



Expert Survey on the Global Information Environment 2024

Searching for Solutions

Summary for Policymakers 2024.1

SYNOPSIS

The global information environment is under significant pressure from the development of new technologies and shifting public policies. How do experts around the world perceive the varied features of, and threats to, the information environment in their countries of expertise?

In June 2024, the International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE) surveyed 412 researchers from 66 countries about the global information environment. This *Summary for Policymakers* summarizes *Trends in the Global Information Environment: 2024 Expert Survey Results* (published as SR2024.2).

The 2024 survey confirms the consensus, first expressed in the [2023 survey \(SR2023.3\)](#), that availability of accurate information and diversity of voices are the most important features of a healthy information environment:

- This year, two thirds (63%) of the respondents expect the information environment to worsen in the future, compared to just over half (54%) in the prior survey.
- Experts are most worried about the threats to the information environment posed by the owners of social media platforms, governments, and politicians.

Researchers perceive generative AI as a source of both concern and hope:

- Nearly two thirds (63%) believe that AI-generated videos, voices, images, and text have negatively impacted the global information environment, while more than half (53%) believe that these technologies will have a negative impact in the next five years.
- Most experts (63%) are concerned that AI perpetuates biases, amplifies harassment, and magnifies the problem of misinformation.
- A majority (67%) are hopeful that generative AI will improve content detection, facilitate journalism, improve cross-cultural and cross-modal communication, and increase the persuasiveness of reliable information.

Experts report significant barriers to the study of the information environment:

- Three quarters of the researchers cite data access as a major challenge.
- Experts are calling for more multi-cultural, multi-platform, and multi-disciplinary research.

When asked about ways to improve the information environment, most experts support free and independent media as well as digital media literacy campaigns, fact-checking and content labeling.

INTRODUCTION

The way people communicate, learn, entertain themselves, keep up with news, and search for information has been impacted by the rapidly evolving global information environment. The proliferation of smartphones, social media platforms, and the widespread adoption of AI-powered technologies has changed how people generate, consume, and exchange information [1,2]. Policymakers have raised concerns about the safety of online interactions, censorship, algorithmic bias and the inequalities in accessing digital technologies [3–6]. In addition, in many countries trust in the news is low and steadily declining, news participation is declining, while interest in news is falling sharply [7, 8]. Many politicians have instrumentalized conspiracy theories and misinformation for political gains, further eroding trust in reliable sources of information and democratic institutions [9]. Generative AI tools have offered novel opportunities to produce propaganda at scale, as well as more mundane and potentially beneficial uses for the global information environment. These transformations and the new challenges that they bring strengthen the need to study local and global contexts.

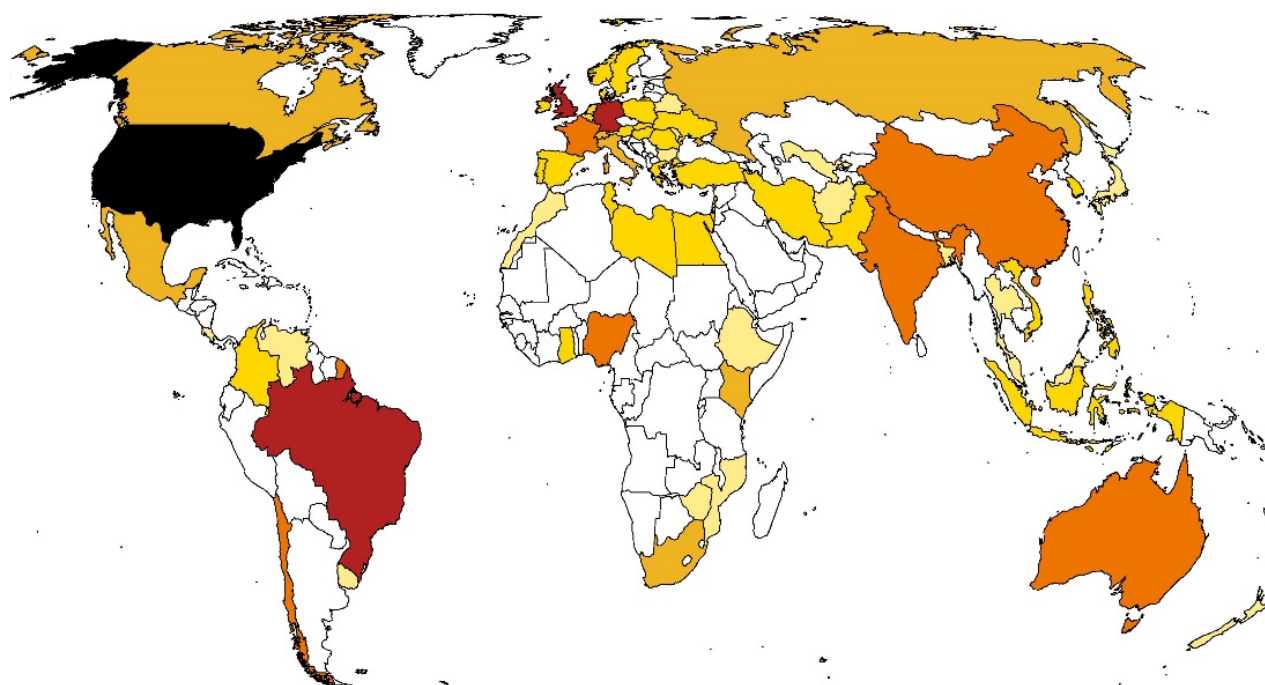
Although the community of researchers looking at the global information environment has grown, the definitions and metrics used for measuring its features vary in important ways. To help identify the divergence and convergence of experts' assessments, in 2023 the IPIE initiated a program of annual surveys of experts at the global level (see [SR2023.3](#)). The main goals of this program are to assess the global information environment, identify areas of consensus and divergence, and suggest directions for future research. Each year experts are invited to share their insights on the current state, main features, challenges, and prospects of the information environment in the countries they study.

This report highlights the main findings of the 2024 survey. The survey assessed the features of a healthy information environment, threats to its health, the role of generative AI, and ways to build resilience:

1. How do experts perceive the present state of the global information environment?
2. Who, and what, are the biggest threats to the information environment?
3. What role may generative AI play in improving or worsening the information environment?
4. What is next? How can we build resilience, improve research on the information environment, and overcome existing barriers?

Between 4 June 2024 and 1 July 2024, 412 researchers from the social sciences, humanities, computer sciences, and related fields studying 66 countries completed the survey. As shown in Figure 1, while respondents' expertise was concentrated in countries such as the USA and regions like Western Europe, global majority countries, including Brazil, Chile, Nigeria, India, and China are represented, as are under studied regions such as Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 1. Respondent Expertise by Country.



Note: = 0, = 1, = 2-5, = 5-10, = 10-20, = 20-40, = 187. Experts were able to select up to two countries in which to claim expertise (the total number of respondents is 529, with 117 experts reporting on two countries); map projection: Equal Earth Projection.

Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE 04/06/2024–01/07/2024.

RESULT 1: FEATURES OF A HEALTHY INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

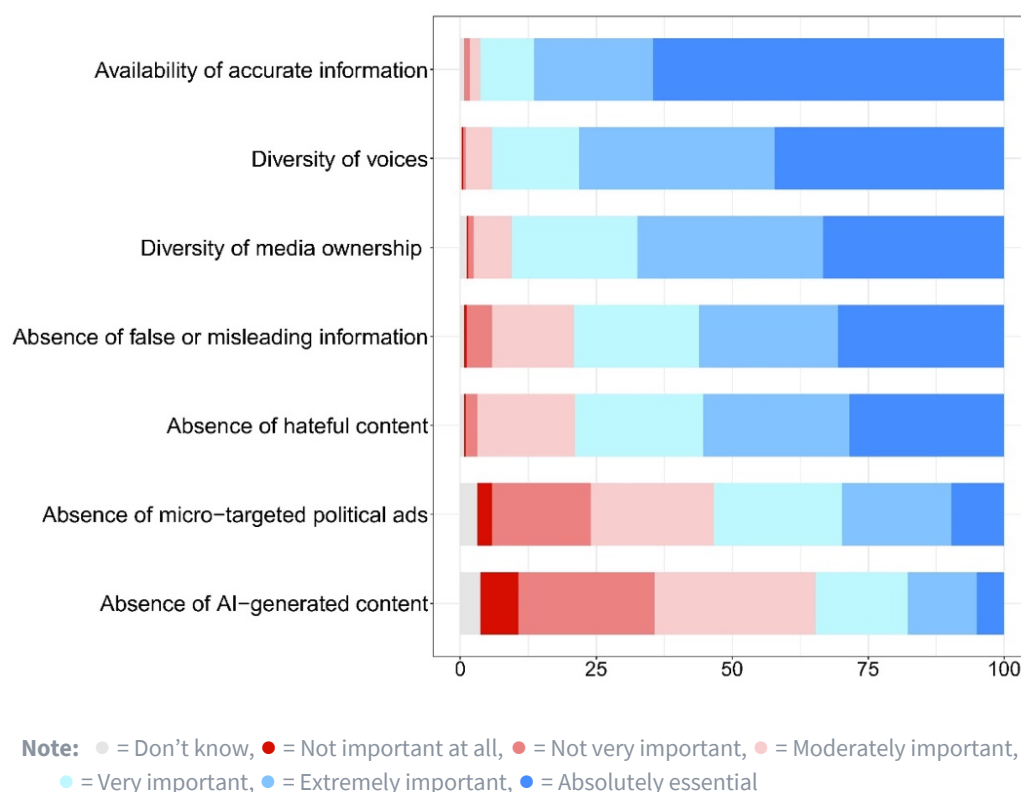
KEY FINDING

65% of experts agree that the most important feature of a healthy information environment is the availability of accurate information.

What are the key features of a healthy information environment? In line with the 2023 survey, the most prominent features highlighted by the 412 surveyed experts are: (1) the availability of accurate information (cited by 65% of respondents), (2) diversity of voices (42%), and diversity of media ownership (33%) (see Figure 2). On average, experts consider the absence of false or misleading information and the absence of hateful content to be “very important”. The absence of micro-targeted political advertisements and AI-generated content are considered the least important—although most considered it at least “moderately important”.

When asked how to improve the information environment, 77% of experts were “in favor” or “strongly in favor” of supporting free and independent media.

Figure 2. Features of a Healthy Information Environment.



RESULT 2: THREATS TO THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

KEY FINDING

Experts consider owners of social media platforms the greatest threat to the information environment, followed by local and foreign governments, politicians, and political parties.

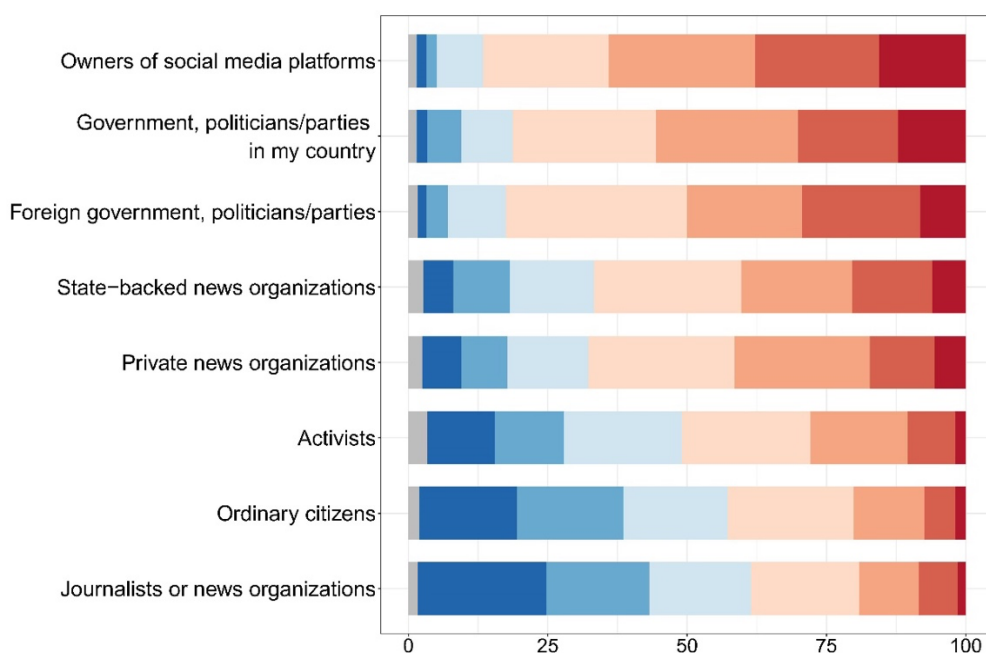
The global information environment is comprised of diverse actors who compete to inform and influence the public. Experts were asked the extent to which they consider various actors and platforms to be threats to the information environment (see Figure 3).

Regarding platforms, experts generally assessed social media platforms (including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp, Telegram, Reddit, 4chan, and X), generative AI tools, and, to some extent, search engines, as posing moderate to significant threats to the information environment. Legacy media, news websites, and podcast platforms were deemed to present small to moderate threats, while Wikis and professional networking sites were considered minor risks.

In terms of actors, experts deemed owners of social media platforms as the most significant threat to the information environment, followed closely by local, national, and foreign governments, politicians, or parties.

State-backed and private news organizations were considered moderate threats, while journalists, news organizations, and ordinary citizens were seen as minor threats. In the 2023 survey, politicians and social media platforms were also seen as the main threats to the information environment.

Figure 3. Main Threats to the Information Environment.



Note: ● = Don't know, ● = Not at all, ● = Very small, ● = Small, ● = Moderate, ● = Big, ● = Very big, ● = The biggest
Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE 04/06/2024–01/07/2024.

RESULT 3: INFLUENCE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

KEY FINDING

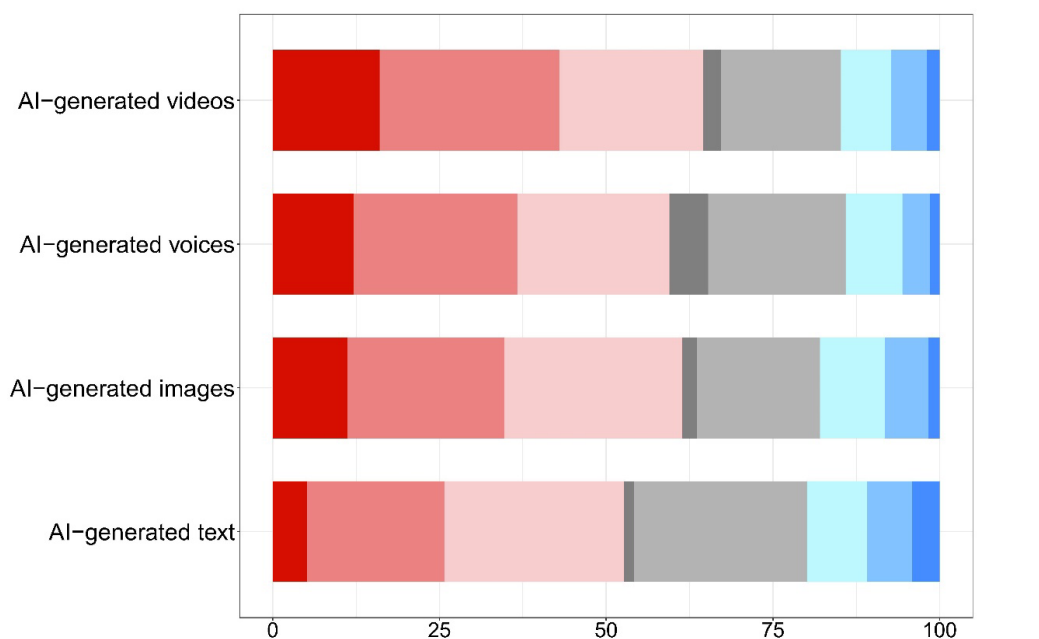
63% percent of experts expressed significant concern about the potential of generative AI to perpetuate biases, amplify harassment, and spread misinformation.

Experts were surveyed about the current and projected impact of generative-AI tools on the information environment (see Figures 4a and 4b). Generative AI refers to artificial intelligence systems capable of producing novel content, such as text (e.g., ChatGPT), images (e.g., DALL-E), videos (e.g., DeepFaceLab), or sound (e.g., WaveNet). While experts were most concerned about the potential negative effects of AI-generated videos, they were least concerned about those of AI-generated text. Overall, experts anticipate that the negative impacts of generative AI will be more pronounced than they have been to date.

A majority of experts (63%) expressed significant concern about the potential for generative AI to perpetuate biases, amplify harassment, and increase the quantity, personalization, and persuasiveness of misinformation.

Most experts (67%) were at least moderately hopeful that generative AI could improve content detection, facilitate journalism, cross-cultural and cross-modal communication, and enhance the personalization and persuasiveness of reliable information. Overall, however, experts' concerns outweighed their hopes.

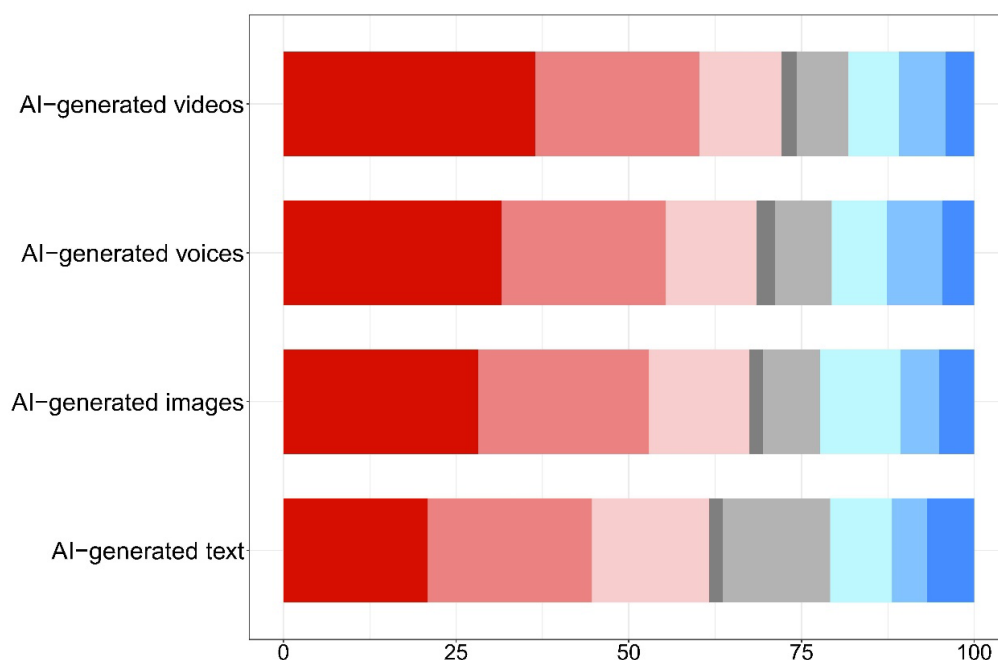
Figure 4a. How have AI-generated Tools Affected the Information Environment?



Note: ● = Greatly worsen, ● = Somewhat worsen, ● = Slightly worsen, ● = Don't know, ● = Neither, ● = Slightly improve, ● = Somewhat improve, ● = Greatly improve.

Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE 04/06/2024-01/07/2024.

Figure 4b. How Will AI-generated Tools Affect the Information Environment in the Next Five Years?



Note: ● = Greatly worsen, ● = Somewhat worsen, ● = Slightly worsen, ● = Don't know, ● = Neither, ● = Slightly improve, ● = Somewhat improve, ● = Greatly improve.

Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE 04/06/2024-01/07/2024.

In general, experts in developing countries were more concerned about the negative effects of generative AI than experts in developed countries. They were also more worried about specific platforms such as messaging apps and social networking apps, and certain actors like owners of social media platforms or politicians in their country. However, they were also more optimistic about interventions to improve the information environment, such as media literacy tips or fact-checking.

CONCLUSION

This Summary for Policymakers demonstrates an emerging consensus about the importance of evidence-based technology policy and good technology design choices. While executing a cross-national study poses its own set of challenges, it generates invaluable insights that contribute to a global, nuanced understanding of the state of the information environment.

In sum, the world's research community expressed a strong consensus that the availability of accurate information and diversity of voices are the cornerstone of a healthy information environment. Providing accurate information is the top priority for improving the global information environment, and one way to do so, favored by experts, is to support free and independent media.

Digital platforms and generative AI represent major threats to the information environment, but they should not overshadow the key role that politicians and some news organizations often play in amplifying harmful information.

Going forward, improving data access is still a priority, as well as conducting multi-platform and interdisciplinary-disciplinary research. Improving the global information environment requires evaluating and comparing experts' opinions.

A copy of the full questionnaire, code, and replication data can be found on the OSF (<https://osf.io/pwvds/>) and GitHub (<https://github.com/SachaAltay/IPIE-Expert-Survey-2024>) platforms. The survey received approval from the University of Zürich (24.02.13) IRB and the IPIE Ethics Panel (IPIE_Ethics_Panel_2024_001). The full report, SR2024.2 is available at www.IPIE.info.

REFERENCES

- [1] P. Lorenz-Spreen, L. Oswald, S. Lewandowsky, and R. Hertwig, "A systematic review of worldwide causal and correlational evidence on digital media and democracy," *Nature human behaviour*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 74–101, 2023. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01460-1>.
- [2] V. Capraro et al., "The impact of generative artificial intelligence on socioeconomic inequalities and policy making," *PNAS nexus*, vol. 3, no. 6, 2024. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae191>.
- [3] S. U. Noble. "Algorithms of oppression: how search engines reinforce racism". New York, NY: NYU Press, 2018.
- [4] R. Deibert, J. Palfrey, R. Rohozinski, and J. Zittrain. "Access denied: the practice and policy of global internet filtering". Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 2008.

- [5] R. Binns, M. Veale, M. Van Kleek, and N. Shadbolt. “Like trainer, like bot? Inheritance of bias in algorithmic content moderation”. *Social Informatics*, G. L. Ciampaglia, A. Mashhadi, and T. Yasseri, Eds., in Lecture Notes in Computer Science. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017, pp. 405–415. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67256-4_32.
- [6] S. Lythreitis, S. K. Singh and A.-N. El-Kassar. “The digital divide: A review and future research agenda”. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*. Elsevier, vol. 175, p. 121359, Feb. 2022, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121359>.
- [7] N. Newman, R. Fletcher, T. R. Craig, R. A. Amy and K. N. Rasmus. Reuters Institute Digital News Report. 2024. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024>.
- [8] S. Altay, R. Fletcher, and R. K. Nielsen. News participation is declining: Evidence from 46 countries between 2015 and 2022. *New Media & Society*, 2024. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241247822>.
- [9] C. Budak, B. Nyhan, D. M. Rothschild, E. Thorson, and D. J. Watts, “Misunderstanding the harms of online misinformation,” *Nature*, vol. 630, no. 8015, pp. 45–53, 2024. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-07417-w>.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Contributors

Drafting authors: Sacha Altay (Consulting Scientist, France/Switzerland), Sebastián Valenzuela (IPIE Chief Science Officer and Chair of the Science & Methodology Committee, Chile), Philip Howard (IPIE President and CEO, Canada/UK). Design: Domenico Di Donna and Raffaele Fulgente. Copyediting: Romilly Golding. We acknowledge comments from the IPIE Science & Methodology Committee: Young Mie Kim (Vice Chair, South Korea/USA), Shelley Boulianne (Member, Canada/UK), Frank Esser (Member, Germany/Switzerland), Lisa Given (Member, Canada/Australia), Stephan Lewandowsky (Member, Australia/UK), Eva Navarro-López (Member, Spain/UK). We gratefully acknowledge support from the IPIE Secretariat: Egerton Neto, Donna Seymour, and Alex Young.

Funders

The International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE) gratefully acknowledges the support of the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, Ford Foundation, Heising-Simons Foundation, Oak Foundation, Simons Foundation. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the IPIE and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders. For an updated list of funding partners, please check www.IPIE.info.

Declaration of Interests

IPIE reports are developed and reviewed by a global network of research affiliates and consulting scientists who constitute focused Scientific Panels and contributor teams. All contributors and reviewers complete declarations of interests, which are reviewed by the IPIE at the appropriate stages of work.

Preferred Citation

An IPIE *Summary for Policy Makers* provides a high-level precis of the state of knowledge and is written for a broad audience. An IPIE *Synthesis Report* makes use of scientific meta-analysis techniques, systematic review, and other tools for evidence aggregation, knowledge generalization, and scientific consensus building, and is written for an expert audience. An IPIE *Technical Report* addresses questions of methodology or provides a policy analysis on a focused regulatory problem. All reports are available on the IPIE website (www.IPIE.info).

This document should be cited as:

International Panel on the Information Environment. 2024. *Expert Survey on the Global Information Environment 2024: Searching for Solutions*. SFP2024.1. Zurich, Switzerland: IPIE.

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.61452/IQVC8768>

Copyright Information



This work is licensed under an Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

ABOUT THE IPIE

The International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE) is an independent and global science organization committed to providing the most actionable scientific knowledge about threats to the world's information environment. Based in Switzerland, the mission of the IPIE is to provide policymakers, industry, and civil society with independent scientific assessments on the global information environment by organizing, evaluating, and elevating research, with the broad aim of improving the global information environment. Hundreds of researchers from around the world contribute to the IPIE's reports.

For more information, please contact the International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE), secretariat@IPIE.info. Seefeldstrasse 123, P.O. Box, 8034 Zurich, Switzerland.



**International Panel
on the Information
Environment**

**Seefeldstrasse 123
P.O. Box
8034 Zurich
Switzerland**

