

Expert Survey on the Global Information Environment 2025

Safeguarding Epistemic Security

Summary for Policymakers 2025.4

SYNOPSIS

The information environment—and those who study it—are under pressure. To better understand the information environment, the IPIE surveyed 438 researchers in 76 countries in June 2025. We frame the results through epistemic security: the reliability of information supply chains from producers to decision-makers.

This is the survey's third year, and experts again cite accuracy and diversity as signs of health. Pessimism has grown: in 2023, 54% expected the information environment to worsen; now 72% do. Three-quarters (75%) identify absent platform accountability as the gravest global threat. Within this frame, we measure integrity as accuracy, pluralism as diverse voices, and institutional safeguards as accountability and protections for researchers and journalists. This year's survey identifies three new findings.

Experts are reporting complex effects from social media use.

- Respondents believe that social media has increased polarization (88%) while promoting political participation (61%).
- More than three-quarters (80%) say search engines are positive, especially compared with recommender systems, social media, and AI.

Researchers are experiencing chilling effects and facing organizational barriers to study the information environment.

- One third of experts (34%) admit self-censoring on social media over career concerns. Developing country experts are more likely to self-censor (40%).
- About one quarter of experts (23%) fear losing their funding and report having been harassed or doxed because of their work.
- Nearly three quarters (73%) report chilling effects—such as self-censorship, harassment, direct political intervention, or fear of losing funding.

Increasingly, the expert community is aligned on policy responses for the AI era—actions that function as epistemic safeguards.

- Almost two-thirds (60%) of experts recommend that AI-generated content be clearly labeled as such.
- More than three-quarters of experts agree on the need to regularly audit algorithms to identify and mitigate biases.
- At the system level, experts strongly favor protecting journalists, funding media literacy initiatives, and enforcing freedom of information standards.

This Summary for Policymakers draws on results reported in the [Expert Survey 2025: Trends in the Information Environment 2025](#) Synthesis Report.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of smartphones, social media platforms, and AI-powered technologies has profoundly changed the ways in which people communicate, learn, access entertainment, and stay informed [1], [2]. While these developments have enabled unprecedented levels of connectivity and information-sharing, they have also sparked significant concerns among researchers, policymakers, and the general public. Key concerns include the proliferation of harmful content, algorithmic bias, and threats to privacy, cyber espionage, and warfare, as well as misinformation and polarization [3]. These challenges are unfolding in the context of a news media crisis: public trust in news media is historically low and steadily declining, interest in news is falling, and news avoidance is growing [4], [5].

Making matters worse, powerful actors across the globe are seeking to take control of the information environment and to push narratives that serve their interests, even at the expense of democratic norms. Right-wing populist leaders, in particular, have strategically employed conspiracy theories and misinformation for political gains—undermining democratic institutions and further eroding trust in reliable sources of information [6]. In countries experiencing democratic backsliding, scholars are now facing growing obstacles to researching the information environment, including reduced access to funding and increasing constraints on academic freedom and freedom of expression.

On top of that, the rise of generative AI tools has added a new, complex layer to this rapidly evolving landscape [7]. Together, these transformations underscore the need for robust, interdisciplinary research into both local and global information environments. The main Synthesis Report explores some of the nuanced, countervailing trends. For example, experts note that social media has made polarization worse while simultaneously promoting political participation.

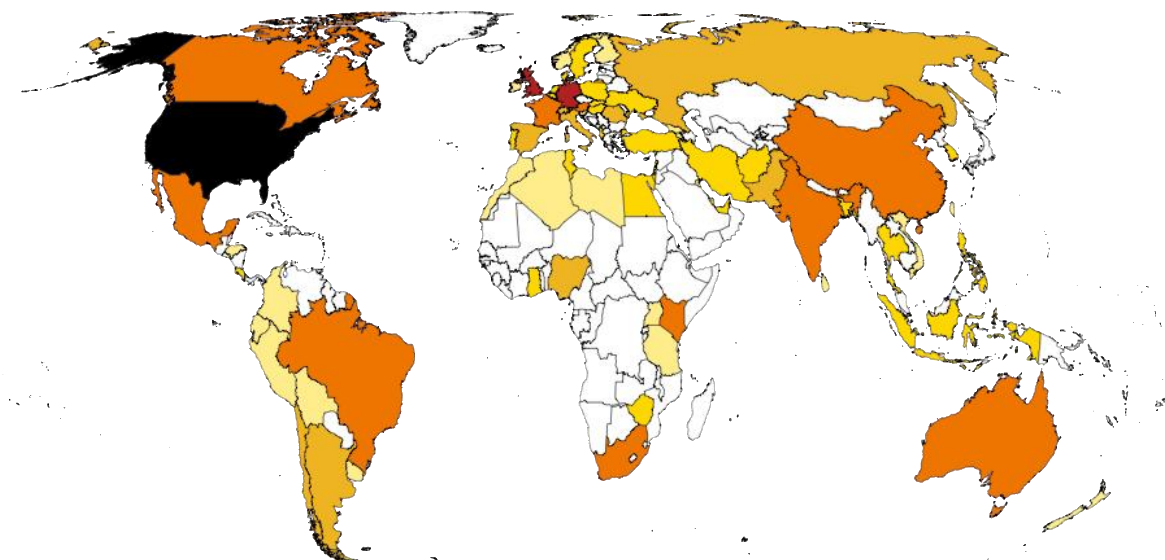
To collect experts' assessments of the information environment, the IPIE ran a global survey in 2023 and 2024 [8], [9]. The main goals of this program are to identify areas of consensus and divergence, as well as suggest directions for future research. Each year experts share their insights on the current state, main features, threats to, and future of the information environment in their country of expertise.

This Summary for Policymakers highlights the main findings of the 2025 Expert Survey, which assesses the defining features of a healthy information environment, identifies the most pressing threats to its integrity, explores strategies for building resilience, and highlights the barriers that experts face. This year, the report explores two new themes: the risks for researchers studying the information environment and the effects of social media platforms and content moderation dilemmas. Four research questions guided the report this year:

1. What makes a healthy information environment?
2. What are the main threats to the information environment?
3. How can we build resilience and improve the information environment?
4. What are the main challenges and barriers that experts face?

Between June and July 2025, 438 researchers who are experts in 76 countries participated in the survey (see Figure 1). While expertise was concentrated on countries like the USA and regions like Western Europe, global majority countries such as Brazil, China, Kenya, India, and Mexico are represented, as well as understudied regions. This year's sample is even more global than last year's, with a 15% increase in country coverage (66 vs 76), a 6% increase in the number of respondents (412 vs 438), and a 6-percentage point growth in the proportion of experts on “developing economies” as defined by the UN Trade and Development organization (34% vs 40%).

Figure 1. Respondent Expertise by Country



Note: ○ = 0, ● = 1, ● = 2-5, ● = 5-10, ● = 10-30, ● = 30-50, ● = 141. Experts were allowed to select up to two countries (this is why the total is 577 and not 438); map projection: Equal Earth Projection.

Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE 12/06/2025–07/07/2025.

RESULT 1: COMPLEX EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

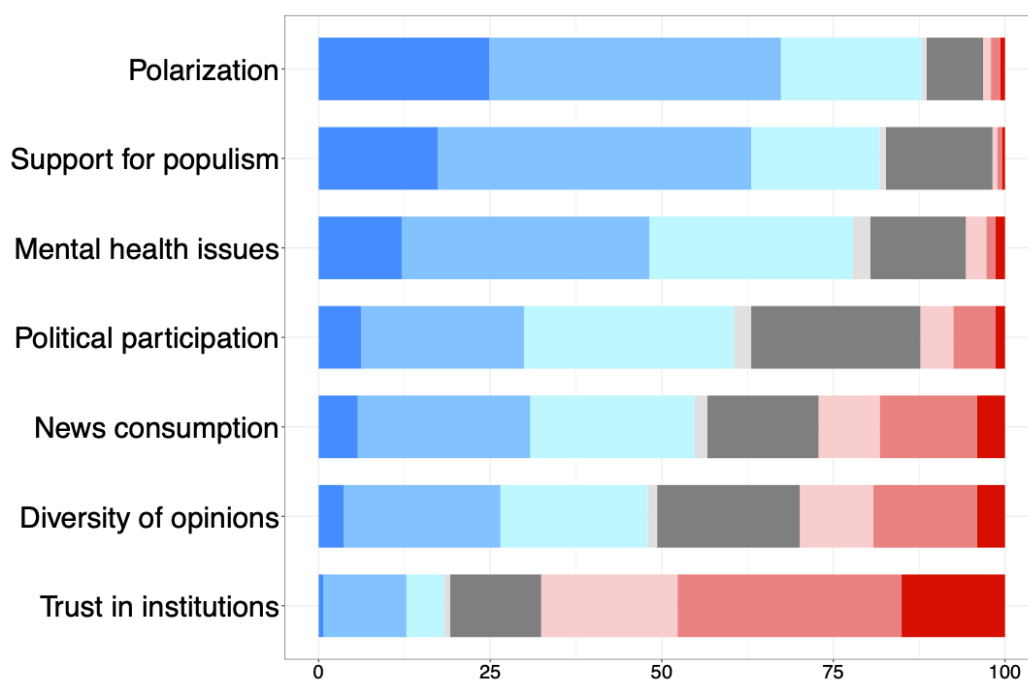
KEY FINDING

Experts consider that social media has increased polarization while promoting political participation.

Social media is often seen as a threat to the information environment. Figure 2 reveals that expert views are nuanced. On one hand, experts consider that social media has increased political polarization, populist sentiment, and mental health issues and has decreased trust in institutions. On the other hand, experts also acknowledge that social media has increased political participation.

As reported in the Synthesis Report, experts consider that social media platforms have helped people be more informed about all sorts of cultural, economic, and political issues. More than 75% of experts believe that search engines have had positive effects on society. The picture is more mixed for artificial intelligence, social media, and recommender systems, with about the same proportion of experts considering they have had positive and negative effects.

Figure 2. Complex Effects of Social Media on the Information Environment



Note: “In your main country of expertise, to what extent have social media platforms increased or decreased the following phenomena?” ● = Strongly increased, ● = Increased, ● = Slightly increased, ● = Don't know, ● = Neither, ● = Slightly decreased, ● = Decreased, ● = Strongly decreased.

Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE 12/06/2025–07/07/2025.

RESULT 2: CHILLING EFFECTS AND BARRIERS

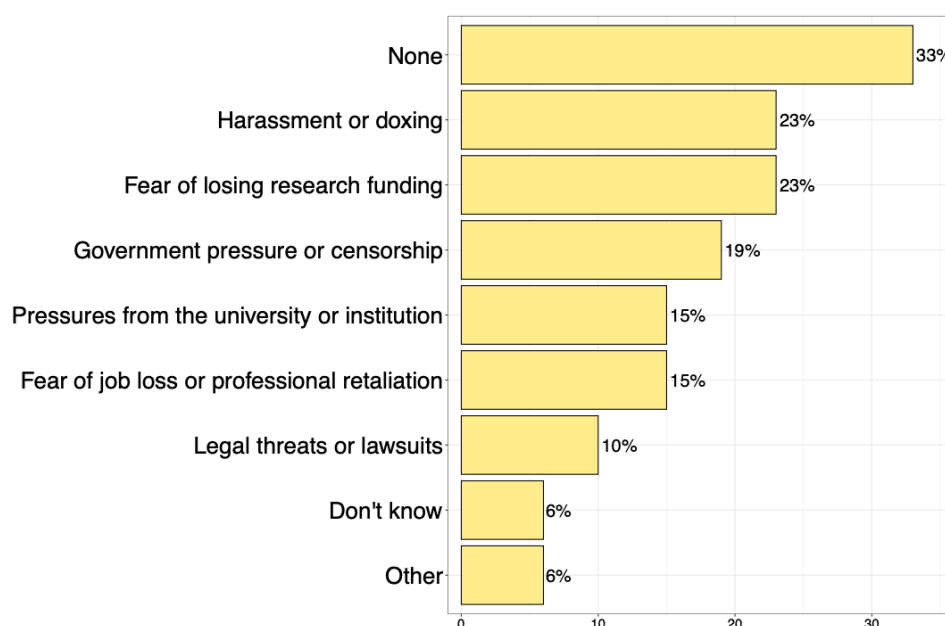
KEY FINDING

Two thirds of experts reported some form of harassment, intervention, or chilling effects of the scientific work that they do.

Researchers now face significant forms of harassment, intervention, or chilling effects of the scientific work they do. As Figure 3 reveals, fully two thirds (66%) of the research community surveyed this year reported some form of harassment or intervention or a chilling effect of the scientific work that they do. Nearly a quarter of the experts reported experiencing harassment or doxing—and a similar percentage feared losing their research funding. Many also reported having been pressured or censored by their government, fearing losing their job or suffering professional retaliation, and experiencing pressure from their university.

As reported in the Synthesis Report, in line with the 2023 and 2024 IPIE Expert Surveys, the most frequently mentioned barriers were funding constraints (62%) and insufficient data access (49%). One third of experts reported self-censoring on social media over career concerns (34%). Overall, 73% of experts reported some form of harassment, intervention, chilling effect, or having self-censored.

Figure 3. Harms Experienced by Experts



Note: “Have you experienced any of the following due to your research? Select all that apply.”

Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE 12/06/2025–07/07/2025.

RESULT 3: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE AI ERA

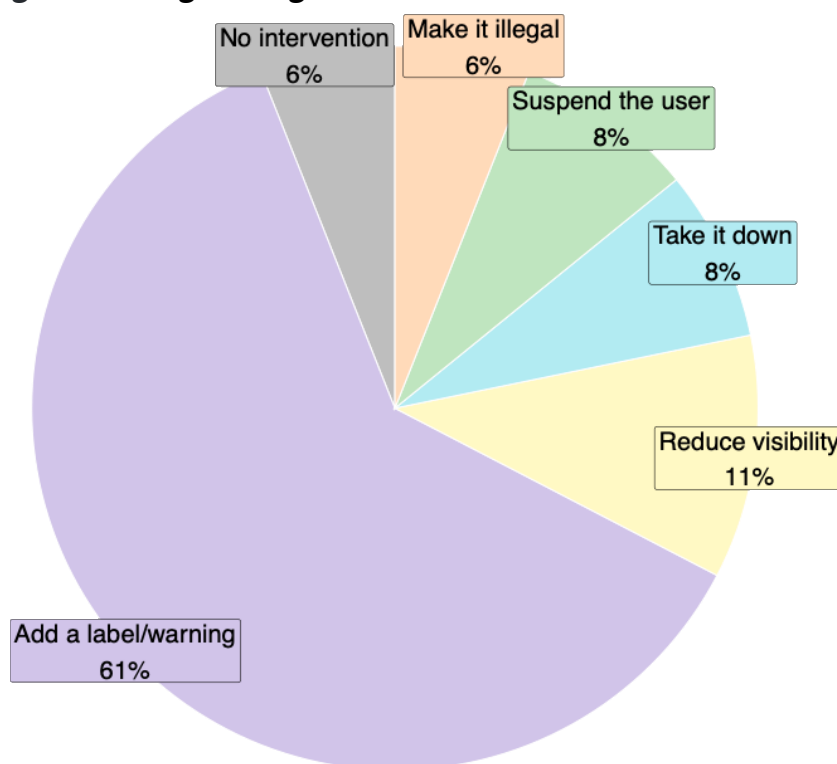
KEY FINDING

Two-thirds of experts agree that AI-generated content should be clearly labeled as such.

Experts were asked what actions should be taken regarding various kinds of potentially harmful content on social media, such as content promoting violence, hate speech, offensive content, and misinformation. We present these findings in the Synthesis Report and focus here on AI-generated content (see Figure 4). A large majority of experts believe it is appropriate and desirable to clearly label AI-generated content (60%), or even to reduce the visibility of such content (11%).

As detailed in the Synthesis Report, and in line with last year, more than three-quarters of experts (83%) consider that labeling AI content would improve the information environment. They also hold similar views about the value of digital and media literacy tips and fact-checking, as well as about the labeling of false content and untrustworthy sources. More than two-thirds of experts agree that algorithms should be regularly audited to identify and mitigate biases, actively promote a diversity of perspectives, and expose users to points of view they might not otherwise encounter.

Figure 4. Safeguarding for an AI Era



Note: “For each of the following types of content or behaviors on social media, indicate the action you find most appropriate and desirable. Select one per row.” We focus here on AI-generated content. One percent of participants selected the response option “Don’t know.”

Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE 12/06/2025–07/07/2025.

CONCLUSION

This survey is best read as an assessment of epistemic security: the reliability of the information supply chains that move facts from producers to decision-makers. It reveals a system where integrity of evidence, pluralism of voices, and institutional safeguards all face pressure. Treating the global information environment as critical infrastructure helps translate research insights into concrete responsibilities for governments, platforms, firms, and civil society.

This Summary for Policymakers reveals several areas of consensus that have deepened over time: respondents expressed a strong consensus that the most important factors contributing to a healthy information environment are the availability of accurate information and diverse voices [9], [10].

Three new findings stand out. First, that the effects of major technologies are complex: some social media platforms can amplify polarization even as they expand participation, while others are perceived as more reliably supportive of informed choice. Second, researchers who generate and test knowledge face growing constraints, which weakens our institutional resilience in the face of serious technology-related harms. Third, there is broad expert alignment on practical safeguards for the AI era.

Applied research helps inform policy solutions. Governments, platforms, firms, and civil society should strengthen provenance and disclosure where content is synthetic or fast-moving. Regulators should require regular, independent auditing of algorithms and enable qualified researchers to access data under clear safeguards. Public authorities and institutions should protect journalists and researchers and reinforce transparency rules so that evidence can travel intact. Media and competition authorities should broaden exposure to diverse sources, especially where ownership is concentrated.

Epistemic security is not an abstract ideal; it is an institutional work plan. By appreciating the complexities of technology policy, supporting the research needed to evaluate and develop safeguards, and holding platforms accountable, decision-makers can harden the information supply chains on which democratic choice, climate action, and peace depend. The next step is to move from diagnosis to deployment: embed resilience into law, policy, products, and everyday practice so that decisions remain anchored in credible evidence.

A copy of the full questionnaire, code, and replication data can be found on [GitHub](#). The survey received approval from the IPIE Ethics Panel (IPIE_Ethics_Panel_2025_004). The full report is available at www.IPIE.info.

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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. The mission of the IPIE, which is based in Switzerland, 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.

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