

Trends in the Information Environment

2025 Expert Survey Results

Synthesis Report 2025.2



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SYNOPSIS

The information environment is under great pressure, as are the individuals studying it. To better understand how experts perceive its features and threats, the IPIE conducted a survey of 438 researchers from 76 countries in June 2025.

- Pessimism is rising. This year, 72% of respondents expected the information environment to worsen—a 9-point increase from 2024 and an 18-point increase since the first survey in 2023.
- Warnings about platforms have intensified, with 75% of experts considering the lack of platform accountability as a major threat.
- Experts note that social media has made problems like polarization worse, while promoting political participation and other positive outcomes.
- A large majority consider that search engines have had positive effects on the information environment, especially compared to recommender systems, social media, and AI.
- The dominance of large private media companies is considered, by far, to be the main barrier to the presence of diverse voices.
- Accurate information and access to diverse voices are the most important features of a healthy information environment, echoing the 2023 and 2024 surveys.

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

- One third of experts (34%) admit self-censoring on social media this year over career concerns. Such self-censoring was more prevalent among experts on developing countries.
- Worryingly, about one quarter of experts (23%) fear losing their funding and report having been harassed or doxed in the past year because of their work on the information environment.

Experts supported content moderation and interventions to improve the information environment:

- More than 75% of experts agreed on the need to regularly audit algorithms to identify and mitigate algorithmic biases, actively promote a diversity of perspectives, and expose users to diverse voices.
- In line with last year, more than half of experts think that the information environment can be substantially improved through increased fact-checking and labeling of content that is either clearly false, from untrustworthy sources, or created by AI.
- At the system level, experts strongly favor protecting journalists, funding media literacy initiatives, and enforcing freedom of information standards.

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SECTION 1. 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, 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, news avoidance is growing, and interest in news is falling [4], [5].

Making matters worse, powerful actors across the globe are seeking to take control of the information ecosystem and 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. While these technologies offer powerful opportunities for democratizing access to information creation, they also present novel risks related to misinformation, authenticity, and the quality of public discourse [7]. Together, these transformations underscore the need for robust, interdisciplinary research into both local and information environments.

Understanding these dynamics is essential not only for addressing current societal challenges but also for safeguarding democracy in the digital age.

In 2023 the IPIE initiated a program of annual [surveys of experts](#) to collect experts' assessments of the information environment at the global level [8]. 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, and future of the information environment in their country of expertise. This report documents the findings of the 2025 survey.

Research Questions

Drawing on expert insights from 76 countries, this Synthesis Report provides a comprehensive analysis of the current state of the information environment. It examines the defining features of a healthy information environment, identifies the most pressing threats to its integrity, explores strategies for building resilience, and highlights the key challenges experts face in studying this evolving landscape. Compared to previous years, the report further explores the risks for researchers studying the information environment, as well as 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?

SECTION 2. CONCEPTUALIZING THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

Healthy information environments provide citizens not only with reliable information—especially on political and current affairs—but also with diverse perspectives, including voices that challenge those in power. Such pluralism is vital to democracy, ensuring that people can make informed choices and hold public officials to account. Well-informed citizens are more likely to participate in democratic processes, develop thoughtful positions on social and political issues, and engage in civic life [9], [10]—all of which are essential to the functioning of democratic societies

The information environment has become increasingly diverse and complex. Today, people are exposed to a broad array of sources across traditional and digital platforms, resulting in an environment characterized by unprecedented choice and hybridity, and one that is steadily growing in complexity, providing a variety of sources of news and information [11], [12]. However, the opportunities to access information differ from one country to another depending on the supply and demand for news [9]. Furthermore, the spread of misinformation can undermine trust in reliable information, sow doubt, and exacerbate existing problems or tensions [13], [14], [15]. Against this backdrop, the Synthesis Report evaluates key factors shaping the information environment across different regions and political systems. By doing so, it aims to deepen our understanding of what makes good information environments, how they are being disrupted, and what can be done to strengthen them.

The information environment is a complex concept. Whereas information is data that is meaningful, well-formed, and semantically valid, the environment refers to “the physical, social and digital surroundings of an individual, particularly the aspects of those surroundings that can influence the individual’s behavior” [16]. In the political domain, the information environment has been defined as “the

supply and demand of political news and political information within a certain society” [10]. The U.S. Department of Defense defines the information environment as “the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information” [17]. For this Synthesis Report, experts were invited to share their knowledge of the information environment based on the following definition:

The aggregate of the physical, social, and digital surroundings that influence how individuals, organizations, or countries communicate, interact, and process information.

You have been invited to participate because you are a researcher working on topics related to the information environment such as: the news, social media, digital platforms, recommendation algorithms, misinformation, hate speech, media or news literacy, fact-checking, etc.

This definition, used since the first IPIE survey in 2023 [8], encompasses information that spreads online and offline through traditional and digital media. As this definition describes information that targets local, national, or international audiences, this survey refers to all of these collectively as the information environment.

SECTION 3. METHODS

Expert surveys are widely used by organizations and academics to evaluate a range of societal [18], health [19], or political issues [20], [21] by collecting informed judgments from professionals and specialists. These surveys offer valuable insights into complex phenomena, help identify emerging trends, highlight areas of consensus and divergence, and reveal gaps in knowledge that are often difficult to capture through traditional research methods [22]. They help to establish indicators of global phenomena across diverse contexts and generate forward-looking insights, anticipating emerging challenges, potential threats, and new opportunities [23]. For example, expert surveys have been used to identify the most promising interventions against misinformation that could be adapted to the Global South [24], as well as to outline future directions for research in the field of misinformation [25]. As such, expert surveys serve not only as a diagnostic tool but also as a strategic tool for setting agendas and informing policy. They also serve to inform scholarly work by providing a high-level view of the state of a research field.

Sampling

Experts on the information environment were selected based on several criteria concerning scientific and research activities. The sampling strategy is similar to the one used for the [2024 IPIE Expert Survey](#) [26]. First, two academic databases, Web of Science and Scopus, were used to identify researchers who study areas related to the information environment. Experts who had published on these topics in peer-reviewed scholarly journals were included in the sample—this systematic literature review was conducted for the [2023 Expert Survey](#) [8] and updated in 2024 [26]. Second, based solely on the 2024 IPIE expert survey sample, we recruited researchers who had participated at academic conferences and

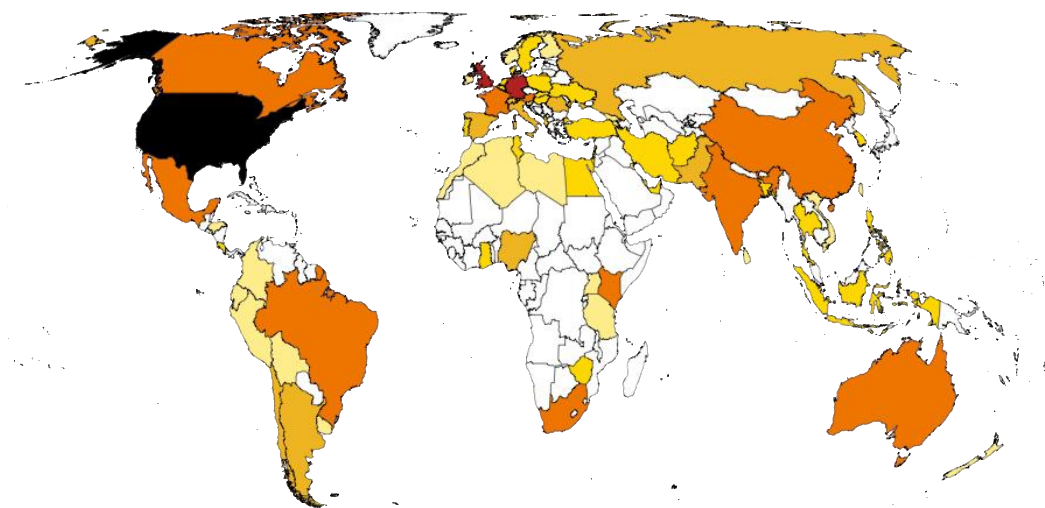
seminars—such as MisInfoCon, the International Communication Association (ICA) annual conference, the Multidisciplinary International Symposium on Disinformation in Open Online Media (MISDOOM), and the American Political Science Association (APSA) annual meeting. Third, we contacted the 2025 IPIE affiliates, who are academics and whose work is related to the information environment. Efforts by the IPIE to expand its affiliate network internationally may help explain the rise in the proportion of experts on developing economies in this year's survey. Fourth, snowball sampling was used to expand the initial sample, and respondents of the 2025 Expert Survey were encouraged to nominate other experts they thought would be suitable. Fifth, we relied on a meta-analysis of peer-reviewed studies on generative AI-produced misinformation conducted by the IPIE in 2025.

Between the 12th of June 2025 and the 7th of July 2025, a total of 2,592 experts were invited, 587 started the survey, and 438 completed the survey, a 6% increase from the previous year. Four participants were excluded because they reported not being researchers. Qualtrics, a survey software that is compliant with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), hosted the instrument.

Experts studying 76 countries participated in the survey (see Figure 1). While expertise was concentrated on countries like the US and regions like Western Europe, global majority countries such as Brazil, China, Kenya, India or Mexico are represented, as well as understudied regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean, East and Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa (see Table 1). The dominance of developed economies is consistent with the unbalanced production of knowledge [27], and could be attributed to the persistent and unequal concentration of well-funded prestigious institutions, research centers, and funding agencies in more developed regions. Yet, this year's sample is an improvement over last year's report, 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 studying “developing economies” as defined by UN Trade and Development (34% vs 40%).

Figure 1. Respondents’ 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.

Table 1. Respondents’ Expertise by Region

Region	Sum
North America	187
Western Europe	156
Latin America and the Caribbean	77
East and Southeast Asia	45
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	41
Sub-Saharan Africa	38
South Asia	27
Oceania	24
Middle East and North Africa	20

Note: Respondents could select multiple regions — thus the total is 615 and not 438.

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

Respondents received an invitation via email to complete the survey and were sent two reminders. At the beginning of the survey the respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study and gave their informed consent. Respondents could opt out of the survey at any point. No identifiable data about the experts was collected such as names, IP addresses, or GPS data.

Most respondents were academic researchers (81%) with a background in the social sciences (73%)—followed by the humanities (13%) and STEM (11%). Most experts came from the field of communication and media studies (33%), followed by political science (10%), computational social sciences (9%), psychology (7%), information science (6%), and computer science (5%). Respondents were mostly early-career (37%, assistant professor or post-doc) and mid-career researchers (31%, associate professor or principal investigator)—the remaining were junior (9%, doctoral students) and late-career researchers (22%, full professor, director of research). More men ($n = 276$) took the survey than women ($n = 155$) and gender diverse participants ($n = 7$).

Instrument Design

The questionnaire was disseminated through the Qualtrics software. Respondents were offered 25 USD as compensation to complete the survey, which was facilitated by Rybbon, a digital gifting platform. Last year, as 95% of experts took the survey in English, the decision was taken to only offer the survey in English this year. A copy of the full questionnaire, code, and replication data can be found on [GitHub](#) (opens new tab). The questionnaire received ethical approval from the IPIE Ethics Panel (reference IPIE_Ethics_Panel_2025_004).

On GitHub we report the results broken down by country. We compared the United States to the rest of the world, as well as “developed” to “developing” economies, according to the UN Trade and Development classification, which considers the following countries as developed economies: Andorra, Australia,

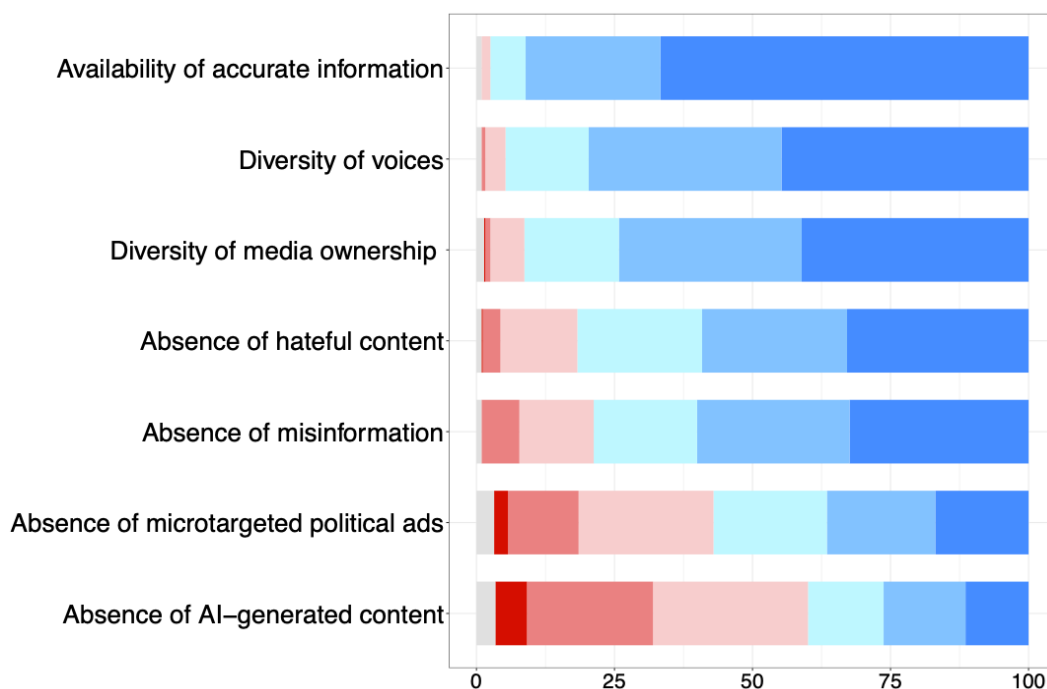
Austria, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, UK, USA [\[28\]](#). In the section below, we report the survey responses across all participants as well as the largest differences between economies.

SECTION 4. FINDINGS

What are the Key Features of a Healthy Information Environment?

The most important feature of a healthy information environment was the availability of accurate information, with 67% of experts considering it as absolutely essential (see Figure 2), followed by the presence of diverse voices (45%) and diverse media ownership (41%). On average, experts also considered the absence of hateful content and the absence of false or misleading information to be very important. The absence of micro-targeted political advertisements and AI-generated content were considered the least important—although most considered it at least moderately important.

Figure 2. Importance for a Good and Healthy Information Environment



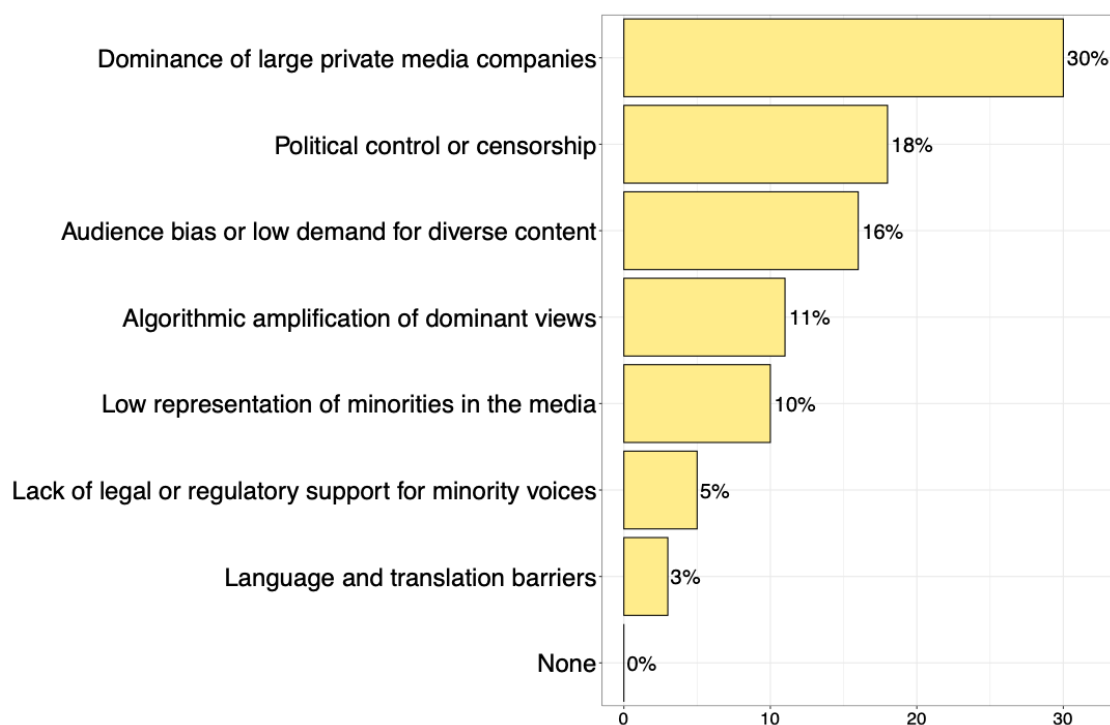
Note: “In your opinion, how important are each of the following to achieve a good, healthy information environment?” ● = Don’t know, ● = Not important at all, ● = Not very important, ● = Moderately important, ● = Very Important, ● = Extremely important, ● = Absolutely essential

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

In the [2023](#) and [2024](#) IPIE Expert Surveys [\[8\]](#), [\[26\]](#), the availability of accurate information and the presence of diverse voices were also the top features of a healthy information environment.

For three consecutive years, experts rated the presence of diverse voices as the second most important feature of a healthy information environment [\[8\]](#), [\[26\]](#). Here, we document the greatest barriers to diversity in media and public discourse (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Barriers to Diversity in Media and Public Discourse



Note: “In your main country of expertise, what is the greatest barrier to diversity in media and public discourse? Select one.”

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

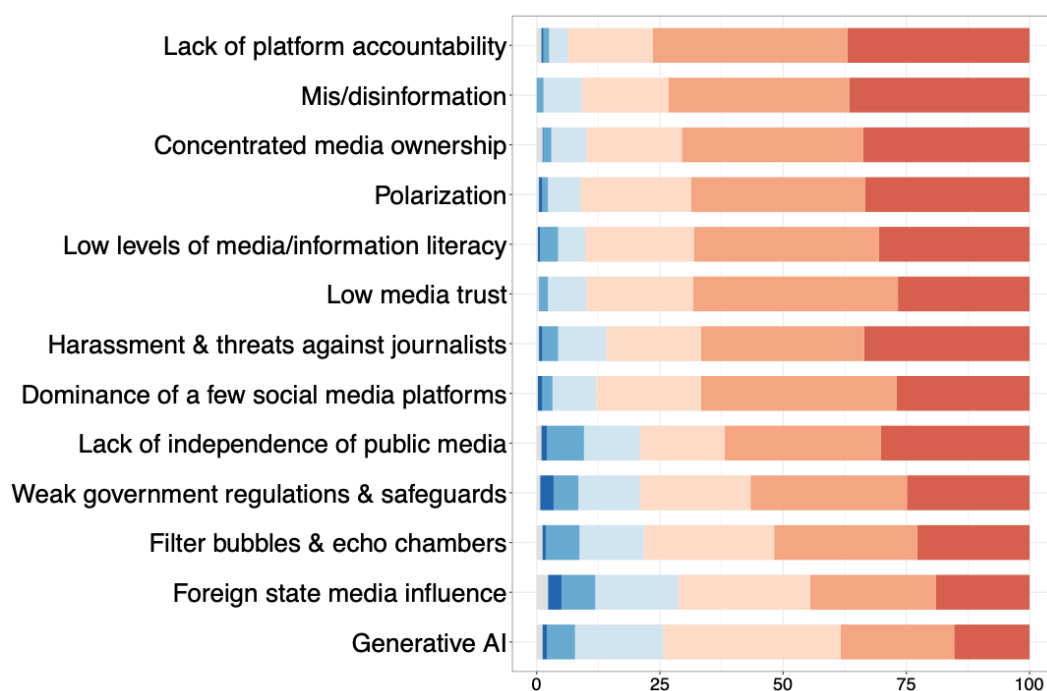
By far the biggest barrier to diversity was the dominance of large private media companies (30%), followed by political control or censorship (18%), and audiences’ low demand for diverse content (16%).

However, there were some key differences by regions of expertise. Experts on developed countries considered the dominance of large private media as the main barrier to diversity (48%), followed by audience bias or low demand for diverse content (32%), with political control or censorship cited less frequently (13%). By contrast, experts on developing countries considered political control or censorship as the top barrier to diversity (32%), while fewer pointed to the dominance of large private media (26%) or audience bias and low demand (9%).

Threats to the Information Environment

In this section we first outline general threats to the information environment, and then discuss more specific risks posed by AI, social media, and algorithms.

Figure 4. Main Threats to the Information Environment



Note: “How significant a threat do you think each of the following poses to the information environment in your main country of expertise?” ● = Don’t know, ● = Not at all, ● = Very small, ● = Small, ● = Moderate, ● = Big, ● = Extreme.

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

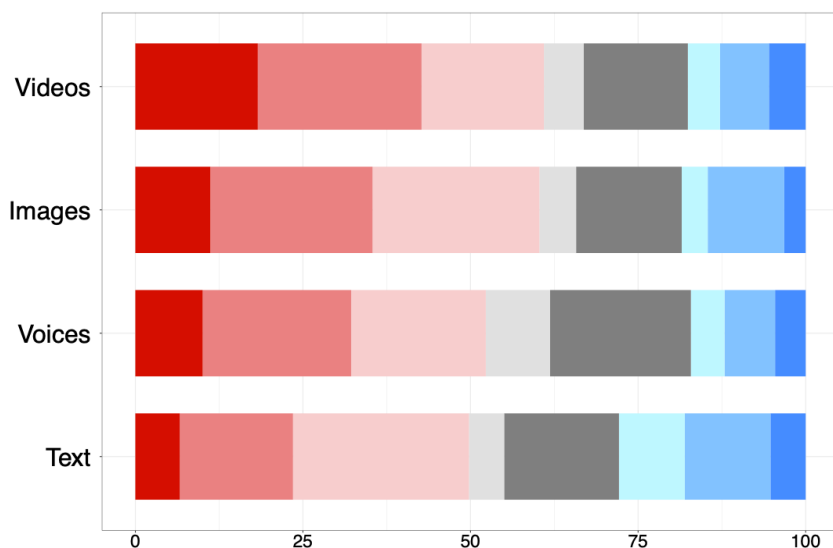
Regarding general threats to the information environment (see Figure 4), 75% of experts considered that lack of platform accountability is a big or extreme threat. Between 50-75% of experts considered mis/disinformation, concentrated media ownership, polarization, low levels of media/information literacy, low media trust, harassment and threats against journalists, and the dominance of a few social media platforms to be big or extreme threats. Finally, less than 50% of experts considered foreign state media influence and generative AI to be big or extreme threats.

Generative AI

Experts were asked their opinion on the impact generative AI tools have had so far on the information environment and the impact they expect these tools to have in the next five years (see Figures 5a and 5b). Experts in general, and especially those studying developing countries, considered that various generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and DALL·E have had, and will have, mostly negative impacts on the information environment. Experts were most concerned about the negative effects of AI-generated videos and least concerned about the negative effects of AI-generated text.

Overall, experts expect that the negative impacts of generative AI will be more substantial in the near future than what we have experienced. These findings replicate the results of the 2024 IPIE Expert Survey [\[26\]](#).

Figure 5a. Current Effects of Generative AI on the Information Environment

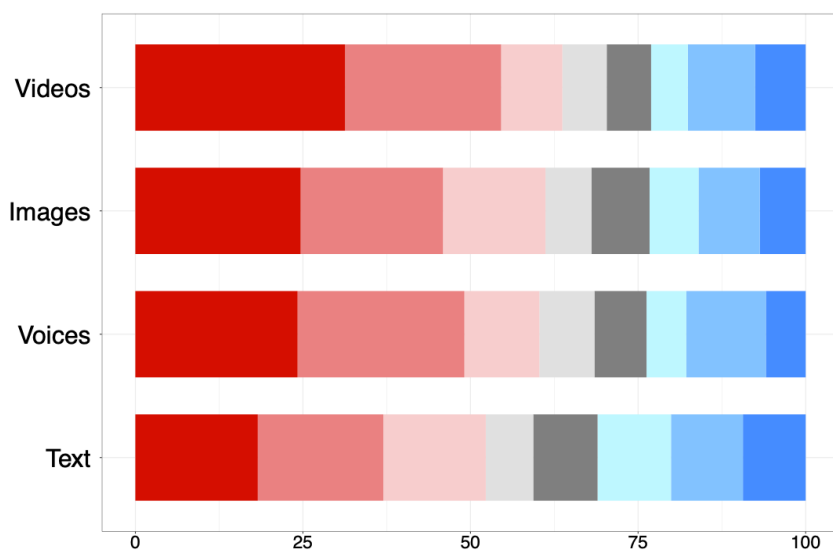


Note: “How do you think generative AI tools HAVE AFFECTED the information environment so far?”

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

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

Figure 5b. Future Effects of Generative AI on the Information Environment



Note: “How do you think generative AI tools WILL AFFECT the information environment in the next 5 years?”

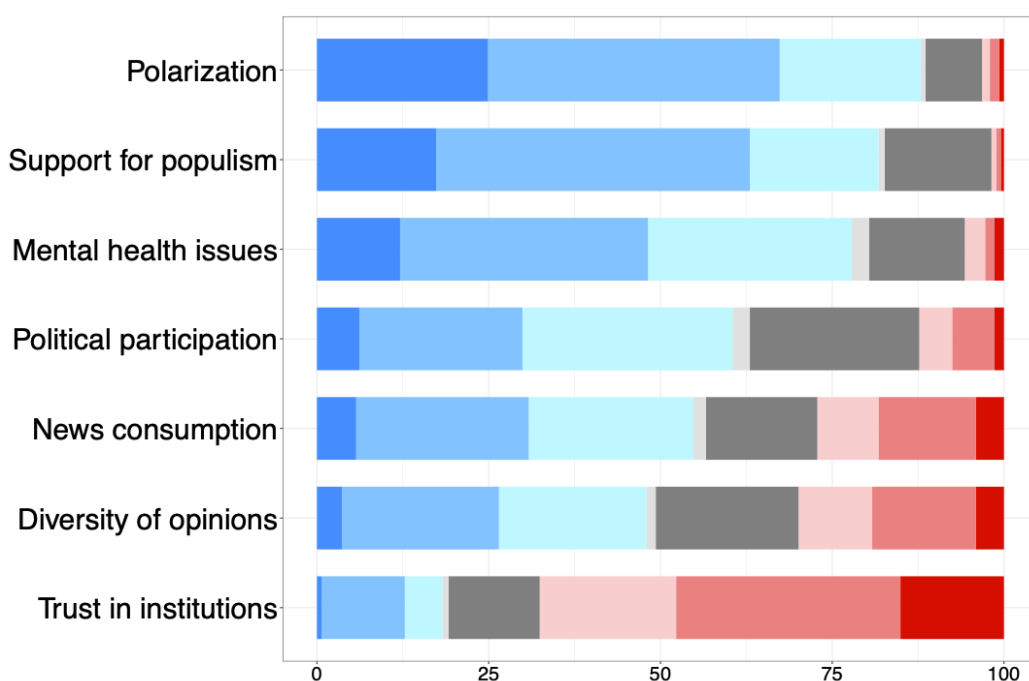
● = Greatly worsen, ● = Somewhat worsen, ● = Slightly worsen, ● = Don't know, ● = Neither, ● = Slightly improve, ● = Somewhat improve, ● = Greatly improve.

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

Social Media Platforms

More than 75% of experts considered that social media has increased polarization, support for populism, and mental health issues, while more than 65% considered social media to have decreased trust in institutions (see Figure 6). In contrast, more than half of experts considered that social media has increased political participation. Other results were more nuanced. For instance, more experts perceived social media to have increased news consumption and the availability of diverse opinions. This perception was stronger among experts studying developing countries.

Figure 6. Complex Effects of Social Media on the Information Environment



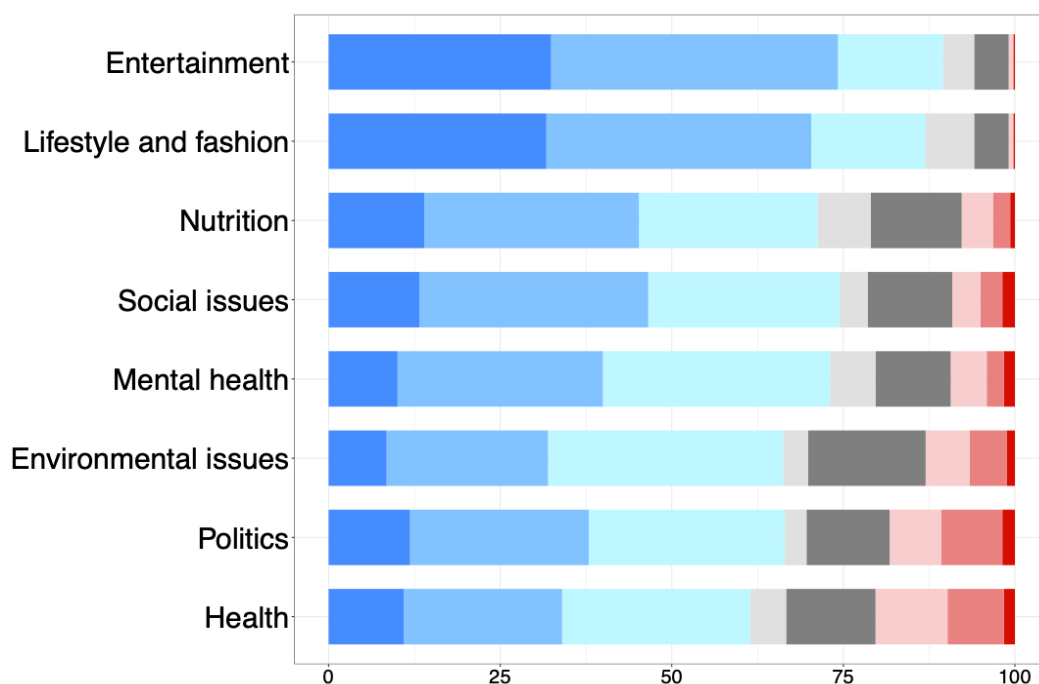
Note: “In your main country of expertise, to what extent have social media platforms increased or decreased the following phenomena?” ● = Strongly increased, ● = Increased, ● = Slightly increased, ● = Don't know, ● = Neither, ● = Slightly decreased, ● = Decreased, ● = Strongly decreased.

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

Despite the negative effects of social media reported above, experts thought that social media platforms had helped people become more informed about all sorts

of issues, including entertainment, lifestyle and fashion, nutrition, social issues, mental health, politics, the environment, and health (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Social Media Platforms Can Inform Users



Note: “In your main country of expertise, would you say that social media platforms have helped people be more or less informed about:” ● = Much more informed, ● = More informed, ● = Slightly more informed, ● = Don't know, ● = Neither, ● = Slightly less informed, ● = Less informed, ● = Much less informed.

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

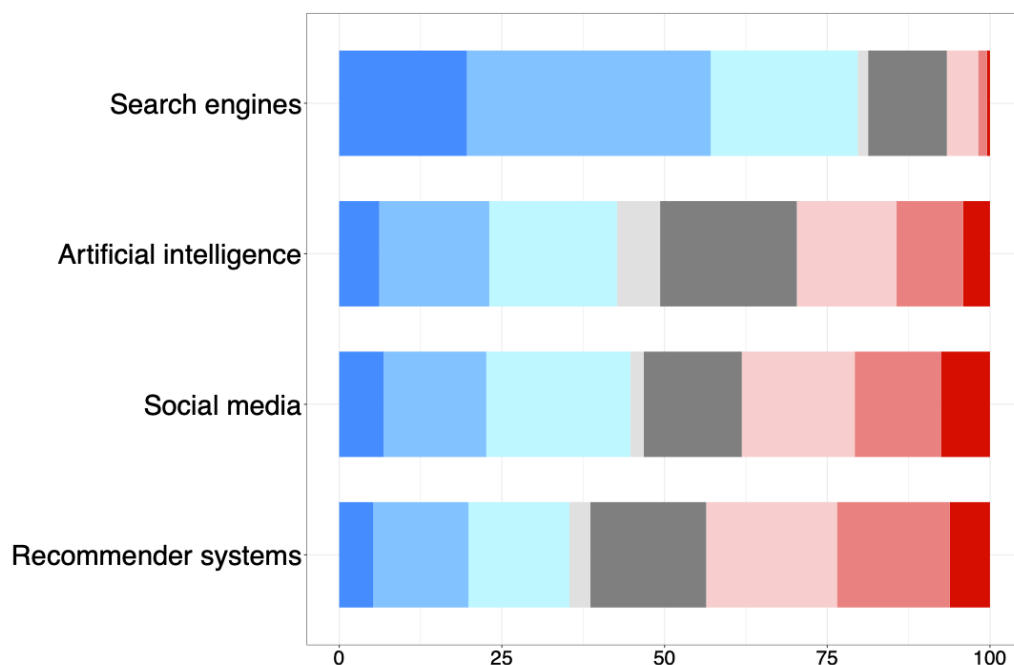
Algorithms and Search Engines

In addition to generative AI and social media, we also investigated the perceived effects of algorithms and search engines on society (see Figure 8).

More than 75% of experts believed 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 both positive and negative effects.

In line with the findings above, experts on developing countries were more likely to report that social media has had a positive effect on society (52%) than experts on developed countries (40%).

Figure 8. Effects of Technologies on the Information Environment



Note: “In your main country of expertise, would you say that the effects of the following technologies on society have been rather positive or negative?” ● = Very positive, ● = Positive, ● = Slightly positive, ● = Don't know, ● = Neither, ● = Slightly negative, ● = Negative, ● = Very negative.

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

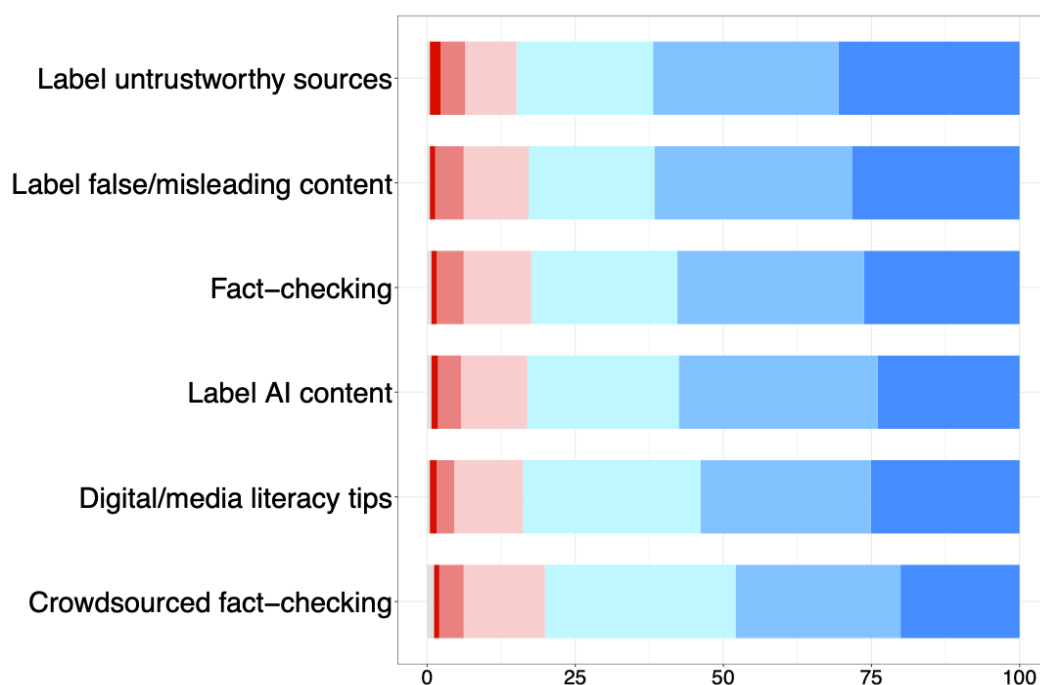
How to Improve the Information Environment?

Having explored the features of a healthy information environment and related threats, we now turn to potential solutions. We start with broad strategies to improve the information environment—at both individual and systemic levels—before exploring specific measures such as content moderation on social media and the regulation and oversight of algorithms.

Experts were optimistic about the impact that various interventions would have on the information environment if deployed at scale and adopted widely (see

Figure 9). More than half of experts considered that digital and media literacy tips, fact-checking, or labeling content that is false, AI-generated, or from untrustworthy sources, would improve “a lot” or “extremely” the information environment. Support for crowd-sourced fact-checking was also high. Experts showed similar optimism about these interventions in the 2024 IPIE Expert Survey [8], [26].

Figure 9. Individual-level Interventions to Improve the Information Environment



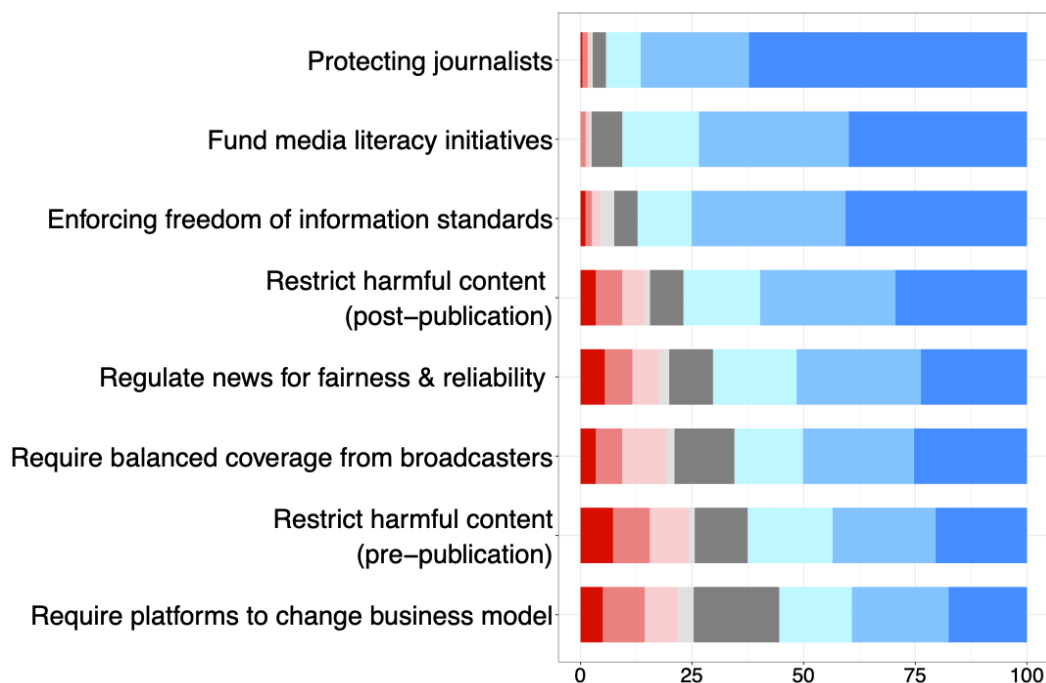
Note: “To what extent would the information environment improve if the following were deployed at scale and adopted widely?” ● = Don’t know, ● = Not at all, ● = Very little, ● = Little, ● = Moderately, ● = A lot, ● = Extremely

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

With regards to government-led, system-level interventions, a large majority of experts favored their involvement in programs protecting journalists, funding media literacy initiatives, and enforcing freedom of information standards (see Figure 10). Although with weaker support, experts favored government-led initiatives to restrict harmful content pre- and post publication, regulating news for fairness and reliability, and requiring balanced news coverage from

broadcasters. Experts were least in favor of requiring social media platforms to shift from advertising-based business models to alternative models such as subscriptions.

Figure 10. System-level Interventions to Improve the Information Environment



Note: “To what extent do you agree or disagree that, in your main country of expertise, the government should be responsible for:” ● = Strongly against, ● = Against, ● = Slightly against, ● = Don’t know, ● = Neither, ● = Slightly in favor, ● = In favor, ● = Strongly in favor.

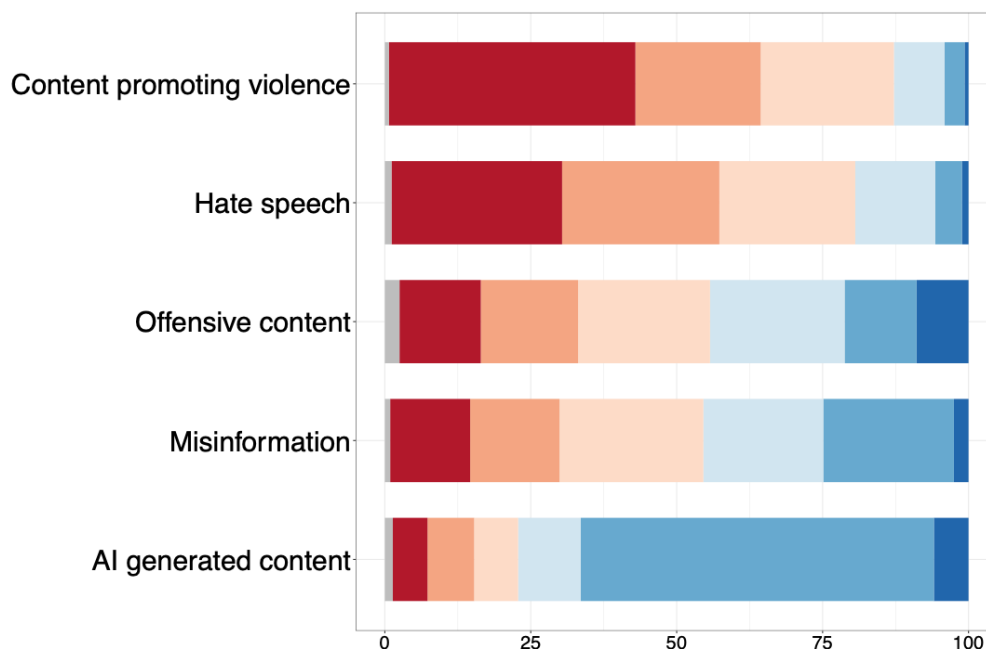
Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE 12/06/2025–07/07/2025.

Next, experts were asked what actions should be taken regarding specific types of content and behaviors on social media platforms. In general, experts agreed that social media platforms need to do something about content promoting violence, hate speech, offensive content, misinformation, and generated by AI. However, the interventions deemed most appropriate and desirable varied across the types of content and behaviors (see Figure 11).

For content promoting violence and hate speech, experts favored the most restrictive measures, like making such content illegal, taking the content down, or

suspending the users. For offensive content and misinformation, experts favored a mix of more or less restrictive measures, including making it illegal, suspending the user, taking down the content, reducing visibility of the content, and labeling the content. For AI-generated content, experts overwhelmingly (60%) favored labeling it.

Figure 11. Content Moderation



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.” ● = Don’t know, ● = Make it illegal, ● = Suspend the user, ● = Take the content down, ● = Reduce visibility of the content, ● = Add a warning or label, ● = No intervention.

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

Experts were asked how algorithms should be regulated and monitored, as well as the types of content they should promote. More than 75% of experts agreed 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.

When asked how they felt about academic collaborations with various actors, from international organizations to big tech companies, around 90% of experts

felt positively about academics collaborating with international organizations, news media outlets, and government or public agencies. A majority also felt positively (68%) about academics collaborating with big tech companies—although 22% of experts felt negatively about it.

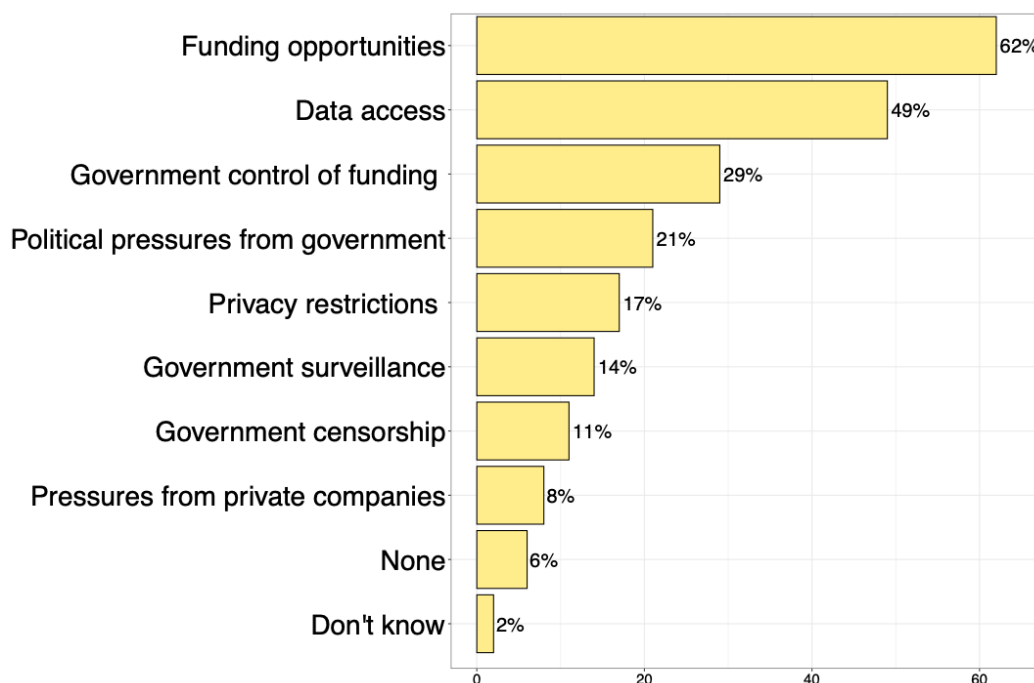
Barriers to the Study of the Information Environment

In this section, we start by identifying the main obstacles experts encountered when studying the information environment. We then examine the challenges they have faced in communicating about their research, the situations in which they have self-censored, and the harms they have experienced over the past year because of their research.

In line with the 2023 and 2024 IPIE Expert Surveys, the most frequently mentioned barriers were funding opportunities (62%) and data access (49%)—although this year funding opportunities topped data access (see Figure 12).

Experts on developed countries were less likely to mention funding (57% vs 70%), government surveillance (11% vs 20%) or data access (46% vs 54%) as a barrier, compared to experts on developing countries. But they were more likely to mention government control of funding (33% vs 24%). This difference is mostly driven by US experts who were much more likely to select government control of funding (48%) compared to experts studying other contexts (23%).

Figure 12. Barriers to Research on the Information Environment



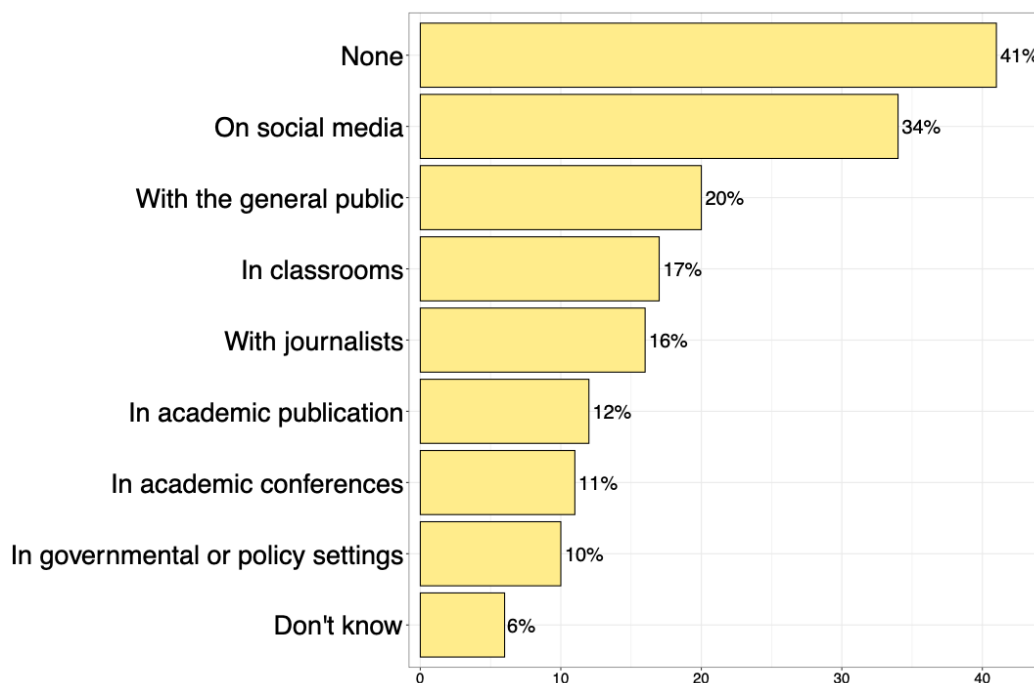
Note: “What barriers or challenges do you currently face in your research on the information environment? Select all that apply.”

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

Turning to the freedom of expression, encouragingly, 41% of experts did not report having refrained from sharing their research or findings in their field due to concerns about their position in the past 12 months (see Figure 13). The most common context in which experts self-censored was, by far, on social media (34%).

Results varied by regions. For example, 40% of experts on developing countries reported self-censoring on social media compared to 30% of experts on developed countries. US experts were much more likely to report self-censoring with the general public (30%) compared experts in other regions (17%).

Figure 13. Contexts in Which Experts Have Self-Censored Due to Concerns About Their Position



Note: “In the past 12 months, have you refrained from sharing your research or findings in your field due to concerns about your position (e.g., job security, grant funding, or promotion) in any of following contexts? Select all that apply.”

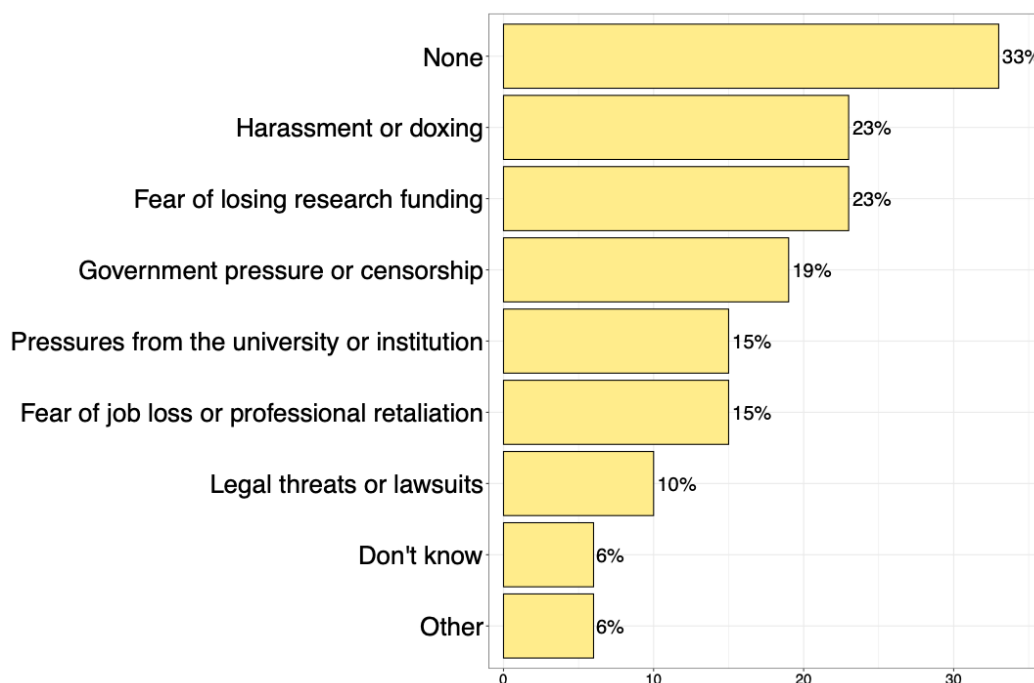
Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE 12/06/2025–07/07/2025.

Finally, we turn to the harms that experts have experienced because of their research. While 33% of experts reported not having experienced any harm due to their research, 23% of experts reported having been harassed or doxed, and feared that they would lose their funding (see Figure 14). Moreover, 19% reported having been pressured or censored by the government—an additional 15% feared losing their job or suffering professional retaliation, and 15% reported feeling pressure from their university.

Experts on developed countries were more likely to fear losing funding (28%) compared to experts on developing countries (15%)—this difference is mostly driven by US experts who were much more likely to fear losing funding (43%) than experts on other regions (16%). Fear of job loss and government pressures were

also more prevalent among US experts (24% and 26%) compared to experts on other regions (12% and 17%). Women experts were more likely to report having been harassed or doxed than men experts (27% and 21%).

Figure 14. Harms Experienced by Experts



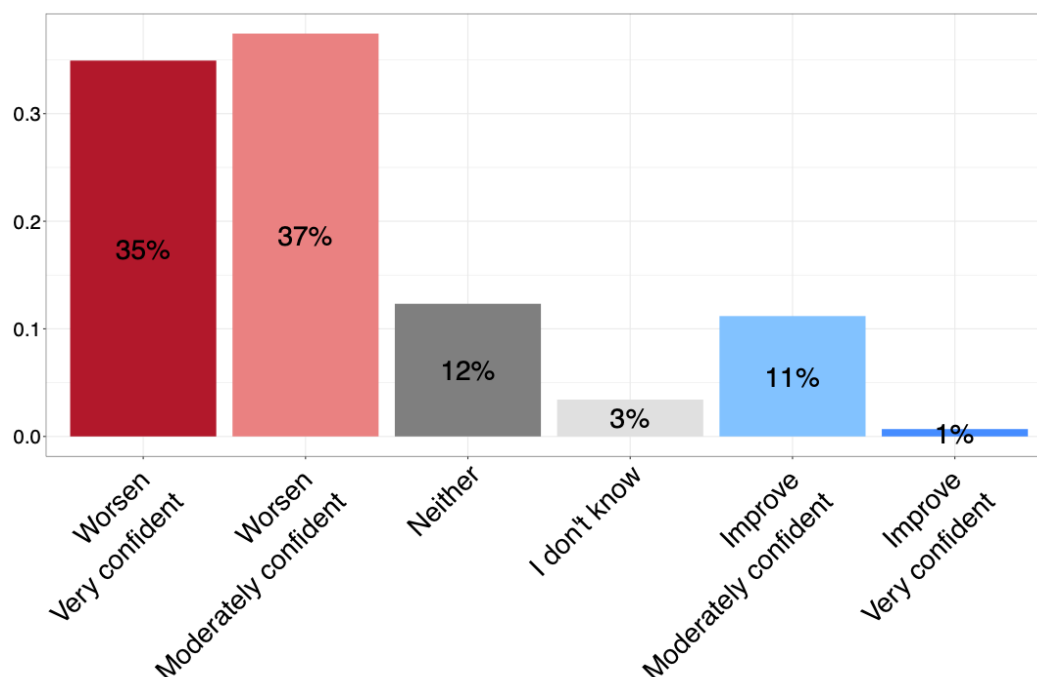
Note: “Have you experienced any of the following due to your research? Select all that apply.”

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

Experts’ Outlook on the Future of the Information Environment

Experts expected that the information environment in their country of expertise will worsen in 2026 (see Figure 15). A large majority of experts (72%) were moderately or very confident that it would worsen, whereas only a minority believed it would neither improve nor worsen (12%) or that it would improve (12%).

Figure 15. Future of the Information Environment



Note: “How confident are you that the information environment will improve or worsen in the next year in your country of expertise?”

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

Since the first IPIE Expert Survey, the proportion of experts predicting that the information environment will worsen has increased by nine percentage points each year—from 54% in 2023 to 63% in 2024, and 72% in 2025.

Similar to the 2024 IPIE survey, experts on developing countries were more pessimistic about the future of the information environment (76%) than experts on developed countries (67%).

SECTION 5. CONCLUSIONS

This Synthesis Report assessed the characteristics of the information environment, the threats it faces, and the ways it can be improved, drawing on insights from experts worldwide. This year we explored in greater detail the barriers and harms that experts faced when studying the information environment, as well as the effects of social media platforms and content moderation dilemmas.

The survey identifies several areas of consensus. Just like in the 2023 and 2024 IPIE Expert Surveys [8], [26], 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. To achieve this healthy information environment, experts favored protecting journalists, funding media literacy initiatives, and enforcing freedom of information standards—which is in line with last year’s recommendation to support free and independent media.

Pessimism about the future of the information environment has been steadily rising over the past three years. In 2023, just over half (54%) of surveyed experts expected the information environment to worsen, while in 2025 this number reached nearly three-quarters of experts (72%).

This growing pessimism may reflect, to some extent, the greater representation of experts on developing countries in the IPIE Expert Survey. However, this trend is also observed among experts on developed countries, suggesting that it is unlikely to fully account for the trend, and may be better explained by other factors, such as recent global governance developments. Since the last survey, significant platform policy shifts under the current U.S. administration—including reduced content moderation and increased tolerance for harmful content [29]—have reshaped the digital landscape in ways that likely contribute to these

attitudes. Equally important is the growing empowerment of technology billionaires, who have increasingly withdrawn from cooperation with regulators, potentially weakening collaborative efforts to address online harms [30]. Three-quarters of experts consider the lack of platform accountability as a significant threat to the information environment. In the 2024 IPIE Expert Survey, owners of social media platforms were considered the main threat to the information environment. Clearly, much remains to be done to better align the incentives of online platforms with the imperatives of a healthy and resilient information environment.

Experts hold mixed views on the societal impact of social media platforms. On one hand, there is broad agreement that these platforms have had several negative consequences, including a role in exacerbating political polarization, contributing to mental health issues, amplifying populist narratives, and undermining trust in institutions. On the other hand, many experts also acknowledge the positive roles that social media can play—notably in facilitating political participation, enhancing access to news, and potentially exposing users to a wider range of viewpoints. Additionally, experts consider that social media has enabled individuals to become more informed on diverse topics and issues. Overall, we recognize the need to conduct interviews to complement the survey, as this will help us better understand the context behind the responses.

This mixed perspective is consistent with findings from the empirical literature, which indicates that digital media use is associated with both positive (increased political participation, higher levels of information consumption) and negative outcomes (greater polarization and populism, alongside declining institutional trust) [1]. Reflecting this duality, roughly half of experts consider social media's impact on society to be positive, while the other half view it negatively. These views are in part shaped by regional contexts. Experts on developing countries

tend to be more optimistic about the role of social media, in contrast to their counterparts studying developed countries. In established democracies with robust media ecosystems, social media may displace more traditional and potentially more reliable sources of information. Conversely, in developing countries, these platforms can sometimes serve as critical tools for free expression—offering a space to voice opinions that might otherwise be censored or marginalized [1]. Importantly, social media is not a homogeneous category, and the previous IPIE Expert Survey showed that experts are more worried about videos or social networking platforms like TikTok or Instagram, rather than professional networking sites like LinkedIn [26].

Generative AI poses new challenges to the information environment. In line with last year, experts considered that various generative AI tools have had, and will have, mostly negative impacts on the information environment. AI-generated videos were perceived as much more threatening than AI-generated text. Compared to last year, fears about the impact of generative AI on the information environment have slightly attenuated (by 7%). Next year's survey will reveal whether this change marks a lasting trend or a temporary anomaly.

Experts support content moderation and various interventions to improve the information environment. In line with last year, more than half of experts consider digital and media literacy tips, fact-checking, and the labeling of false or AI content, as well as untrustworthy sources, to greatly improve the information environment.

In general, experts agreed that social media platforms need to take action to address potentially harmful content. For content promoting violence and hate speech, experts favored the most restrictive measures, such as making it illegal, taking the content down, or suspending the users. For misinformation and offensive content, experts favored more varied and proportional approaches.

Whereas experts overwhelmingly favored labeling AI-generated content. These recommendations stand in contrast to the decisions of some major social media companies to scale back content moderation [29].

Regarding algorithms and their regulation, more than 75% of experts agreed that algorithms should be regularly audited to identify and mitigate algorithmic biases, actively promote a diversity of perspectives, and expose users to perspectives they might not otherwise encounter. Recent regulations, such as the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, may make these audits more likely to be realized. However, effective implementation remains challenging, and there is still a long way to go before consistent, meaningful, and transparent audits become an industry standard.

For the first time, lack of research funding has overtaken data access as the top barrier to study the information environment. Fewer than half of experts now identify restricted data access as a barrier, compared to over three-quarters last year. Due to recent political developments, scholars in the United States have faced mounting pressure, most notably, this has come in the form of repeated attacks on academic freedom and the reduction or cancellation of several federal grants for research in this field. This shift may also reflect a change in the demographic makeup of respondents, with more experts from developing countries joining the ranks of those surveyed—where financial constraints are a longstanding issue.

This year, we explored the harms and risks that experts face to study the information environment. Strikingly, one third of experts reported self-censoring on social media over career concerns. This self-censorship is more prevalent among experts on developing countries. Nearly a quarter of experts reported experiencing harassment or doxing in the past year as a result of their work on the information environment—and a similar percentage of experts feared losing their

research funding. The prevalence of self-censorship and harassment highlights the need to protect researchers working in this field. The politicization of academic topics and the erosion of institutional safeguards are contributing to a climate where caution increasingly outweighs openness. This may discourage scholars from pursuing critical lines of research. Ultimately, safeguarding academic freedom and ensuring the safety of researchers is essential, not just for the well-being of individual scholars, but for the integrity of knowledge production systems and society's capacity to navigate the complexities of the information environment.

The findings of this third annual IPIE Expert Survey paint a sobering picture of an information environment under growing pressure. As pessimism among experts reaches unprecedented levels, the persistent challenges of platform accountability, misinformation, and concentrated media ownership continue to undermine democratic discourse. Three years of consensus on accurate information and diversity of voices as foundational principles point to next steps for reform. The path forward demands a multifaceted approach that protects journalistic integrity, invests in both individual and systemic solutions, ensures algorithmic transparency, and crucially, safeguards academic freedom. As the information environment continues its rapid evolution, we hope that these findings will help build greater resiliency. These challenges demand coordinated action by policymakers, platforms, and civil society to preserve the information environment.

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