



International Panel on the Information Environment

Expert Survey on the Global Information Environment 2026

Under Pressure

Summary for Policymakers 2026.3

DOI Number: 10.61452/ORMU3913

S. Altay, S. Valenzuela, P. N. Howard

SYNOPSIS

The information environment is under great pressure, and so are the researchers who study it. People increasingly receive information already sorted for them, by recommendation algorithms or by generative AI systems that answer directly rather than link to sources. How do experts around the world assess threats to the information environment?

In May and June 2026, the IPIE surveyed 470 researchers with expertise on 71 countries in the fourth and most diverse wave of its annual expert survey. Nearly half the experts study developing economies. This Summary for Policymakers presents the main findings of Trends in the Information Environment: 2026 Expert Survey Results (SR2026.3).

AI summaries deliver speed at the expense of diverse news sources and viewpoints. Nearly four in five experts, 79%, expect AI summaries to help people find answers faster. However, this is expected to drive down the use of news websites and narrow the range of viewpoints people encounter.

Conditions for research on the information environment have worsened according to every measure. Three in five experts report restricted data access, a third report pressure to align research with government agendas, and almost a quarter report government censorship, all on the rise since 2025. Fully half the experts on the USA report government control of funding and political pressure—twice the rate of others.

Experts are most worried about unaccountable platform power. More than three quarters of experts, 78%, rate the lack of platform accountability a big or extreme threat, ahead of misinformation and polarization and the impact of generative AI.

Pessimism stands at a record level, and it is deepest where research conditions are rated better. Three in four experts, 76%, expect the information environment in their country of expertise to worsen next year, up from just over half in 2023. Fewer than a quarter of experts on developing economies think most people can tell accurate information from false.

The full report presents these findings in detail, with further observations on the technologies experts view most favorably and on how perceived risks from AI-generated content compare with experimental evidence.

INTRODUCTION

How people consume information is changing again. People increasingly receive information already sorted for them, whether through recommendation algorithms or generative AI systems that answer directly rather than requiring users to choose from among different sources. By early 2026, 60% of adults in the USA said they read the AI-generated summaries that now sit at the top of most search results [1]. A growing minority treat chatbots as a place to look things up, news included [2]. This shift is happening on already shaky ground. Across much of the world, trust in news is low and audiences for professional journalism keep thinning [2]. Many people actively avoid the news altogether [2]. Platforms, meanwhile, have stepped back from moderating content just as regulators have begun to demand more of them.

As these pressures mount, researchers studying the information environment face growing strain. In 2025, the USA suspended or terminated thousands of federal research grants, with work on misinformation among the topics singled out [3]. Similar pressures on academic freedom have been reported elsewhere, including in Hungary, Mexico, Russia, and Venezuela [4]. Thin funding, restricted data, and political pressure now shape what is studied. The Synthesis Report ([SR2026.3](#)) reviews the evidence behind these developments.

Since 2023, the IPIE has run a yearly survey to track how experts view the information environment. The information environment is the aggregate of the physical, social, and digital surroundings that influence how individuals, organizations, or countries communicate, interact, and process information ([SR2023.3](#); [SR2024.2](#); [SR2025.2](#)). Each wave asks researchers to evaluate the information environment in their main country of expertise. This report presents the fourth wave, gathered in 2026.

Research Questions

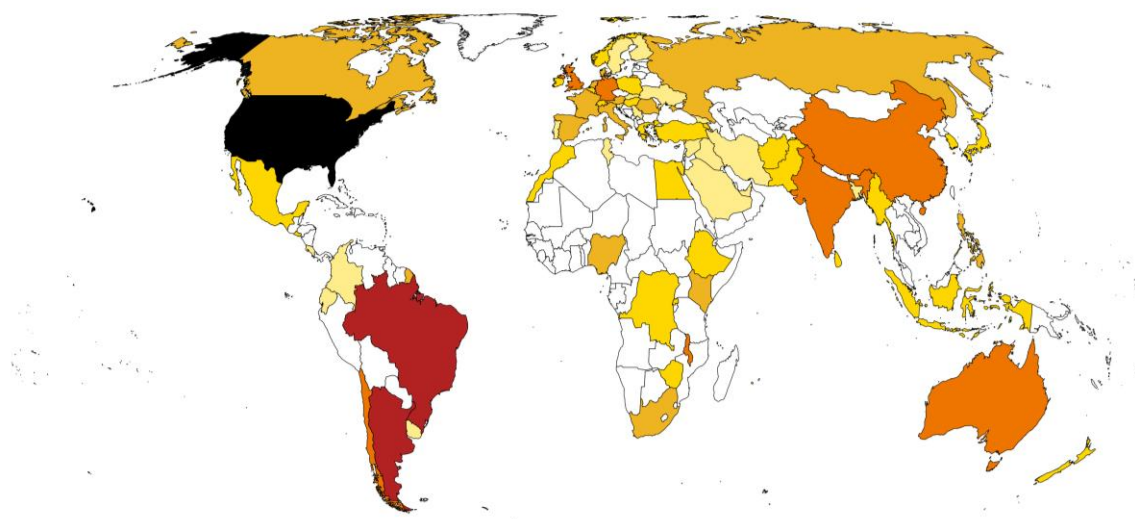
Five questions guided the analysis this year:

- What makes a healthy information environment?
- What are the main threats to the information environment?
- How are generative AI and other information technologies, including AI-powered search, reshaping the information environment?
- How do experts expect the information environment to change?
- What barriers and pressures do experts face in studying the information environment?

The survey was in the field between 6 May and 8 June 2026. A total of 470 researchers completed it, about 14% of those invited. They reported expertise on 71 countries (Figure 1). Every world region is represented. Each respondent named a single main country of expertise, to which all country-level results refer. Aligning with the UN Trade and Development classification, 55% are experts on developed economies and 45% on developing economies, the most balanced split the survey has achieved yet. Responses were anonymous, and percentages throughout are shares of all 470 experts. The full methods, sampling information, questionnaire, data, and analysis code are available in the Synthesis Report ([SR2026.3](#)) and in the replication materials on [GitHub](#).

The survey's first question asks what a healthy information environment needs, and experts have now given the same answer four times. Experts rated the availability of accurate information as the most important feature, with nine in ten calling it extremely important or absolutely essential, and a diversity of voices ranked second. Most experts, 76%, thought people in their country of expertise can find diverse viewpoints online at least somewhat easily. Far fewer thought the public trusts what it finds. Only 28% believed more than half of the population trusts the main news outlets to report accurately about politics, and only 37% thought the available information gives people the understanding needed for civic life. The full feature ratings appear in the Synthesis Report. Against that stable backdrop, four findings stand out this year.

Figure 1. Respondents' Expertise by Country.



Note: Shading reflects the number of experts reporting each country as their main country of expertise; map projection: Equal Earth Projection. ○ = 0, ● = 1, ● = 2–5, ● = 6–10, ● = 11–20, ● = 21–40, ● = 41–120.

Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE, 6 May to 8 June 2026.

RESULT 1: MIXED VIEWS ON AI SUMMARIES IN SEARCH

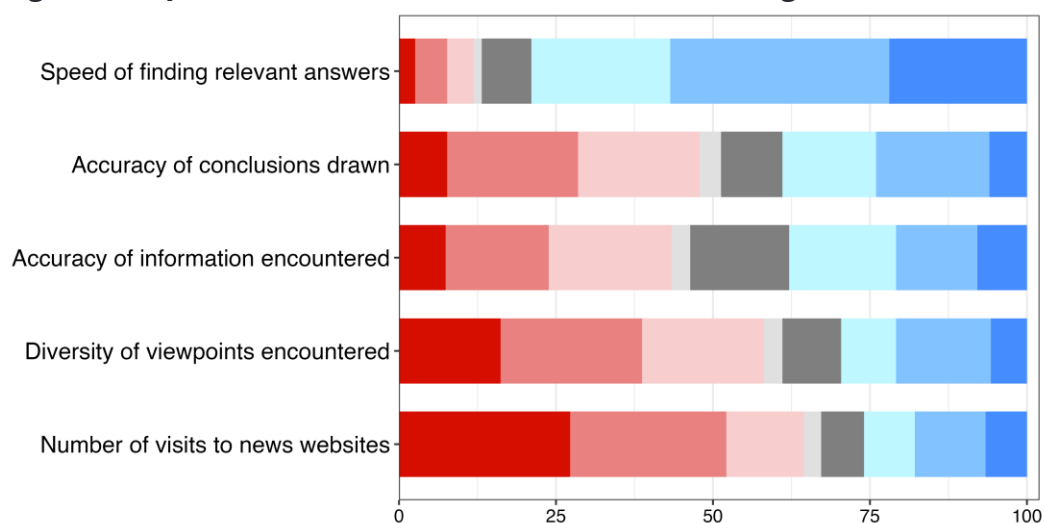
KEY FINDING

AI summaries deliver speed at the expense of visits to news websites and viewpoint diversity.

New this year, the survey asked how AI summaries in search, the generated answers now shown above search engine results, will affect what people find. Experts described a sharp trade-off, shown in Figure 2. Nearly four in five, 79%, expect AI summaries to help users find relevant answers faster. Almost two-thirds, 64%, also expect AI summaries to reduce visits to news websites, and 58% to narrow the diversity of viewpoints users encounter. Experts are divided on whether the summaries improve the accuracy of what people find and of the conclusions they draw. Early evidence points the same way, as users have become markedly less likely to click through to a source when an AI summary appears in search results [5].

In contrast, 80% of experts rated the impact of search engines as positive and only 8% as negative. That question did not, however, distinguish searches carrying AI summaries from those without, so the favorable rating is not an endorsement of AI-assisted search.

Figure 2. Expected Effects of AI Summaries in Search Engines.



Note: “To what extent do you think AI summaries in search engines will improve or worsen the following outcomes of a search in [your main country of expertise]?” ● = Worsen a lot, ● = Worsen, ● = Worsen a little, ● = Don't know, ● = No change, ● = Improve a little, ● = Improve, ● = Improve a lot.

Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE. 6 May to 8 June 2026.

RESULT 2: POLITICAL PRESSURES AND BARRIERS

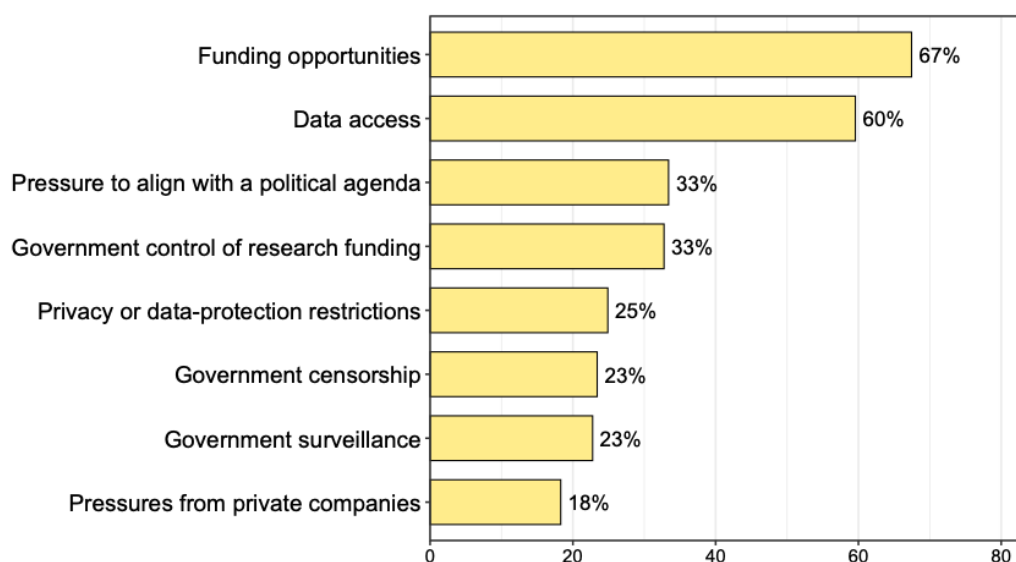
KEY FINDING

Conditions for research on the information environment have worsened by every measure, most notably in the USA.

Experts reported the barriers they face in their work on the information environment, and every barrier was selected more often than in 2025. As shown in Figure 3, availability of research funding remains the most common barrier, cited by two-thirds, 67%. Restricted access to data follows at 60%, up from 49% last year. The sharpest rises were political. Pressure to align research with a government's agenda rose from 21% to 33%, government censorship from 11% to 23%, and pressure from private companies from 8% to 18%.

These pressures fell unevenly by geography. Experts on the USA reported government control of research funding and pressure to align research with a political agenda at about twice the rate of non-USA experts. The former was reported by 50% of experts on the USA and the latter by 48%. The first percentage has changed little from last year but the second increased sharply from 30%. Government censorship and surveillance are reported about as often by experts on the USA, at 30% and 27%, as by experts on developing economies, at 31% and 29%, and rarely by experts on other developed economies, 7% and 9%.

Figure 3. Barriers to Research on the Information Environment.



Note: “What barriers or challenges do you currently face in your work on the information environment? Select all that apply.” Percentages are of all 470 experts; respondents could select multiple barriers.

Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE, 6 May to 8 June 2026.

RESULT 3: THREATS TO THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

KEY FINDING

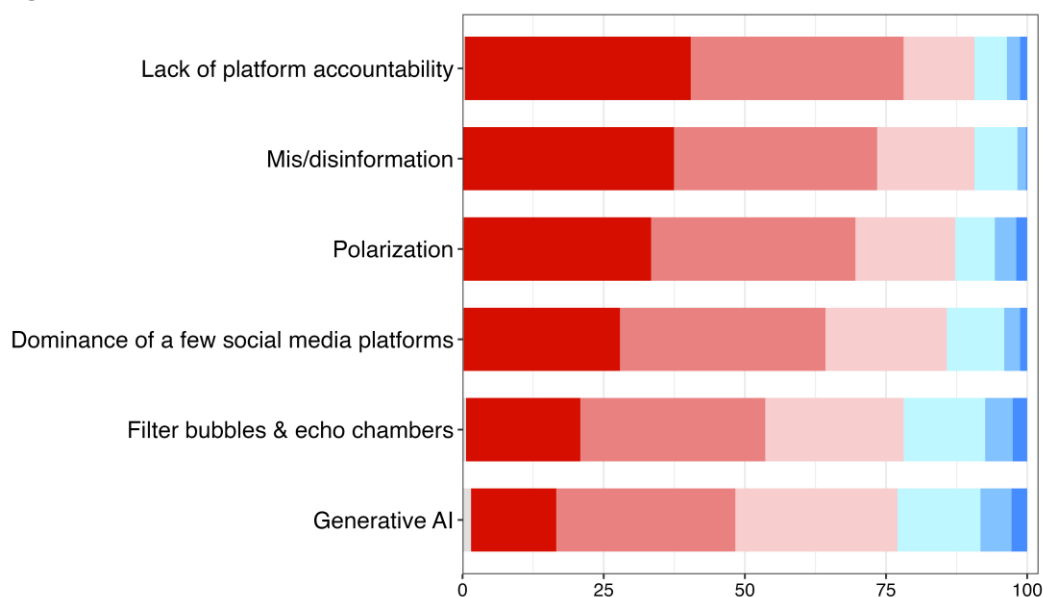
Experts are most worried about unaccountable platform power, followed by misinformation and polarization.

Experts rated how significant a threat each of six factors poses to the information environment in their main country of expertise. As shown in Figure 4, lack of platform accountability was the most widely shared concern, rated a big or extreme threat by 78% of experts, narrowly ahead of misinformation, 73%, and polarization, 69%. The dominance of a few social media platforms, 64%, and filter bubbles or echo chambers, 53%, followed. Generative AI was rated the smallest of the six threats, though still a big or extreme threat for almost half, 47%.

The ordering is not new. Platform accountability also topped the longer 2025 list, and generative AI sat at the bottom in both waves. Behind the averages, experts fall into three groups. About half are broadly alarmed across every threat, more than a third concentrate their concern on platforms and misinformation, and roughly one in ten is unconcerned.

Concern about platform accountability remains high despite unprecedented legislative and regulatory activity worldwide, especially in Europe, where the Digital Services Act (DSA) is now coming into force [6]–[8]. Experts' views on regulatory regimes differ across regions. Only 26% of EU experts report weak or absent legal disclosure requirements for content and platforms, versus 58% elsewhere, suggesting that the EU's regulatory framework is visible to the experts who study it.

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, ● = Extreme threat, ● = Big threat, ● = Moderate threat, ● = Small threat, ● = Very small threat, ● = Not a threat at all.

Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE, 6 May to 8 June 2026.

RESULT 4: THE FUTURE OF THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

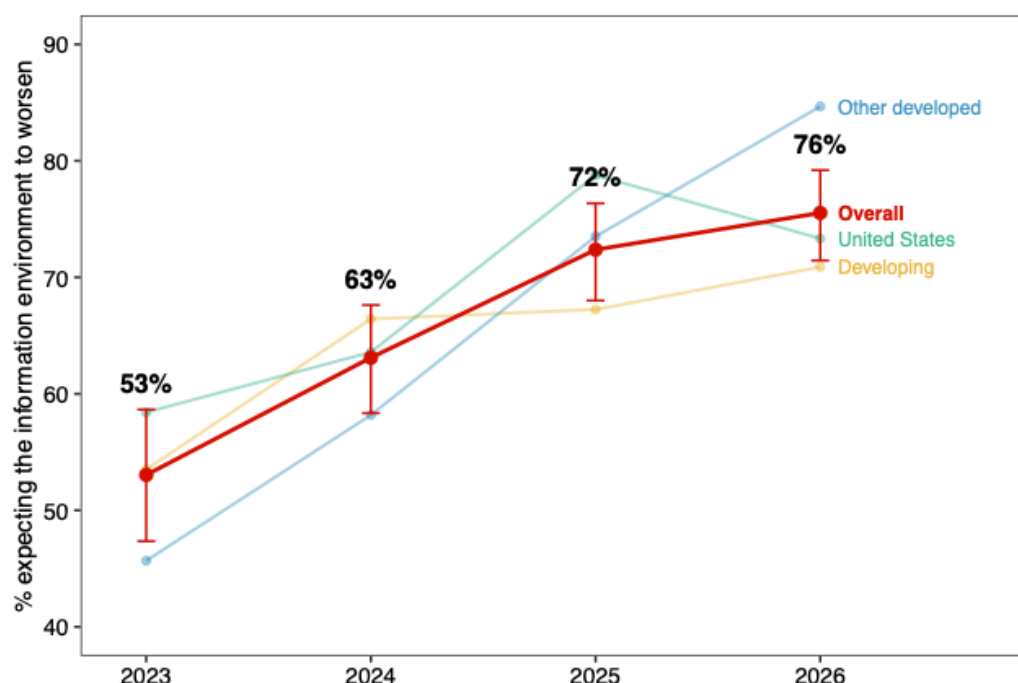
KEY

Pessimism stands at a record level, and it is deepest where research conditions are rated better.

Three in four experts, 76%, are moderately or very confident that the information environment in their country of expertise will worsen over the coming year, while 14% expect it to improve. Figure 5 shows that pessimism has climbed from just over half in 2023 to 63% in 2024, and 72% in 2025. This year's step, however, sits within normal sampling variation, so the trend may be flattening rather than continuing. The survey does not identify what has driven the climb. Platforms' retreat from content moderation, the regulatory conflict surrounding it, and the squeeze on research funding are plausible contributors, but testing them would require evidence this survey does not collect.

The pessimism is deepest where research conditions are rated better. Experts on developed economies outside the USA are the most pessimistic, at 85%, while experts on the USA and developing economies are less pessimistic, at 73% and 71% respectively. Yet experts on developing economies and the USA judge current conditions as being the worst and rate most threats higher. They see a worse present and a less bleak year ahead.

Figure 5. Experts' Outlook on the Information Environment, 2023 to 2026.



Note: Percentage of experts moderately or very confident that the information environment in their country of expertise will worsen over the coming year, with 95% confidence intervals. N = 296 in 2023, 412 in 2024, 438 in 2025, and 470 in 2026. Faint lines show experts on developing economies (n = 114, 140, 174, 213 in 2023 to 2026 respectively), the USA (101, 162, 113, 120), and other developed economies (81, 110, 151, 137).

Source: Based on data collected by the IPIE 2023 to 2026.

CONCLUSION

Four annual surveys now give an evolving picture of how experts read the information environment. The most durable result is consensus on what that environment needs. For a fourth consecutive wave, experts ranked the availability of accurate information and a diversity of voices as its two most important features, and that ranking has held across four samples that have grown and changed in make-up.

This year's findings sharpen the picture. Experts expect AI summaries in search to deliver faster answers at a cost to news organizations and to the range of viewpoints people encounter. The conditions for studying the information environment have worsened by every measure, with the sharpest rises in political pressure. For a second year, experts remain more worried about unaccountable platform power than about generative AI. And pessimism about the coming year is reported by a record high of three in four experts. It is deepest among experts on developed economies outside the USA, even though experts on developing economies judge the overall current conditions the worst to date.

The Synthesis Report carries observations this summary leaves aside. It reports, for example, that search engines remain the only technology whose effects on society experts rate as clearly positive and that experts' concern about AI-generated video sits uneasily beside experimental evidence showing that synthetic text may now pose the greater persuasive risk ([SR2026.2](#)).

The survey did not ask experts to endorse policies this year, so this summary offers no list of prescriptions. One implication, however, follows directly from the findings, and the IPIE has made it consistently: identifying and responding to threats to the information environment requires stable researcher access to data. This year, experts reported more barriers to accessing data, and pressures on researchers also grew. Understanding the global information environment depends on the access, funding, and protection of the people who do the research.

Several limitations and caveats apply to the findings reported here. The survey reports expert judgment rather than direct measurement, each wave draws a fresh sample, and questions about the future tend to draw pessimistic answers. For a full discussion of the methodology, sampling, and study design limitations, please see the full report. The next wave will show whether the AI-summaries findings harden into a trend, whether pessimism has peaked, and whether the pressures on research continue to mount.

A copy of the full questionnaire, code, and replication data is available in the replication materials on GitHub. The survey received approval from the IPIE Ethics Committee (IPIE_Ethics_Committee_2026_001). The full report, SR2026.3, is available at www.IPIE.info.

REFERENCES

- [1] Pew Research Center, “Americans and AI 2026: Chatbots, smart devices and views on impact,” Jun. 17, 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2026/06/17/americans-and-ai-2026-chatbots-smart-devices-and-views-on-impact/>
- [2] Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, *Digital News Report 2025*, 2025, doi: 10.60625/RISJ-8QQF-JT36.
- [3] M. Kozlov, J. Tollefson, and D. Garisto, “US science after a year of Trump: What has been lost and what remains,” *Nature*, vol. 649, no. 8098, pp. 812–815, 2026, doi: 10.1038/d41586-026-00088-9.
- [4] O. Westlund, M. Carlson, B. Hamada, N. Helberger, S. Lecheler, S. C. Lewis, T. Quandt, S. D. Reese, R. Salaverría, M. Saldaña, T. J. Thomson, K. Wahl-Jorgensen, and S. Wu, “Public knowledge and expertise under authoritarian siege: A defense of academic freedom from digital journalism studies,” *Digital Journalism*, vol. 13, no. 5, pp. 869–892, 2025, doi: 10.1080/21670811.2025.2527997.
- [5] Pew Research Center, “Google users are less likely to click on links when an AI summary appears in the results,” Jul. 22, 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/07/22/google-users-are-less-likely-to-click-on-links-when-an-ai-summary-appears-in-the-results/>
- [6] A. Pinggen, “Overview of the latest developments under the Digital Services Act: November 2025–February 2026,” 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://eucrim.eu/news/overview-of-the-latest-developments-under-the-digital-services-act-november-2025-february-2026/>
- [7] Ofcom, “Online safety industry bulletin – March 2026,” published Mar. 17, 2026, last updated Mar. 24, 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/online-safety-industry-bulletins/online-safety-industry-bulletin-march-2026>
- [8] Cyberspace Administration of China, “Measures for Labeling of Artificial Intelligence-Generated Synthetic Content,” issued Mar. 14, 2025; effective Sep. 1, 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.cac.gov.cn/2025-03/14/c_1743654684782215.htm

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Contributors

Drafting authors: Sacha Altay (Consulting Scientist, Switzerland), Sebastián Valenzuela (IPIE Chief Science Officer and Chair of the Science & Methodology Committee, Chile), Philip N. Howard (IPIE President and CEO, Canada/UK). Independent External Reviewers: Brendan Nyhan and Malihe Alikhani. Copyediting: Beverley Sykes. We acknowledge comments from the IPIE Science & Methodology Committee: Lisa Given, Stephan Lewandowsky, and Eva Navarro-López. We also acknowledge valuable feedback from Frank Esser, Peter van Aelst, Madalina Botan, Julien Labarre, Dani Madrid-Morales, Rose Marie Santini, Brigitte Seim, Jonathan A. Solis, and Morgan Wack. We gratefully acknowledge support from the IPIE Secretariat: Ollie Buckley, Jessica Gold, Perrine Lhuillier, Wiktoría Schulz, Donna Seymour, and Alex Young.

Funders

The International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE) gratefully acknowledges the support of its funders. For a full list of funding partners please visit www.IPIE.info. 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.

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 Policymakers 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 Paper 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 [S. Altay, S. Valenzuela, P. N. Howard (eds.)], “Expert Survey on the Global Information Environment 2026:

Under Pressure,” Zurich, Switzerland: IPIE, 2026. Summary for Policymakers, SFP2026.3, doi: 10.61452/ORMU3913.

Copyright Information



SA 4.0).

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-

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. 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.

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

