



See Radio Differently

# Breaking News

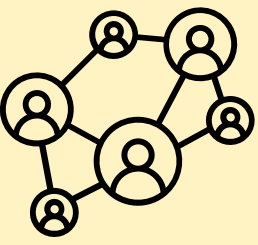
How commercial radio **cuts through** with listeners in a general election

June 2024

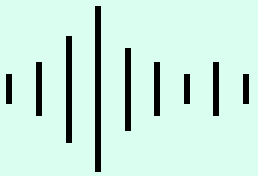
# Executive summary

- ❑ **Radio continues to be the most trusted medium for news and is considered to be the most impartial and accurate news source during an election.** In the run up to an election, commercial radio is seen as the best form of audio for a quick summary of key events and regular updates throughout the day.
- ❑ **Commercial radio news cuts through to listeners during an election** – encouraging discussion and debate and acting as a catalyst for further discovery. Young people are most likely to discuss what they've heard on commercial radio with family and friends.
- ❑ **Commercial radio news has a unique ability to reach an important group of potential swing voters.** Outsiders (over a third of commercial radio listeners who are least engaged with news) are more likely to say they don't know who they will vote for in the upcoming election. This group is most likely group to turn to commercial radio as their primary news source and their reliance on commercial radio news has grown since 2020.

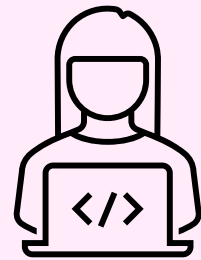
# Commercial radio news – a snapshot



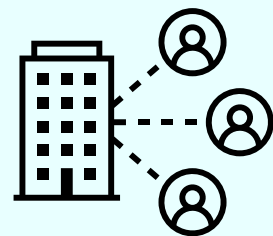
Reaching over 39 million listeners every week  
with vital news and information



Broadcasting over 10,000 bulletins every week –  
the vast majority of which contain local news



Employing hundreds of journalists across the UK – in local stations as  
well as national and regional news centres, with specialist reporters  
covering Westminster, Holyrood, The Senedd and Stormont



Operating over 20 newsrooms and broadcast centres across England,  
Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

# Background

Commercial radio remains a vitally important provider of news and journalism in the UK. With **39.7 million** listeners tuning in every week, the number of people receiving news and information from commercial radio is at an all-time high and, for a significant number of listeners, it is their principal source of news.

Radiocentre has commissioned a number of studies in recent years focusing on news. For example, *Beyond the Bubble* (2020), explored how commercial radio uniquely connects with audiences that other media struggle to reach. Before that, *Breaking News* (2017), focused on how listeners value commercial radio's news provision.

In anticipation of a general election taking place this year (now confirmed for 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024), Radiocentre commissioned new research\* to better understand how the British public engages with news content now, and how this impacts their expectations of and attitudes towards different news sources.

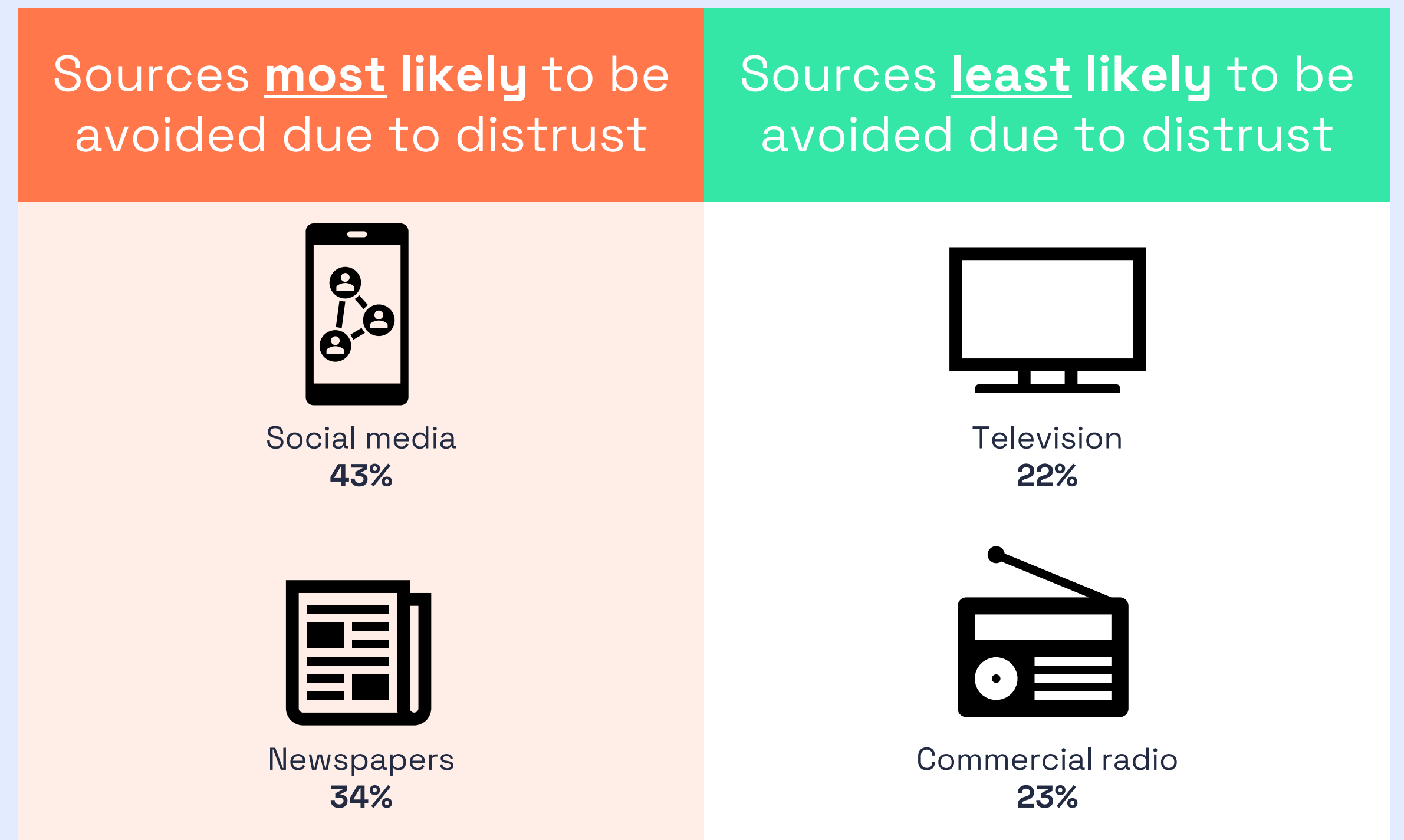
The survey sought to understand more about different listener groups, how they value commercial radio news, including during an election.

# News avoidance is on the rise, but radio remains a vital source of news and information

More and more people are avoiding news, overwhelmed by the constant flow of (often negative) information. Social media, in particular, is being actively avoided as a news source due to lack of trust and the prevalence of negative news.

**In this context, radio emerges as a reliable and convenient source of essential news and information.**

Although people listen to commercial radio primarily as a source of entertainment, it holds a unique position in the news ecosystem by providing trusted news bulletins that seamlessly integrate into listeners' routines. This enables audiences to stay up-to-date and informed even if they are not actively seeking out the news.



# Radio remains the most trusted news source

The Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2023* finds a continuing downward trend with public trust in news in the UK. This is, in part, down to growing concerns around misinformation and disinformation.

In our 2020 *Beyond the Bubble* research, respondents were asked if they were concerned about fake news. For this new research, the question was updated to reflect wider concerns about misleading or false information being presented as news. The survey finds that 63% of respondents were concerned, or very concerned, about misinformation in the news.

In this context, it is reassuring to find that radio is still the most trusted news source – **69% of respondents trust news to be factual and true on radio**, followed by television (60%). The least trusted news source is social media (27%).

This finding is also backed up by other sources, such as the European Commission’s Eurobarometer research on trust in media, which finds that radio continues to be the most trusted medium in the UK (as well as the majority of countries across Europe).

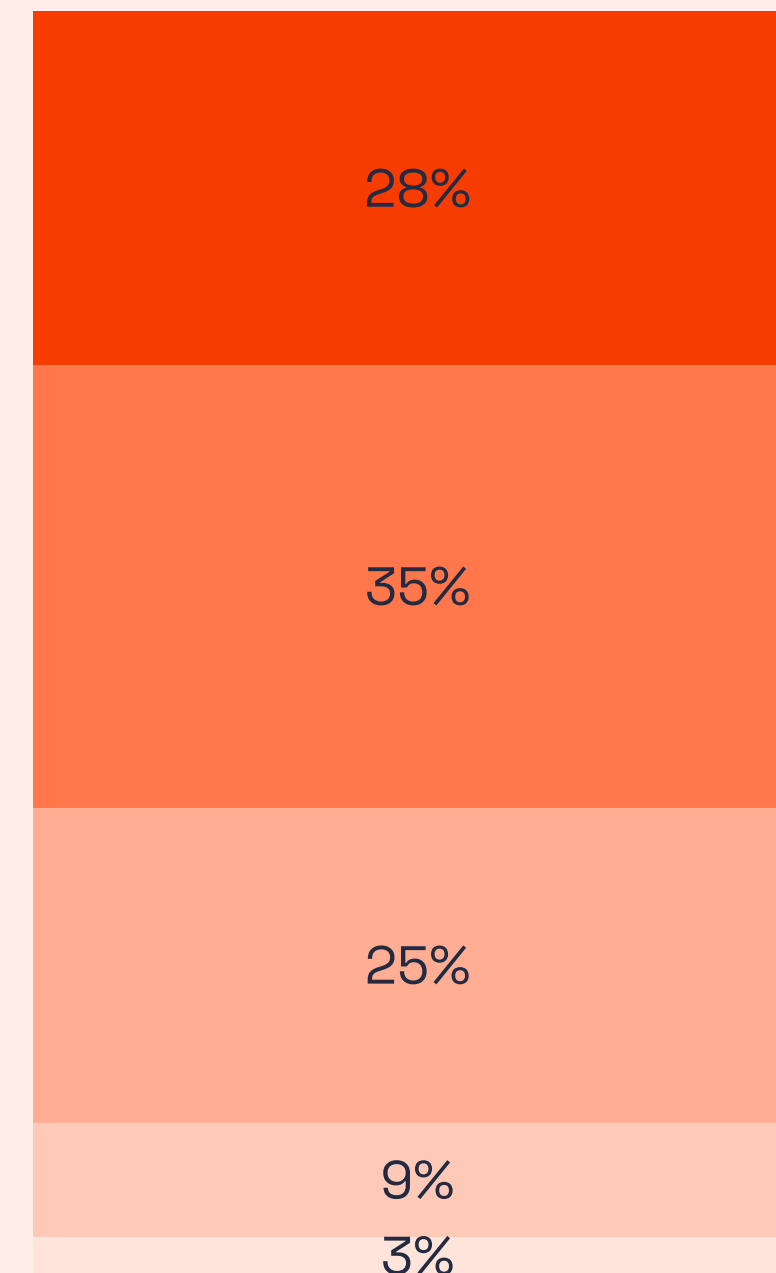
Listeners value commercial radio news for its relatability, ease of access, and consistency. The top three descriptions associated with commercial radio news updates were:



# Concern about false or misleading news is **high**

**63%**  
are very concerned  
or concerned about  
the amount of  
misleading or false  
information  
presented as news

*Concerned about misleading  
or false information  
presented as news*

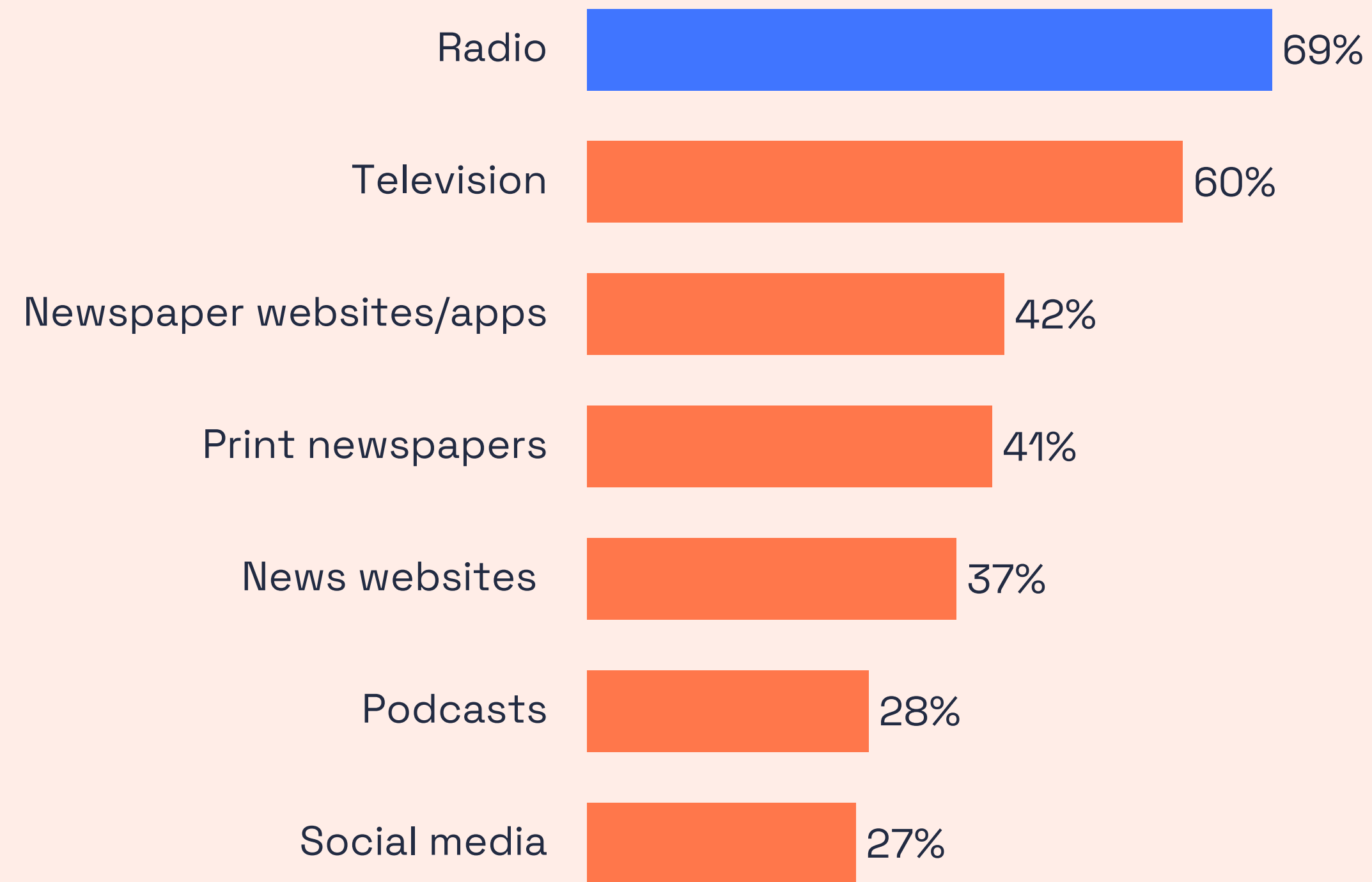


2024

1 - not at all concerned 2 3 4 5 - very concerned

# Radio is the most **trusted** medium for news

Trust news to be **factual** and **true** from these sources





# The role of commercial radio news in a general election

Radio and audio will play a particularly prominent role during an election campaign, by providing coverage that is reliable and trusted by audiences.

The survey found that radio is highly valued as a source of regular updates throughout the day and a quick summary of key events. This is a particularly important way of reaching people in a context where many people are avoiding news due to information overload.

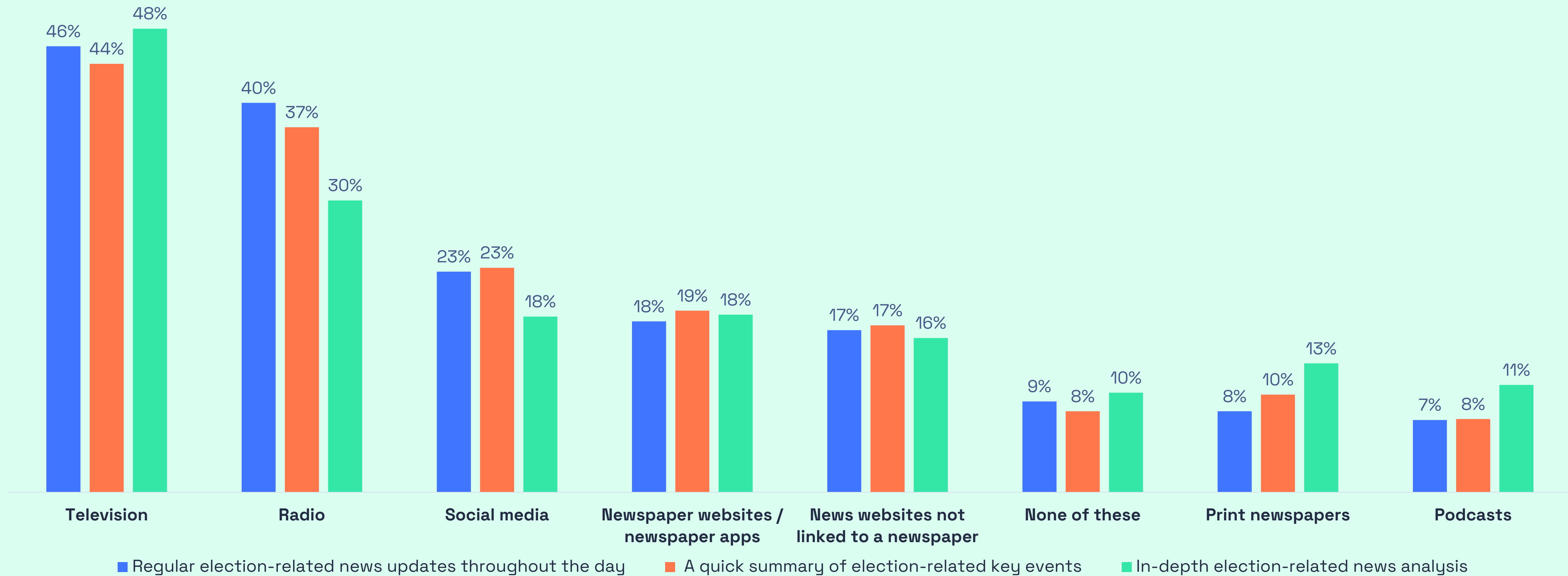
Radio is second only to television as the best news source during an election. Television performs particularly well for in depth analysis, which reflects the longer format of television news, compared with shorter news bulletins on radio.

When it comes to audio news, commercial radio is seen as the best source for a quick summary of key events and regular news updates throughout the day. Whereas BBC radio is considered to be a better source for in depth analysis.

**Radio is seen as the most impartial and accurate news source during an election.** It is therefore a particularly important vehicle for keeping the public informed via a news source that they will trust.

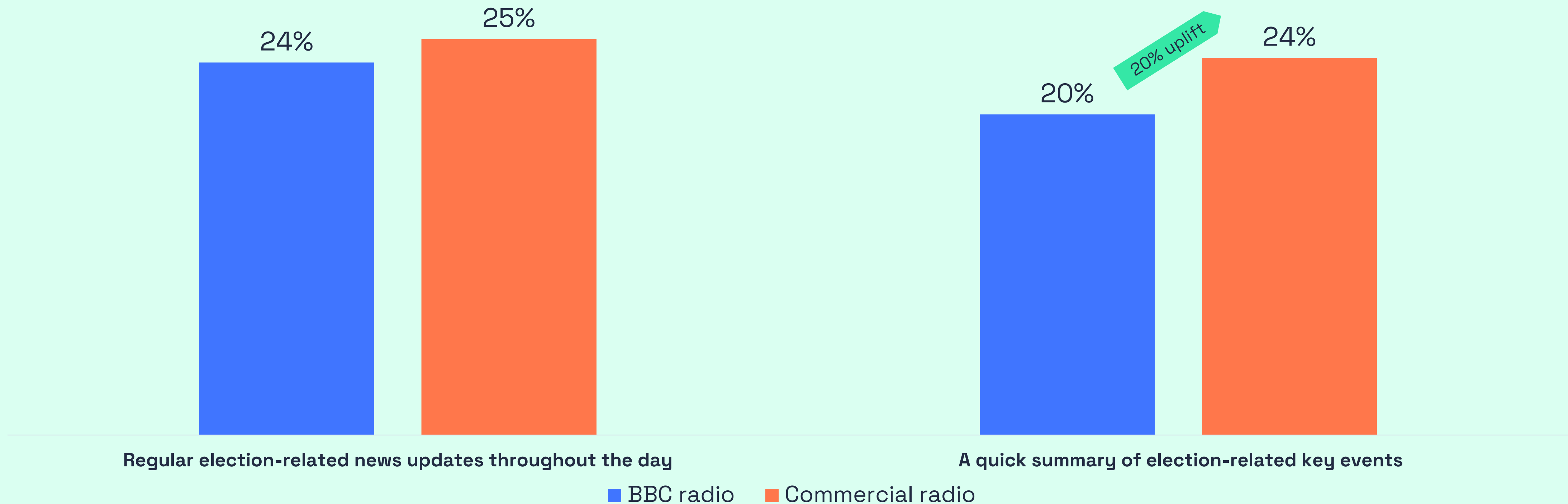
# Radio is a crucial news source during a general election

Best news source during a general election



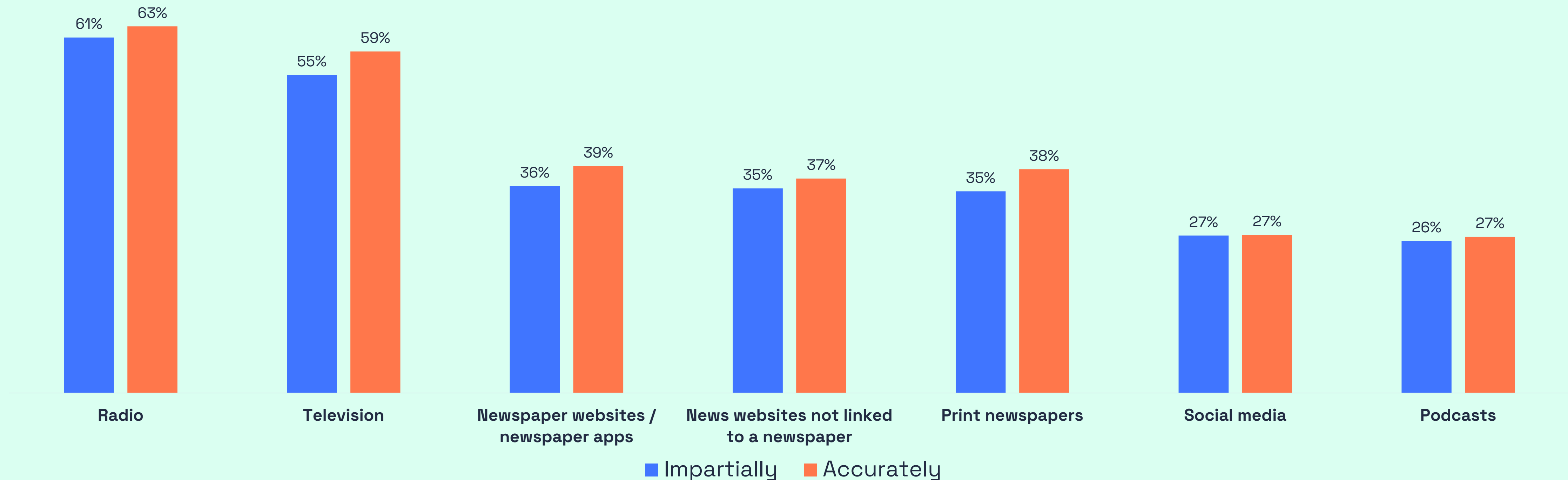
# Commercial radio is the best **audio news** source for quick updates and a summary of key events

Best news source during a general election



# Radio is considered to be the most **accurate** and **impartial** news source during an election

Trusted to report impartially and accurately during a general election



# Cutting through to audiences

The Reuters Institute finds that news audience polarisation in the UK is relatively high. In this context, commercial radio stands out as news source with significant reach (over 39 million people) that is highly trusted to be impartial and accurate in its reporting.

This is particularly pertinent during a general election, where political parties rely on getting their core messages out to potential voters.

Our research also found that news on commercial radio cuts through to listeners. Commercial radio is an important driver of discussion and debate, acting as a catalyst for further discovery.

Over two thirds of survey respondents said that they have followed up with an action after hearing news on commercial radio, whether that is discussing with family and friends or following up to find out more online or later watching the news on television.

Commercial radio news cuts through to younger people in particular, a demographic that is more likely than older groups to discuss what they've heard with family and friends.

# Commercial radio news **cuts through** to listeners – encouraging discussion and debate

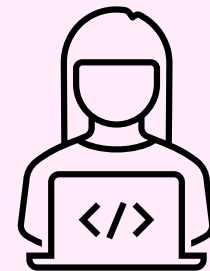
7 in 10

Listeners have taken an action after hearing news updates on commercial radio

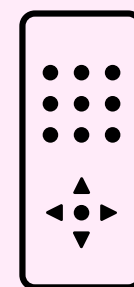
## Most prominent actions



Discuss something that you heard on the news with family and friends

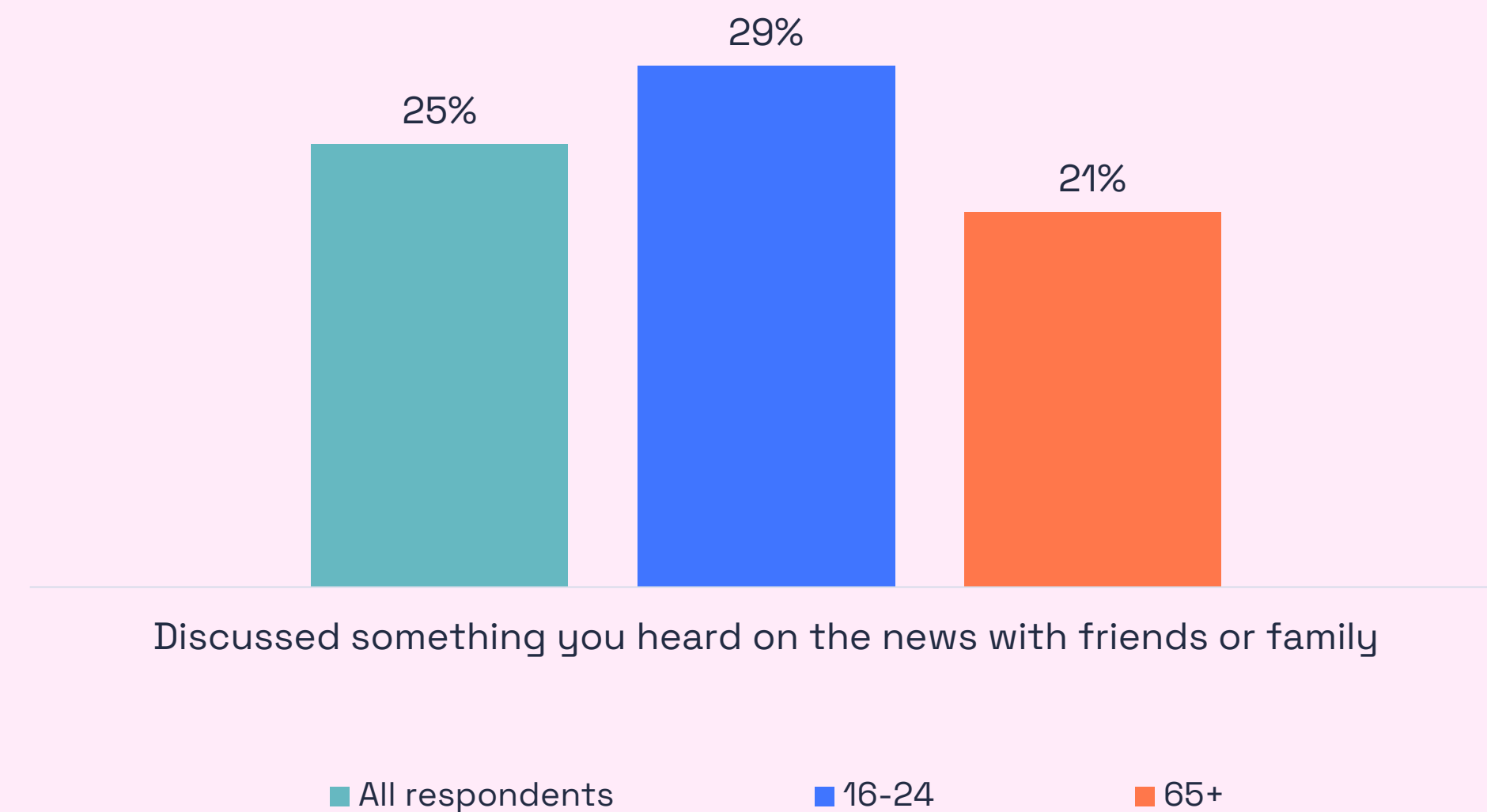


Searched for more information online



Turned on TV with the specific purpose to watch the news

Younger people are **more likely** to discuss what they've heard on the news with friends or family



# Listeners' views on commercial radio news during an election

“ They don't spin their own agenda, they just tell you the facts.

- Michelle, 39, Bristol

“ Around [an election], I'm listening to a bit more talk radio, probably like LBC, things like that. I'm listening to that more and just hearing what different parties are saying.

- Corey, 34, Glasgow

“ I just think it basically tends to give both sides...I just think it generally says it how it is.

- Caroline, 60, Manchester

# Commercial radio news is uniquely placed to reach audiences beyond the bubble

Our previous research, *Beyond the Bubble*, showed that commercial radio news reaches four distinct audience types: Super-seekers, Enthusiasts, Outsiders and Avoiders.

This updated survey finds that over a third of listeners comprise the often overlooked 'Outsiders' category – a group of news consumers that value commercial radio news especially highly.

Outsiders are less engaged in political news and the Westminster bubble, but make up an important group of potential swing voters. They skew older than other groups, are much more likely to be female and have a C2DE background, as well as less likely to live in London and the South-East.

Outsiders are the group most likely to turn to commercial radio as their **primary news source**. They are particularly heavy users of radio in the mornings and cite commercial radio as the most helpful source for both national and local news updates throughout the day.

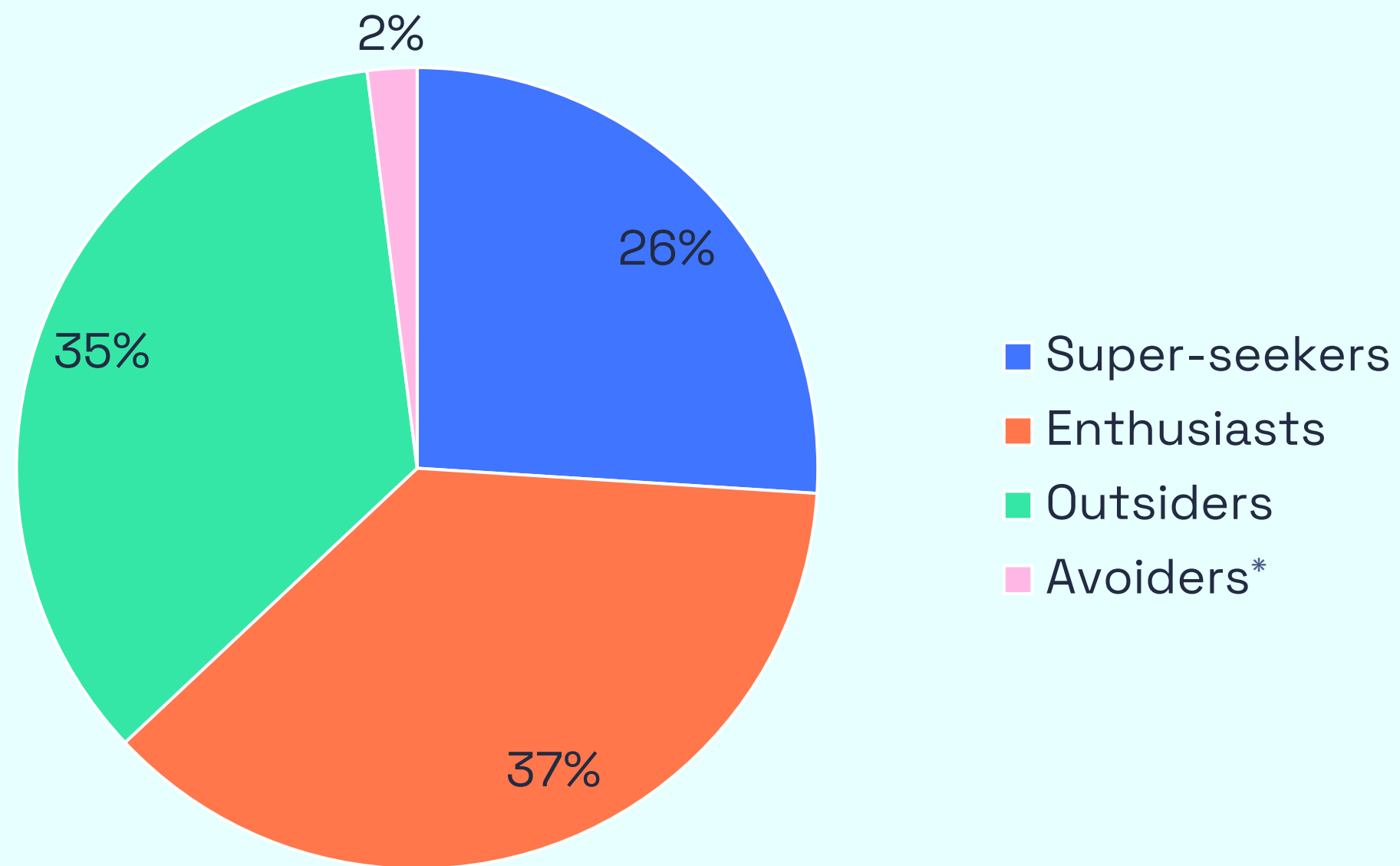
Outsiders' reliance on commercial radio for news has grown since 2020, especially during local emergencies, and they are three times more likely to rely on commercial radio than BBC radio for regular updates.

Importantly, commercial radio news has a unique ability to cut through to this audience group which has a higher proportion of swing voters compared to the average.



# Outsiders are an overlooked group of news consumers

Key groups of news consumers



UK Commercial Radio listeners: 39.1m (source: RAJAR Q3 2024)

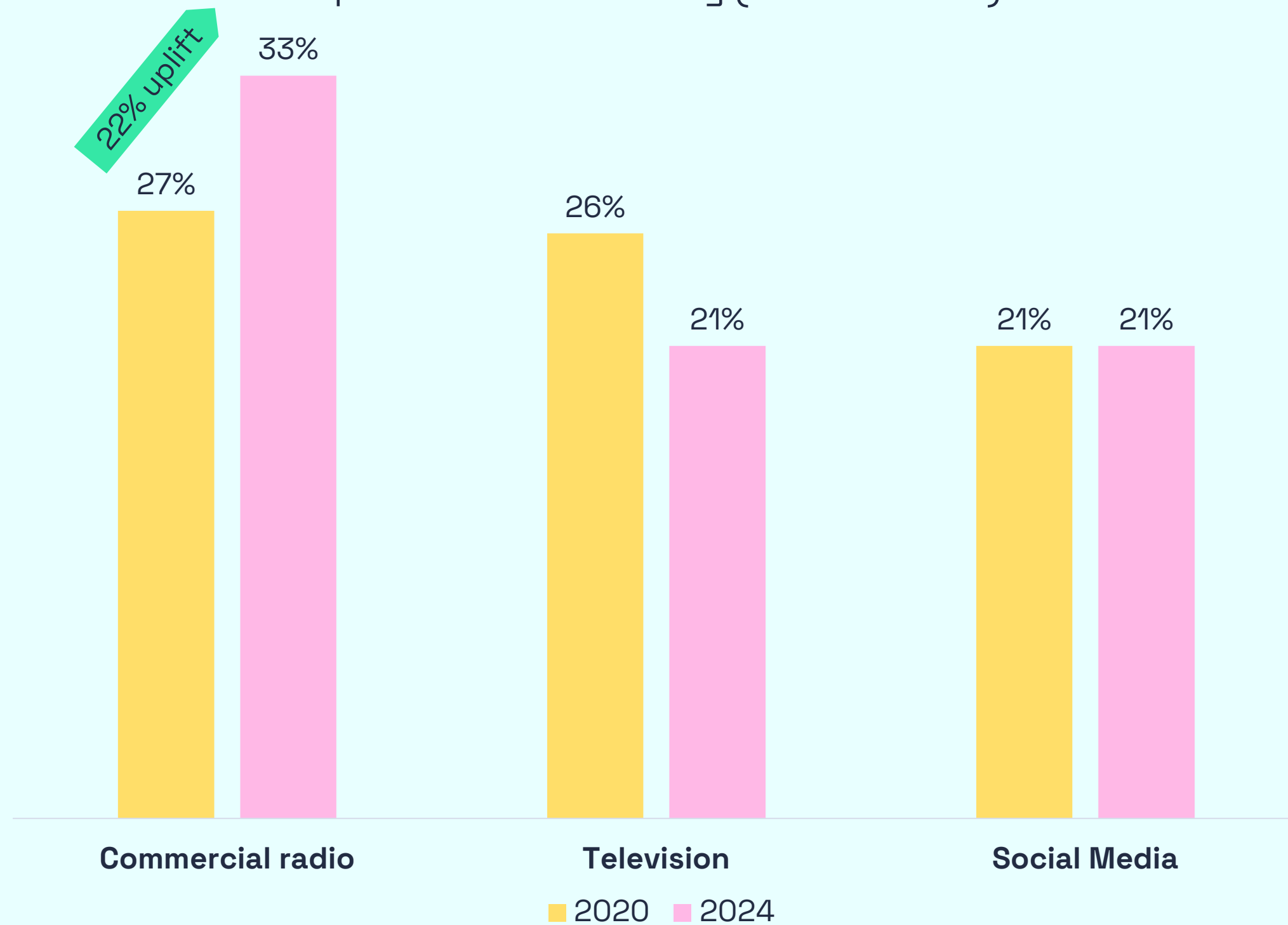
**Super-seekers:** love staying up-to-date with news and are constantly checking for the latest updates on different media (c.10m of commercial radio listeners in the UK)

**Enthusiasts:** have a keen interest in news and check for updates regularly (c.14.4m of commercial radio listeners in the UK)

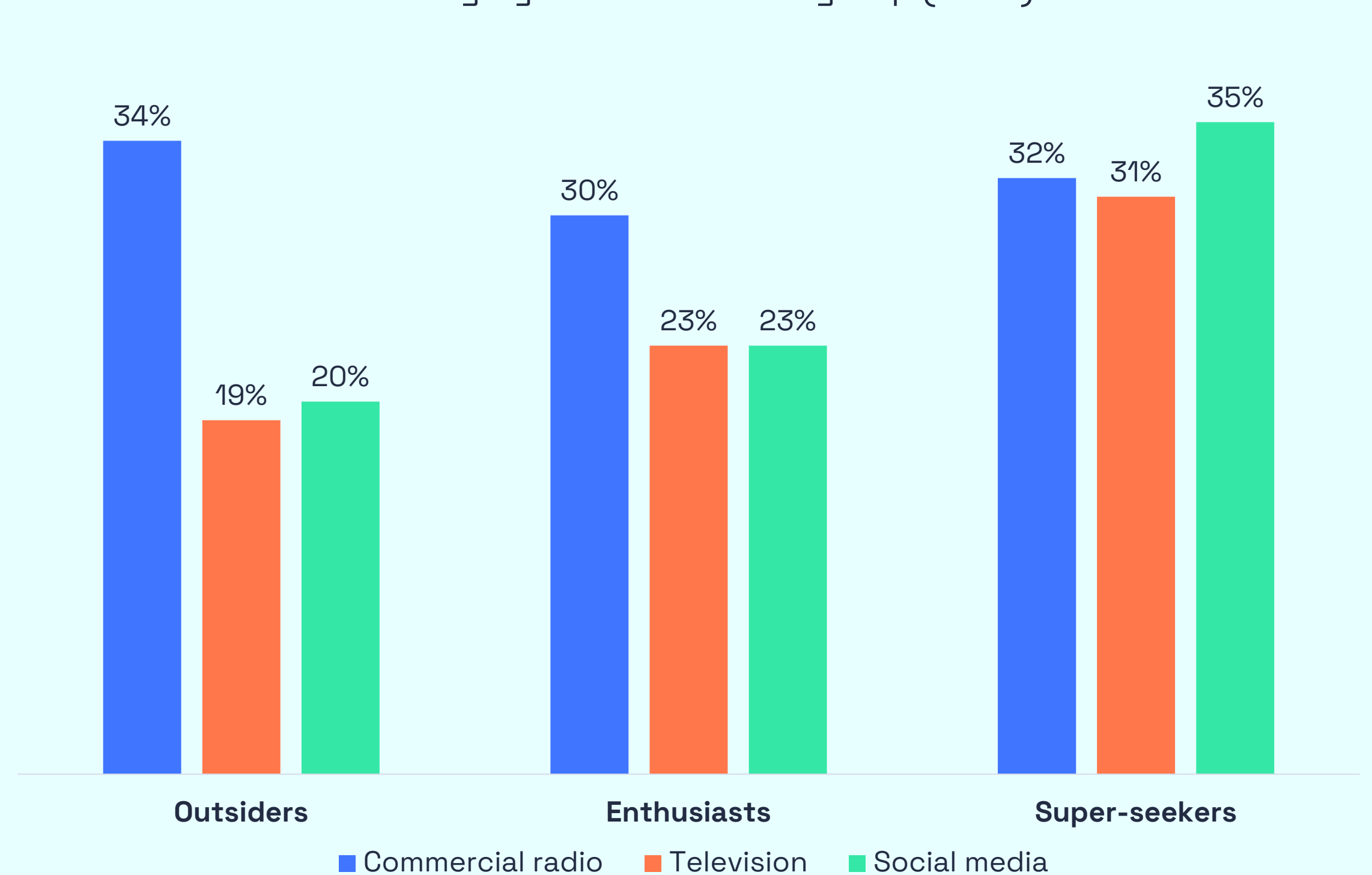
**Outsiders:** like to stay informed, but do not usually go out of their way to stay up-to-date. They will listen to or watch when news comes on the radio / TV, but do not usually seek it out (c.13.8m of commercial radio listeners in the UK)

# Outsiders rely on **commercial radio** for news more than other groups

Outsiders top three sources for providing national news updates in the morning (2020 vs 2024)

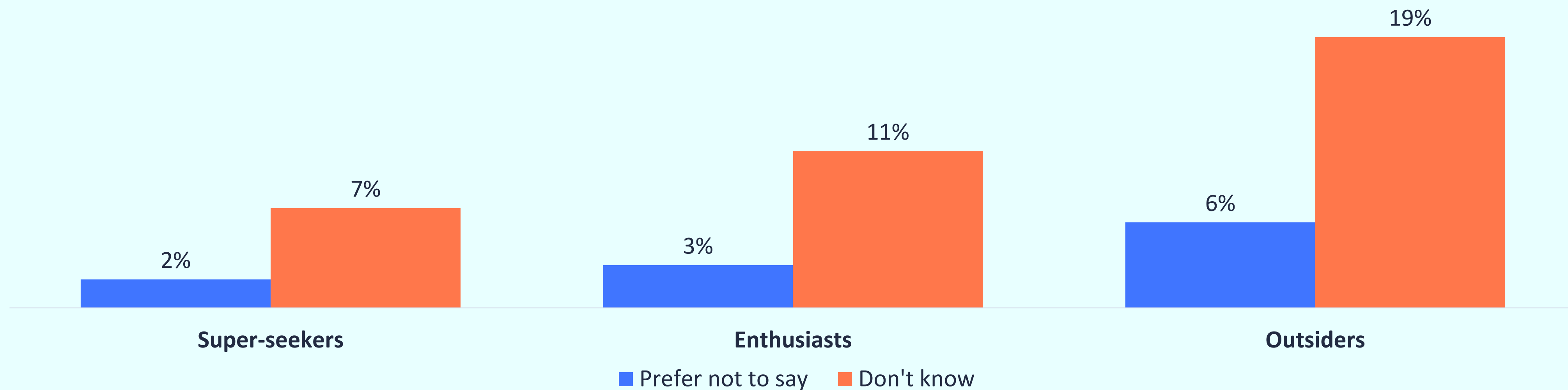


Top three news sources for providing local news updates in the morning by news consumer group (2024)



# Commercial radio is uniquely placed to connect with Outsiders – an important group of potential swing voters

Voting intention in 2024 general election



# Key takeaways

- 1. Enduring impact, particularly during elections** – commercial radio is an essential part of listeners' daily news consumption. During an election it is considered to be the best form of audio news for a quick summary of events and regular updates throughout the day.
- 2. Cutting through the noise** – audiences hear news on commercial radio and take actions. It encourages discussion and debate and spurs people to search for more information.
- 3. Connecting with audiences beyond the bubble** – commercial radio is uniquely placed to reach audiences beyond the bubble, who are less engaged in political news but make up an important group of potential swing voters.

# Notes on the research

This general election snapshot report is based on an online survey conducted in Q1 2024 by Differentology, a leading market research company, of a nationally representative UK sample of 3,037 regular commercial radio listeners.

Some data is not comparable to earlier Radiocentre research as a number of questions differ from previous years.

A full report based on this survey is due to be published after the summer and will explore in more depth how listeners value commercial radio news, including how news consumption habits have changed since *Beyond the Bubble* in 2020, as well as covering new elements such as podcasts and the role of AI in audio news.

For more information on this research please contact Will Thomson, Senior Policy Manager at [will.thomson@radiocentre.org](mailto:will.thomson@radiocentre.org).

Find out more about Radiocentre policy and research at [www.radiocentre.org/policy](http://www.radiocentre.org/policy)