

# Free speech debate targets big media

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Illustration: Megan Robinson/Axios

America's free speech frustration has pivoted from tech companies to media publishers, according to this year's [Axios Harris Poll 100](#).

**Why it matters:** It's a [sign of growing hostility](#) toward publishers, with little recourse for people who think they don't do enough to guard against bias or misinformation.

- The lines between publishers, like The Washington Post, and platforms like Twitter where their stories might appear are becoming increasingly blurred — making it harder to be sure exactly who the public is blaming when they don't like the content.
- Tech firms are protected by internet laws that shield them from liability for what users post. But there's [bipartisan momentum](#) around changing those rules.
- The Axios Harris Poll 100 is an annual survey to gauge the reputations of the most visible brands in the country.

**Details:** A majority of Americans (57%) say publishers are responsible for content that goes against their personal values, not platforms.

- Only 43% said platforms were more responsible.
- While most Americans (58%) say technology companies are promoting free speech rather than hurting it, a major political divide persists.
- An overwhelming majority of Democrats (72%) say tech companies

promote free speech vs. only (41%) of Republicans.

**Yes, but:** The gap between the two parties in terms of trust in mass media reached [an all-time](#) high during the Trump administration, which could impact how they approach the free speech debate.

- When asked who is responsible when content is published on a media platform that goes against their personal values, Democrats are evenly split (49% platform vs. 51% publisher), compared to Republicans (59% publisher vs 41% platform).

**Between the lines:** In the wake of the 2020 election, skepticism of mainstream media has intensified on the right, while frustration with coverage from Fox News has intensified on the left.

- Last year, Democratic lawmakers [held a hearing](#) about the role of cable and broadcast companies in disseminating disinformation and extremist content.
- A Pew Research Center [poll](#) from July found that Republicans are less likely to trust a media source if it's viewed as "mainstream."

**The big picture:** Tech firms are still some of the worst-performing companies in the Axios Harris 100 poll.

- Meta/Facebook ranked 97th of 100 brands on the poll, followed by Twitter, which ranked 98th. TikTok ranked 94th.

**Go deeper:**

- [Friendly brands poisoned by politics](#)
- [Full results and methodology](#)