

October 18, 2007

Public Opposed to Media Consolidation

To: Interested Parties

From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner

A recent poll finds that Americans broadly support limits on cross-ownership of media outlets and view the trend toward ownership consolidation with concern. Moreover, support for ownership limits and alarm over consolidation are shared by large swaths of the public, cutting across racial, generational, and political divides. These outcomes are underscored by the public's preference for local news coverage and their perception of bias in the news, as both local coverage and impartiality of news content are threatened by the consolidation of news outlets into big national and multi-national media corporations.

The Media and Democracy Coalition commissioned this survey to explore how Americans view the news and media ownership. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner designed and administered the random digit dial telephone survey, conducted by professional interviewers. The survey fielded August 26-September 3, 2007 and reached a nationally-representative sample of 1000 adults over the age of 18 with oversamples of 200 African Americans and 200 Hispanic respondents. Hispanic respondents were given the option of completing a Spanish-language translation of the survey, administered by bilingual interviewers. The data were weighted by gender, age, race, education and region to ensure an accurate reflection of the population. The sample size with these weights applied is 1000 and carries a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percent.

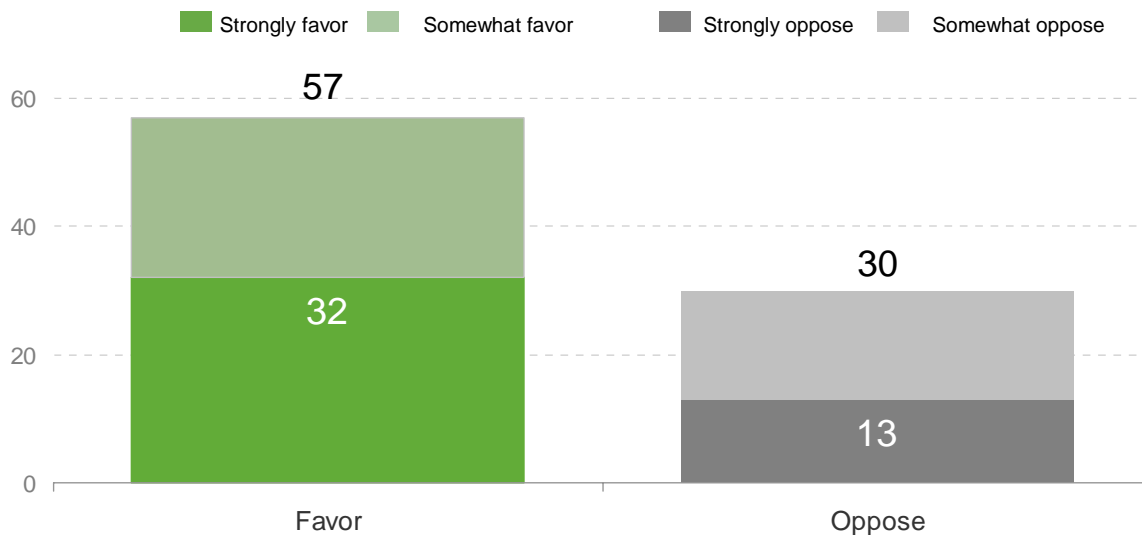
Key Findings

Cross-ownership bans. Recently, the FCC floated a plan to relax the decades-old media ownership rules, including repealing a rule that forbids a company to own both a newspaper and a television or radio station in the same city.¹ Americans oppose this change. By a considerable margin, Americans favor laws that prohibit cross-ownership of different media outlets in one region. By a margin of 57 percent to 30 percent, the public favors laws that make it illegal for a corporation to own both a newspaper and a television station in the same city or media market.

¹ Labaton, Stephen. "Plan Would Ease Limits on Media Owners." *The New York Times*, October 18, 2007.

Support for the cross-ownership prohibition extends across political and demographic boundaries. Similar levels of support exist among political liberals (59 percent favor), moderates (58 percent favor), and conservatives (56 percent favor). Furthermore, party affiliation has little effect on support for the cross-ownership ban; Democrats (63 percent favor), independents (52 percent favor), and Republicans (53 percent favor) all report comparable levels of support for laws against cross-ownership. Likewise, we find support among both older and younger Americans (58 and 55 percent, respectively), white Americans and people of color (59 and 50 percent), and union and non-union households (59 and 56 percent).

Figure 1: Support for laws preventing cross-ownership of local media outlets (percent responding)

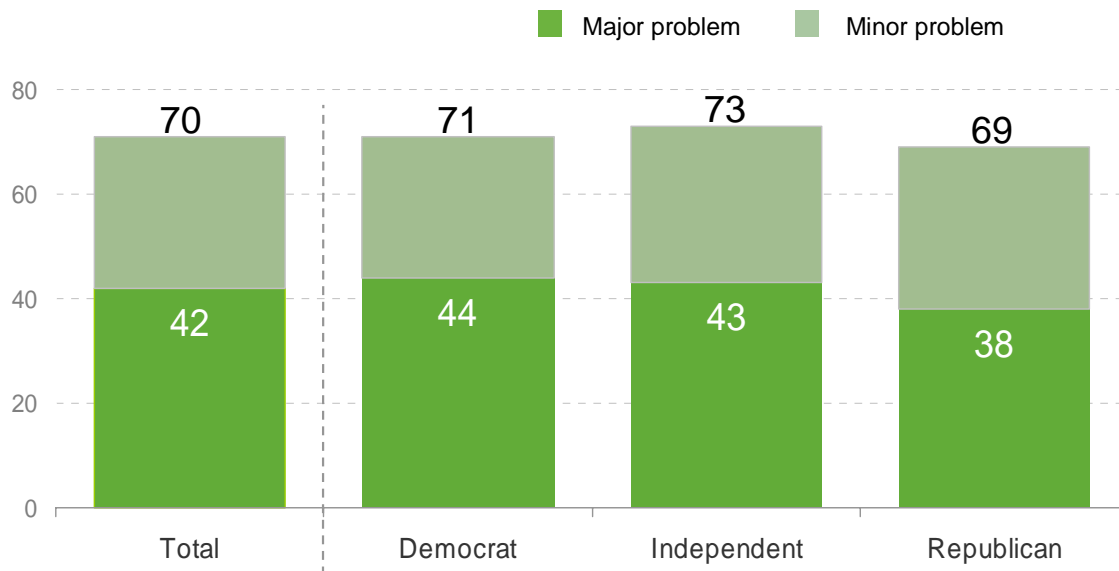


Currently it is illegal for one corporation to own a newspaper and a television station in the same city or media market. Generally speaking, do you favor or oppose this law?

Ownership consolidation. Americans also express concern about the trend toward increased ownership consolidation. When read a brief description defining media ownership consolidation as a few large corporations buying many of the newspapers, radio stations and television stations, 70 percent describe consolidation as a problem and 42 percent of Americans describe it as a major problem.

Similar to support for the cross-ownership ban, concern about consolidation is broad. Democrats, independents and Republicans all consider ownership consolidation to be a problem in nearly equal proportions; seventy-one percent of Democrats, 73 percent of independents and 69 percent of Republicans believe increasing ownership consolidation is a major or minor problem (44 percent, 43 percent and 38 percent major problem, respectively).

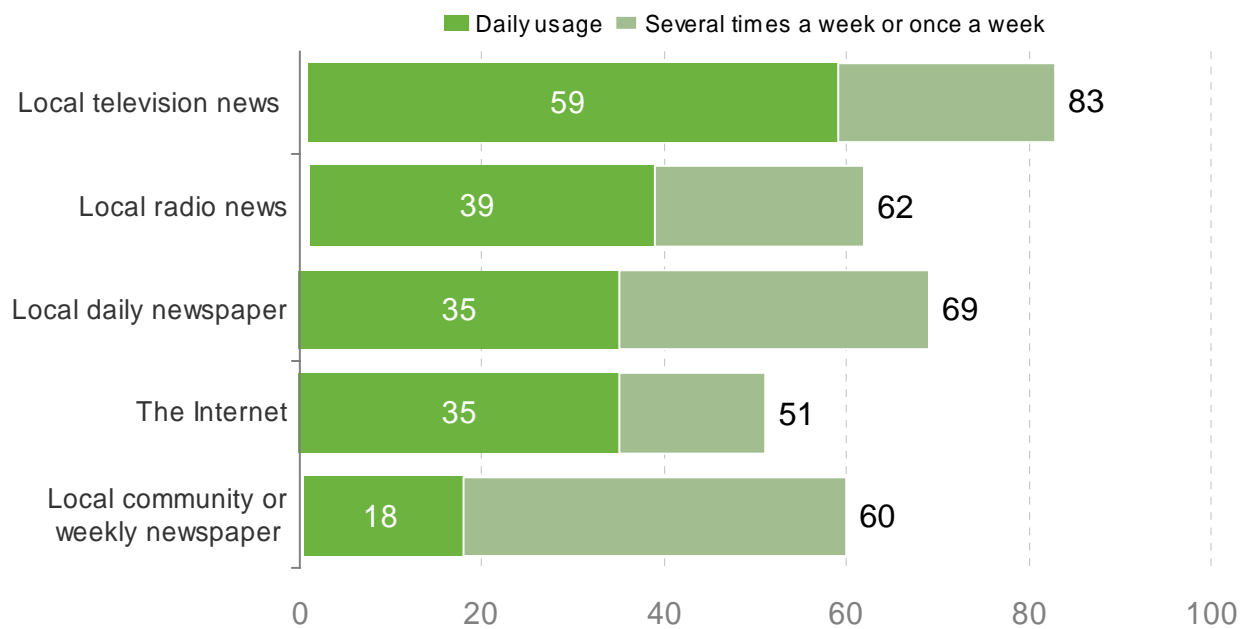
■ **Figure 2:** Concern about continuing ownership consolidation (percent responding “major/minor problem”)



As you may know, in recent years, because of rules changes, a small number of big corporations have bought up many of the newspapers, radio stations and television stations in this country. Generally speaking, do you believe this is a major problem, a minor problem, not much of a problem, or no problem at all?

News consumption. The concern about ownership consolidation and cross-ownership of local news outlets is further informed by the public’s preference for local news sources which are threatened by the concentration of ownership by a few, very large multi-national conglomerates. Even for national news, Americans report that they are more likely to watch local television news on a daily basis (61 percent daily) than national television news broadcasts (44 percent daily) or cable television news (37 percent daily). Newspapers share a similar dynamic: thirty-five percent of the public say they read their local daily newspaper every day compared to 5 percent who read a national newspaper on a daily basis. When it comes to local news, the same patterns emerge, with television dominating followed by local radio news, daily newspapers and the Internet.

■ **Figure 3:** Sources of local news (percent responding)

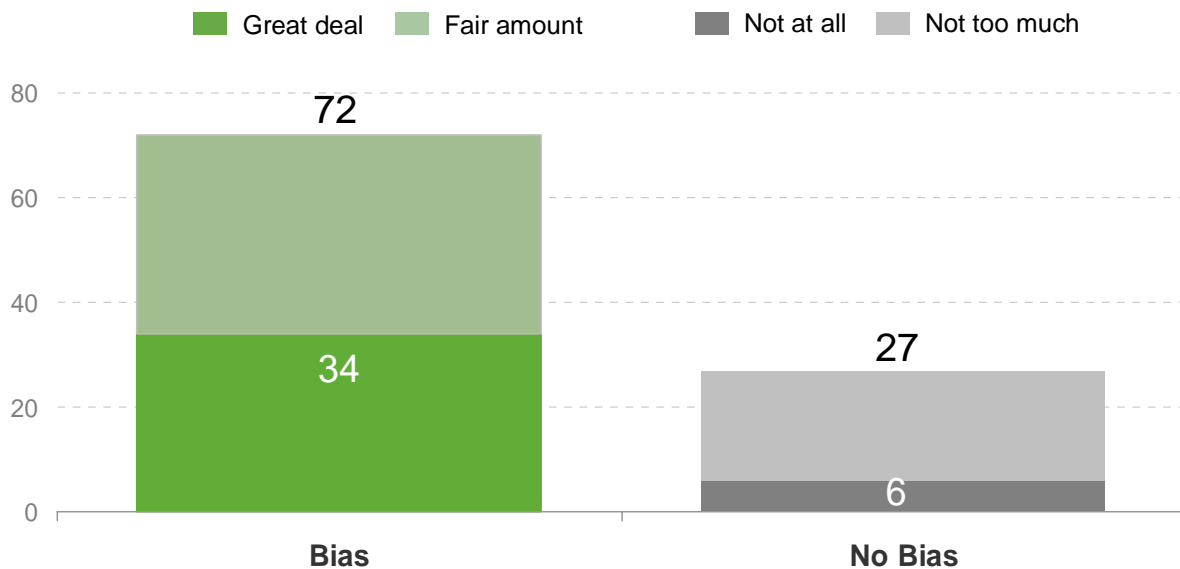


I'd like to ask more about how you get information about local issues, such as what is happening in your local government or in your local schools. I am going to read you several sources of local news and information, and I'd like you to tell me how often you use each source of local news. For each one I read, please tell me if you use this source every day or several times a day, several times a week, once a week, once or twice a month or almost never.

If local news sources are a preferred outlet, local news coverage also represents favored content. Of qualities tested on an eleven-point scale (0 meaning not very important, 10 meaning very important), “thorough coverage of local news” ranks second among characteristics associated with quality news. Only “availability of thorough, accurate information” ranks higher.

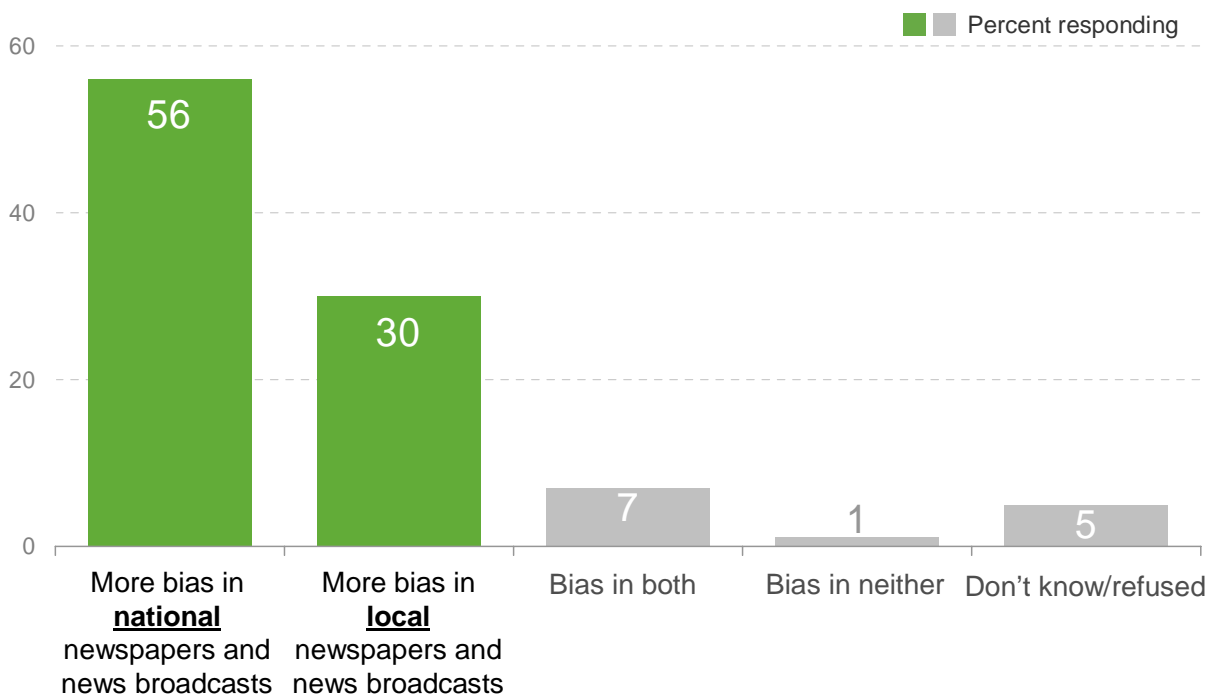
Bias in the news. The consolidation of ownership also threatens to introduce more bias into broadcasts that the public already views as tainted by partiality. One third of Americans (34 percent) already believe there is a “great deal” of bias in the news coverage they watch, and nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of the public consider there to be a “great deal” or a “fair amount of bias.” Revealingly, by a 56 to 30 percent margin, the public believes there is more bias in “national newspapers and broadcasts” than in “local newspapers and news broadcast.” Consolidation of ownership threatens the autonomy of the local outlets that the public prefers and relies on and eliminates the diversity of voices in the news media that prevents imbalance in news coverage.

Figure 4: Bias in news coverage (percent responding)



To what extent do you see bias in the news coverage you typically read, see or hear – a great deal, a fair amount, not too much, or not at all?

Figure 5: Bias in national and local news coverage (percent responding)



Generally speaking, do you think there is more bias in local newspapers and local news broadcasts or more bias in national newspapers and national news broadcasts?

Conclusion

Media consolidation jeopardizes Americans' ability to get thorough, accurate and unbiased news coverage from the local news sources they prefer. In light of this risk, the public is strongly supportive of cross-ownership prohibitions and exhibits alarm about continuing consolidation. When faced with this threat to their preferred local sources for news and the loss of true choices in their news sources, Americans champion the protections that ensure a diversity of voices in media.