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FACT SHEET | JUNE 29, 2021



## Newspapers Fact Sheet

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Newspapers are a critical part of the American news landscape, but they have been hit hard as more and more Americans consume news digitally. The industry’s financial fortunes and subscriber base have been in decline since the mid-2000s, but their website audience traffic has again begun to grow. Explore the patterns and longitudinal data about U.S. newspapers below.

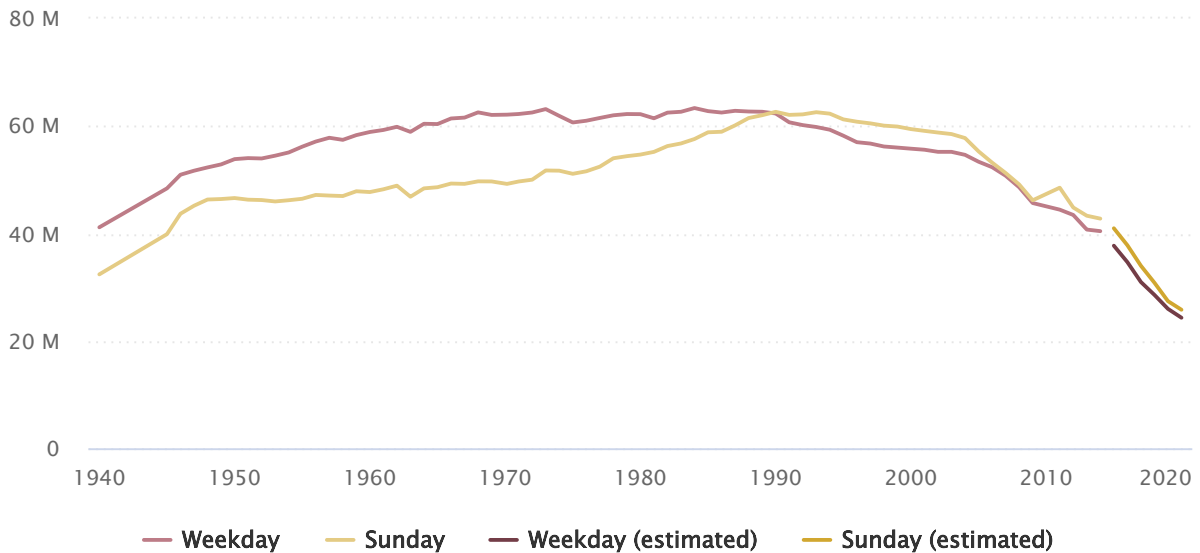


## Audience

The estimated total U.S. daily newspaper circulation (print and digital combined) in 2020 was 24.3 million for weekday and 25.8 million for Sunday, each down 6% from the previous year – though with some caveats, as detailed below and in a new [Decoded post](#).

### Total estimated circulation of U.S. daily newspapers

Total circulation of U.S. daily newspapers



Note: To determine totals for 2015 onward, researchers analyzed the year-over-year change in total weekday and Sunday circulation using AAM data and applied these percent changes to the previous year's total. Only those daily U.S. newspapers that report to AAM are included. Affiliated publications are not included in the analysis. Weekday circulation only includes those publications reporting a Monday-Friday average. Comparisons are either between the three-month averages for the period ending Dec. 31 of the given year and the same period of the previous year (2015-2019) or between the six-month period ending Sept. 30 and the three-month period ending Sept. 30 of the previous year (2020).

Source: Editor & Publisher (through 2014); estimate based on Pew Research Center analysis of Alliance for Audited Media data (2015-2020).

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(Note that the Alliance for Audited Media (AAM), the source of this circulation data and the group that audits the circulation figures of many of the largest North American newspapers and other publications, changed their reporting period in 2020 from a three-month period to a six-month period. As such, in 2020, the comparison is between average circulation for the three months ending September 2019 and the six months ending September 2020. Additional details about how the circulation estimate is calculated can be found in the [methodological note](#) below.)

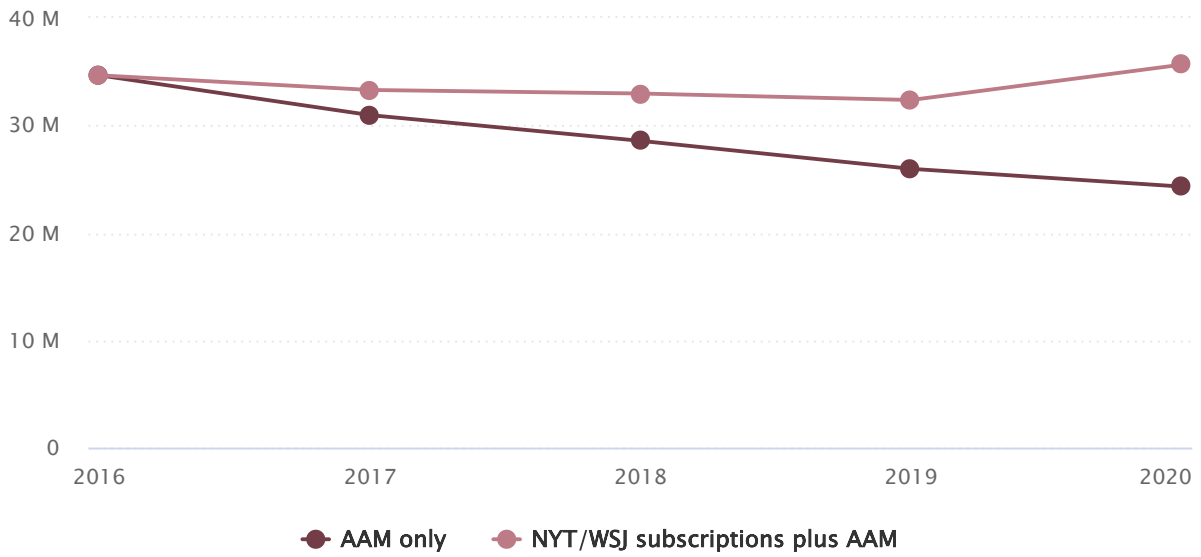
Within this total circulation figure, weekday print circulation decreased 19% and Sunday print circulation decreased 14%.

Digital circulation is more difficult to gauge. Using only the AAM data, digital circulation in 2020 is projected to have risen sharply, with weekday up 27% and Sunday up 26%. But three of the highest-circulation daily papers in the U.S. – The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post – have in recent years not fully reported their digital circulation to AAM. The Times and the Journal provide data on digital subscriptions in publicly available reports, but since this is not the same as circulation and may not be counted under the same rules used by AAM, these independently produced figures cannot easily be merged with the AAM data. If these independently produced figures were included with the AAM data in both 2019 and 2020, weekday digital circulation would have risen even more sharply, by 38%.

Estimated newspaper circulation using two different data sources

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Total weekday circulation of U.S. daily newspapers using data from ...



Note: Researchers analyzed the year-over-year change in total weekday circulation using AAM data and applied these percent changes to the previous year's total. Only those daily U.S. newspapers that report to AAM are included. Affiliated publications are not included in the analysis. Weekday circulation only includes those publications reporting a Monday-Friday average. Comparisons are either between the three-month averages for the period ending Dec. 31 of the given year and the same period of the previous year (2016-2019) or between the six-month period ending Sept. 30 and the three-month period ending Sept. 30 of the previous year (2020).

Source: Estimate based on Pew Research Center analysis of Alliance for Audited Media data and subscription data from SEC filings and audited reports.

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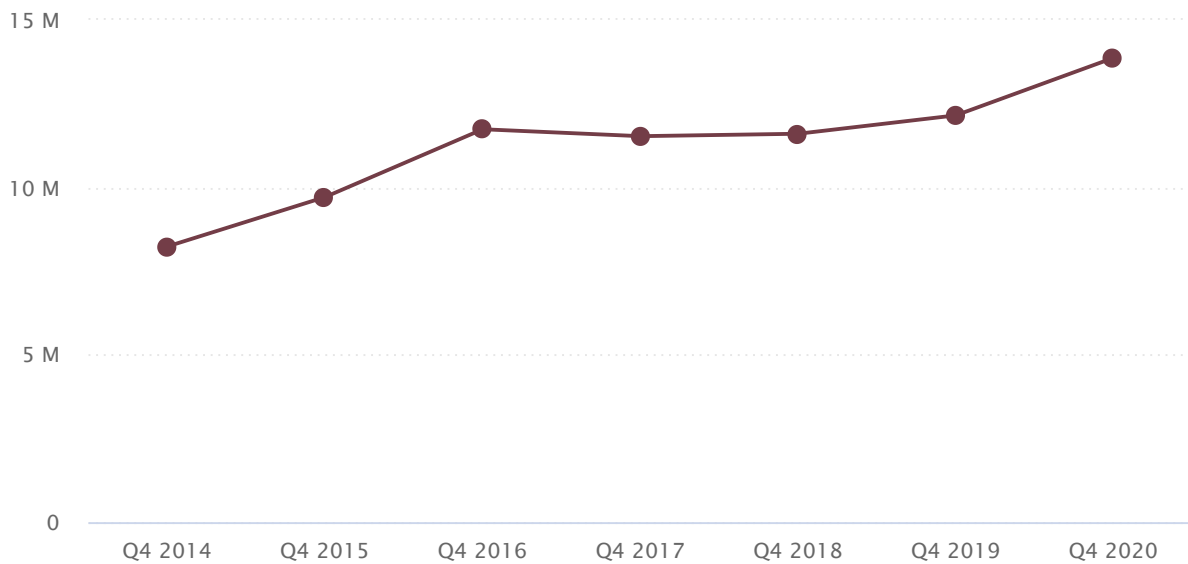
The addition of these figures would also change the overall picture for combined print and digital circulation. In previous years, including these subscription numbers with the AAM circulation data would not have changed the overall circulation picture, as total circulation would still decline. In 2020, however, including the Times' and the Journal's digital subscribers reverses the trend: Total weekday circulation would rise by 10%, not fall by 6%, as is the case when looking strictly at the AAM data. For comparison, the chart above shows estimated total weekday circulation using just the AAM data and when the digital subscriber numbers from the Times and the Journal are included over the past five years. For more details on how this affects our estimates and conclusions, see [this post](#) on our Decoded blog.

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## Unique visitors of newspaper websites

<a href="#">Chart</a>	<a href="#">Data</a>	<a href="#">Share</a>	<a href="#">Embed</a>
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### Average monthly unique visitors to the top 50 U.S. newspapers by circulation



Note: For each year, the average traffic for each website for October/November/December was calculated; the data point represents the overall average of those numbers. Analysis is of the top 49 newspapers by average Sunday circulation for Q3 2015-2020, according to Alliance for Audited Media data, with the addition of The Wall Street Journal. For each newspaper, the Comscore entity matching its homepage URL was analyzed.

Source: Comscore Media Metrix® Multi-Platform, US, Unique Visitors, October-December 2014-2020.

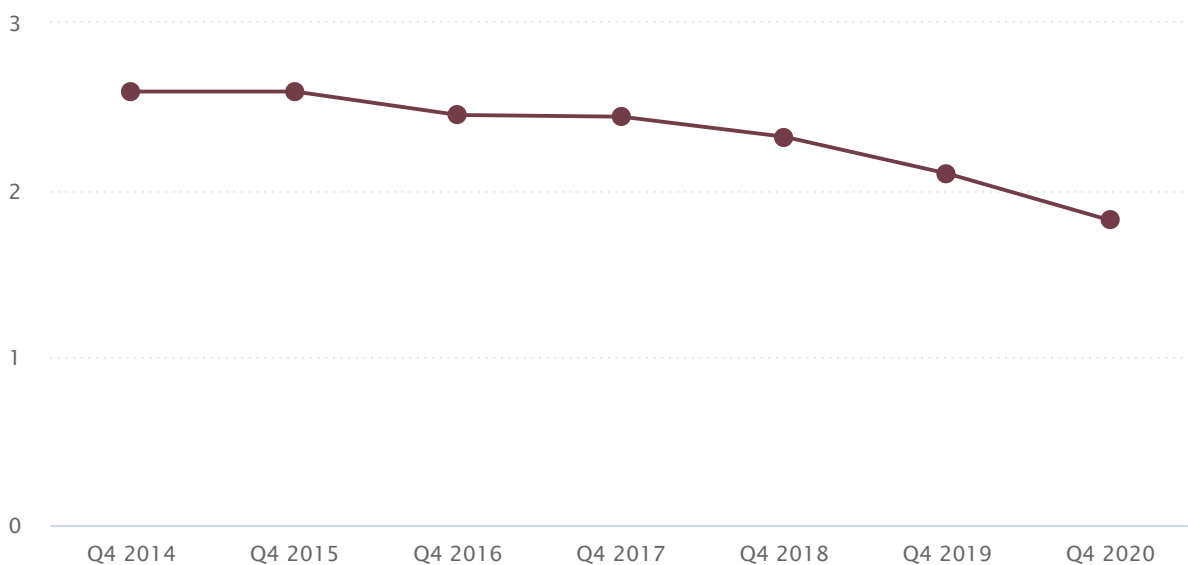
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Gauging digital audience for the entire newspaper industry is difficult since many daily newspapers do not receive enough traffic to their websites to be measured by Comscore, the data source relied on here. Thus, the figures offered above reflect the top 50 U.S. daily newspapers based on circulation. In the fourth quarter of 2020, there was an average of 13.9 million monthly unique visitors (across all devices) for these top 50 newspapers. This is up 14% from 2019, which itself was 5% higher than 2018. (The list of top 50 papers is based on Sunday circulation but includes The Wall Street Journal, which does not report Sunday circulation to AAM. It also includes The Washington Post and The New York Times, which make the top 50 even though they do not fully report their digital circulation to AAM. For more details and the full list of newspapers, see our [methodology](#).)

### Visit duration of newspaper websites

[Chart](#) [Data](#) [Share](#) [Embed](#)

### Average minutes per visit for the top 50 U.S. newspapers by circulation



Note: For each year, the average minutes per visit for each website for October/November/December was calculated; the data point represents the overall average of those numbers. Analysis is of the top 49 newspapers by average Sunday circulation for Q3 2015-2020, according to Alliance for Audited Media data, with the addition of The Wall Street Journal. For each newspaper, the Comscore entity matching its homepage URL was analyzed.

Source: Comscore Media Metrix® Multi-Platform, US, Average Minutes Per Visit, October-December 2014-2020.

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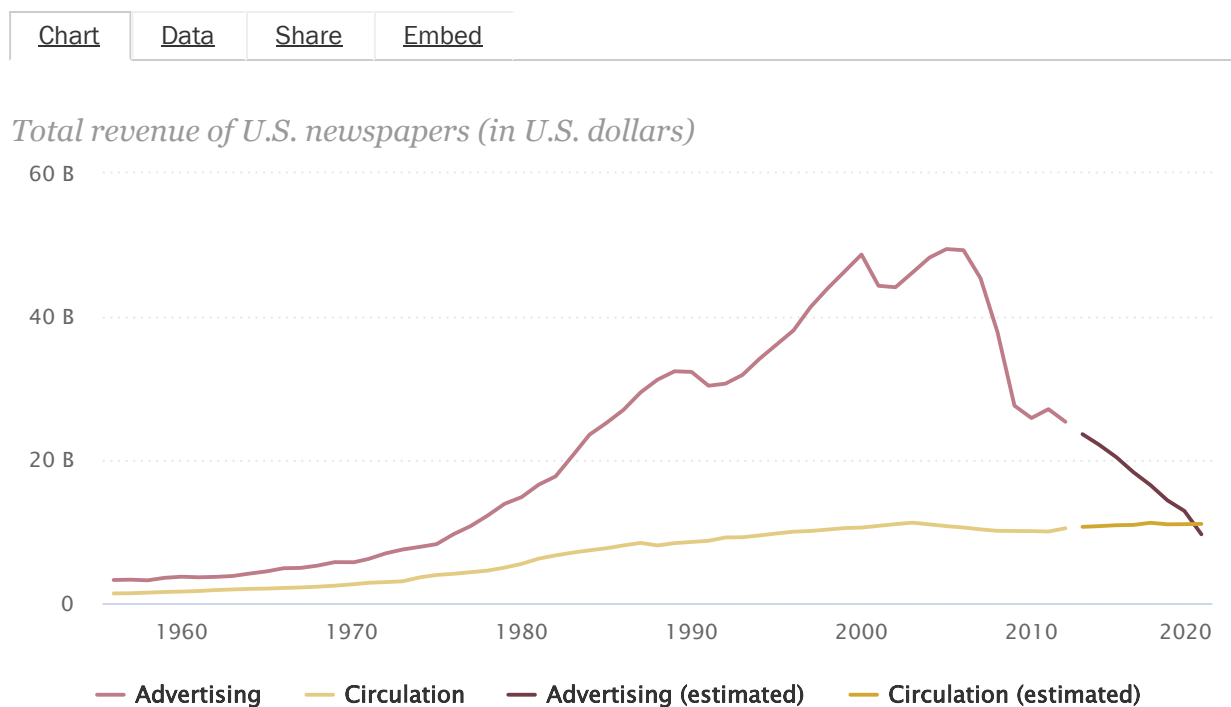
Average minutes per visit for the top 50 U.S. daily newspapers, based on circulation, is a little less than two minutes in Q4 2020. This is down about 45 seconds from when we first began tracking this in Q4 2014.



## Economics

The total estimated advertising revenue for the newspaper industry in 2020 was \$9.6 billion, based on the Center’s analysis of financial statements for publicly traded newspaper companies. This is down 25% from 2019. Total estimated circulation revenue was \$11.1 billion, compared with \$11.0 billion in 2019. This is the first year in our data that circulation revenue has been higher than advertising revenue.

### Estimated advertising and circulation revenue of the newspaper industry



Source: News Media Alliance, formerly Newspaper Association of America (through 2012); Pew Research Center analysis of year-end SEC filings of publicly traded newspaper companies (2013-2020).

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**CORRECTION:** (Feb. 17, 2022): The following sentences were updated to reflect the correct total estimated advertising revenue for the newspaper industry in 2020 and the percent change from 2019: “The total estimated advertising revenue for the newspaper industry in 2020 was \$9.6 billion, based on the Center’s analysis of financial statements for publicly traded newspaper companies. This is down 25% from 2019.”

In the chart, “Estimated advertising and circulation revenue of the newspaper industry,” the 2019 and 2020 advertising and circulation revenue numbers have also been updated to reflect these changes.

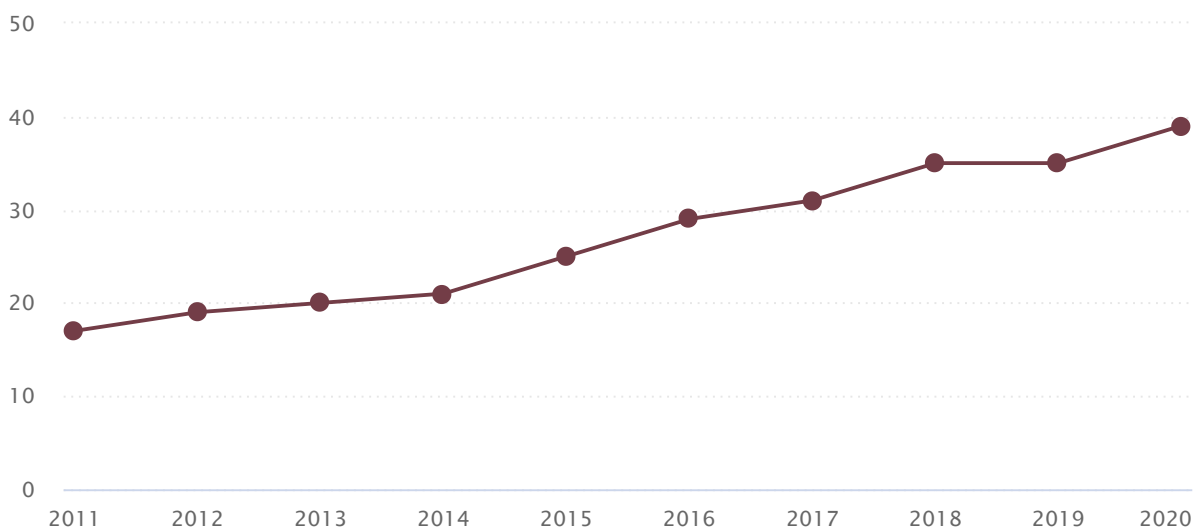
These changes did not affect the report’s overall findings.

In the chart above, data through 2012 comes from the trade group formerly known as the Newspaper Association of America (NAA), now known as the News Media Alliance (NMA). Data from 2013 onward is based on the Center’s analysis of financial statements from publicly traded U.S. newspaper companies, which in 2020 numbered five and accounted for more than 300 U.S. daily newspapers, from large national papers to midsize metro dailies and local papers. From 2013 onward, the year-over-year percentage change in advertising and circulation revenue for these companies is calculated and then applied to the previous year’s revenue totals as reported by the NMA/NAA. In testing this method, changes from 2006 through 2012 generally matched those as reported by the NMA/NAA; for more details, see our [2016 report](#).

## Share of newspaper advertising revenue coming from digital advertising

<a href="#">Chart</a>	<a href="#">Data</a>	<a href="#">Share</a>	<a href="#">Embed</a>
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Percent of newspaper companies’ advertising revenue coming from digital advertising



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of year-end SEC filings for publicly traded newspaper companies that break out digital advertising revenue for each year.

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Digital advertising accounted for 39% of newspaper advertising revenue in 2020, based on this analysis of publicly traded newspaper companies. The portion stood at 35% in 2019 – but at 17% in 2011, the first year it was possible to perform this analysis.



## Newsroom investment

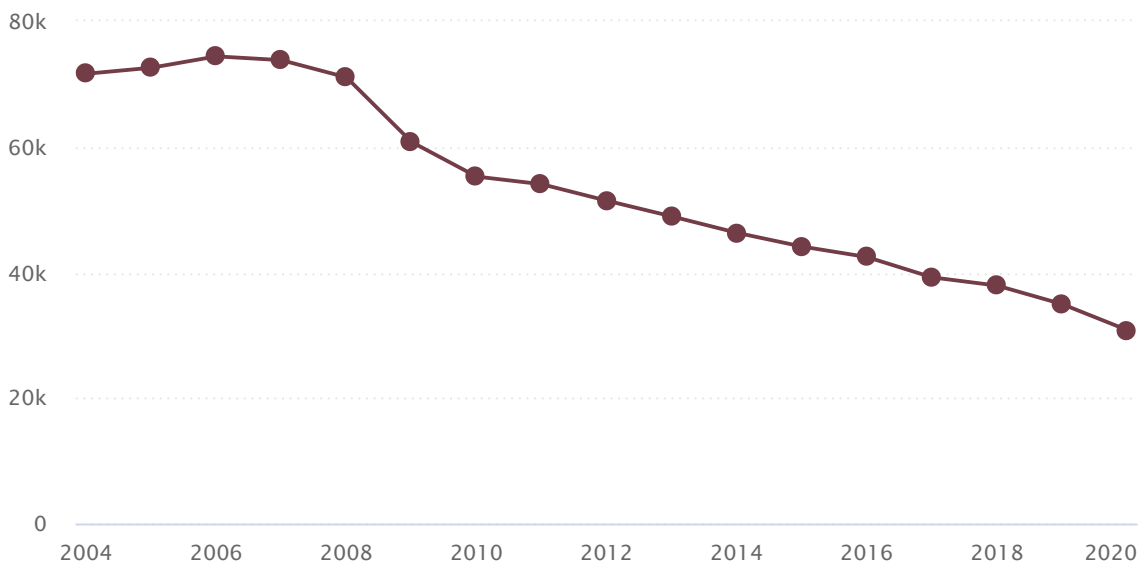
According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, 30,820 people worked as reporters, editors, photographers, or film and video editors and operators in the newspaper industry in 2020. That is down 12% from 2019 and 57% from 2004. Median wages for editors in 2020 were about \$50,000, while for reporters, the figure was about \$36,000.

## Employment in newspaper newsrooms

Employees      Wages

[Chart](#)   [Data](#)   [Share](#)   [Embed](#)

*Total number of newsroom employees in the newspaper sector*



Note: The OEWS survey is designed to produce estimates by combining data collected over a three-year period. Newsroom employees include news analysts, reporters and journalists; editors; photographers; and television, video, and film camera operators and editors.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics data.

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## Methodological note

In this fact sheet, circulation data through 2014 is from Editor & Publisher, which was published on the website of the News Media Alliance (NMA), known at the time as the Newspaper Association of America (NAA). Since then, the NMA no longer supplies this data, so the Center determined the year-over-year change in total circulation for those daily U.S. newspapers that report to the Alliance for Audited Media and meet certain criteria. This percentage change was then applied to the total circulation from the prior year – thus the use of the term “estimated total circulation.” This technique is also used to create the revenue estimates, using the financial statements of publicly traded newspaper companies as the data source.



**Find out more**

This fact sheet was compiled by Senior Researcher [Michael Barthel](#) and Research Assistant [Kirsten Worden](#).


Read the [methodology](#).

Pew Research Center is a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, its primary funder. This is the latest report in Pew Research Center's ongoing investigation of the state of news, information and journalism in the digital age, a research program funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, with generous support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Find more in-depth explorations of U.S. newspapers by following the links below:

- [A third of large U.S. newspapers experienced layoffs in 2020, more than in 2019](#), May 21, 2021
- [More than eight-in-ten Americans get news from digital devices](#), Jan. 12, 2021
- [Coronavirus-Driven Downturn Hits Newspapers Hard as TV News Thrives](#), Oct. 29, 2020
- [Nearly 2,800 newspaper companies received paycheck protection loans, and most were under \\$150K](#), Oct. 29, 2020
- [U.S. newspapers have shed half of their newsroom employees since 2008](#), April 20, 2020
- [Americans' main sources for political news vary by party and age](#), April 1, 2020
- [Black and white Democrats differ in their media diets, assessments of primaries](#), March 11, 2020
- [Fast facts about the newspaper industry's financial struggles as McClatchy files for bankruptcy](#), Feb. 14, 2020
- [U.S. Media Polarization and the 2020 Election: A Nation Divided](#), Jan. 24, 2020
- [For Local News, Americans Embrace Digital but Still Want Strong Community Connection](#), March 26, 2019
- [What are the local news dynamics in your city?](#), March 26, 2019

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