

Media Habits of Congressional Staff in the Digital Age

Insights from Washington in the Information Age 2017

May 9, 2018

Presenter

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Challenges / Observed Dynamics in Advocacy Today

Changing dynamics in advocacy create new challenges for those producing content for and communicating with a policy audience



1. Low tenure on Capitol Hill



2. Lack of regular order / compressed decision-making



3. Increased party polarization



4. Digital natives as points of origin for content



5. Reduced opportunities for personal touch



6. Empowered and impatient / tech-driven self-service approach to intel



7. Reduction in congressional resources (CRS, GAO, CBO)



8. More crowded advocacy market / messaging

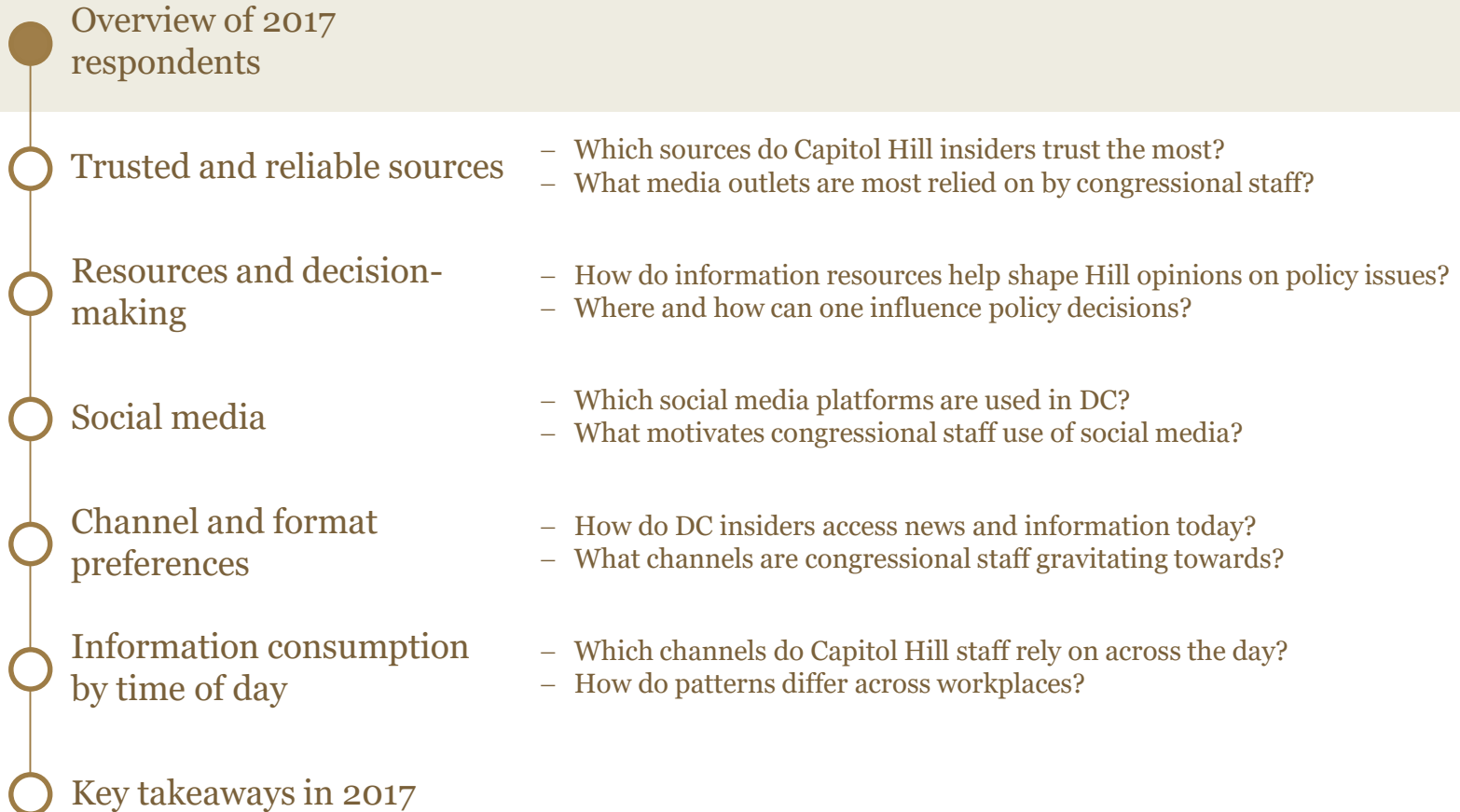


9. Faster, bigger news cycles, shifting trust in media

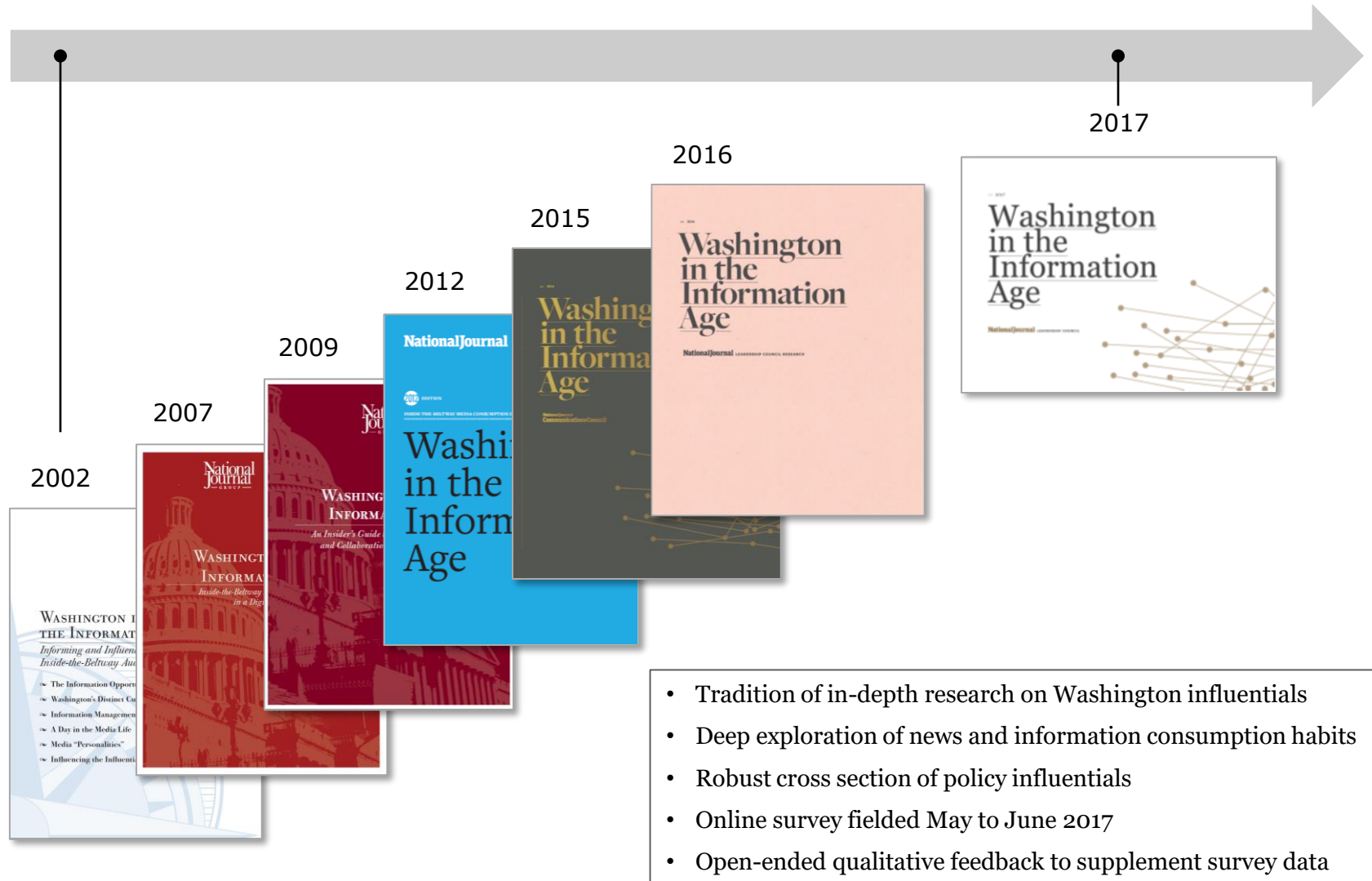


10. Expanding choice in what, when, how we consume content

Roadmap for today's discussion



Changing behaviors, changing landscape

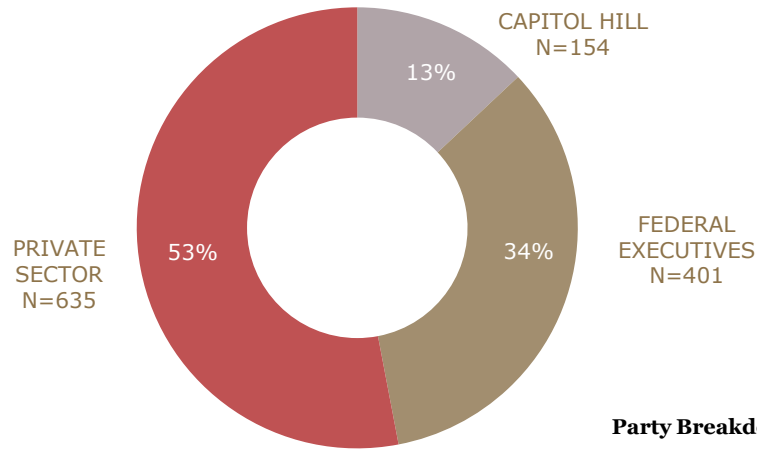


A snapshot of Washington insiders

2017 respondents consistent with earlier WIA data

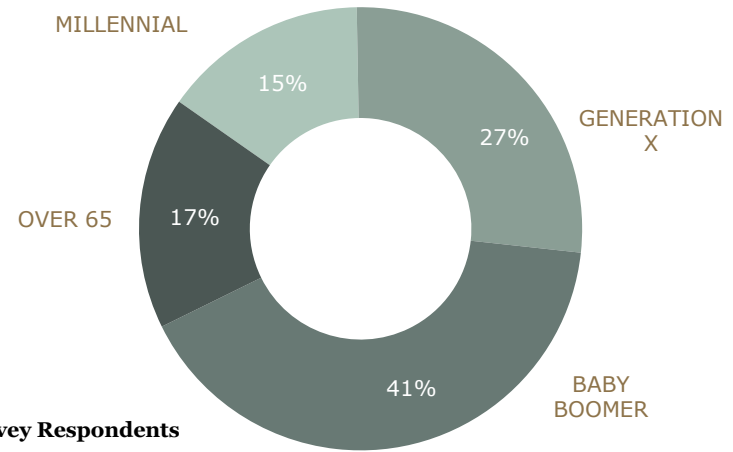
Composition of Survey Respondents

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS, N=1,190

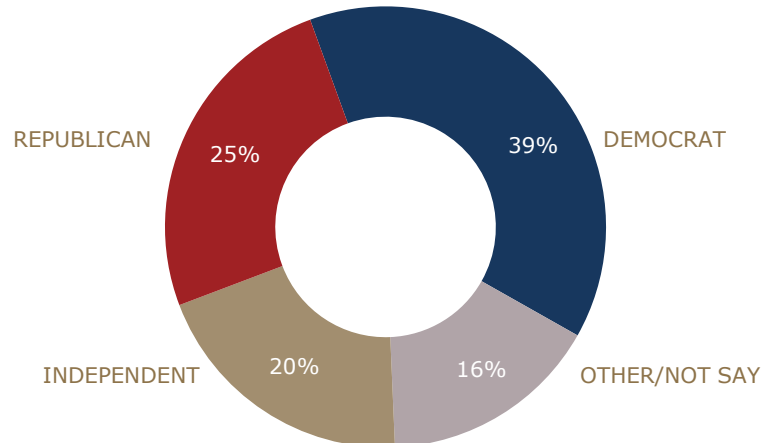


Generational Breakdown of Survey Respondents

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS



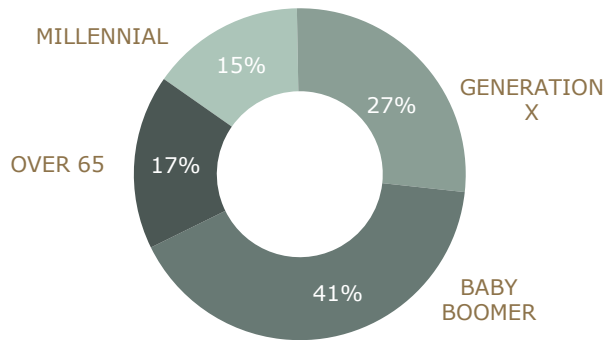
Party Breakdown of Survey Respondents



In focus: Capitol Hill

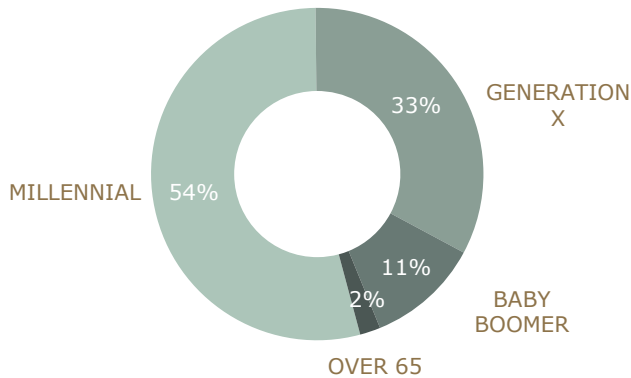
Generational Breakdown of *All* Respondents

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS, N = 1,190



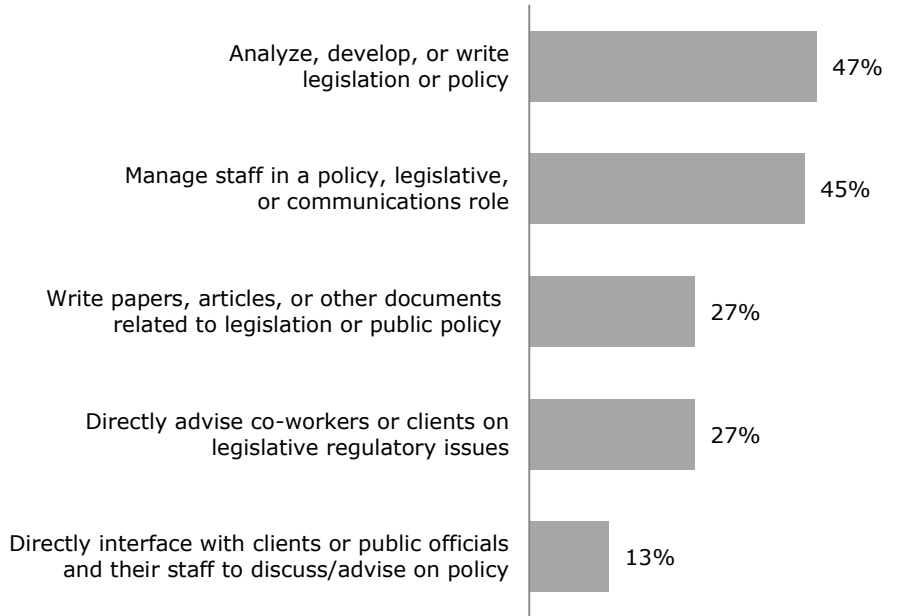
Generational Breakdown of *Capitol Hill* Respondents *Only*

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS, N = 154



Top 5 Policy-Related Functions

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS



REPRESENTATIVE JOB TITLES

- Chief of Staff
- Chief Counsel or Counsel
- Communications Director
- Legislative Director
- Senior Policy Advisor
- Press Secretary
- Legislative Assistant
- Professional Staff Member
- Digital Director

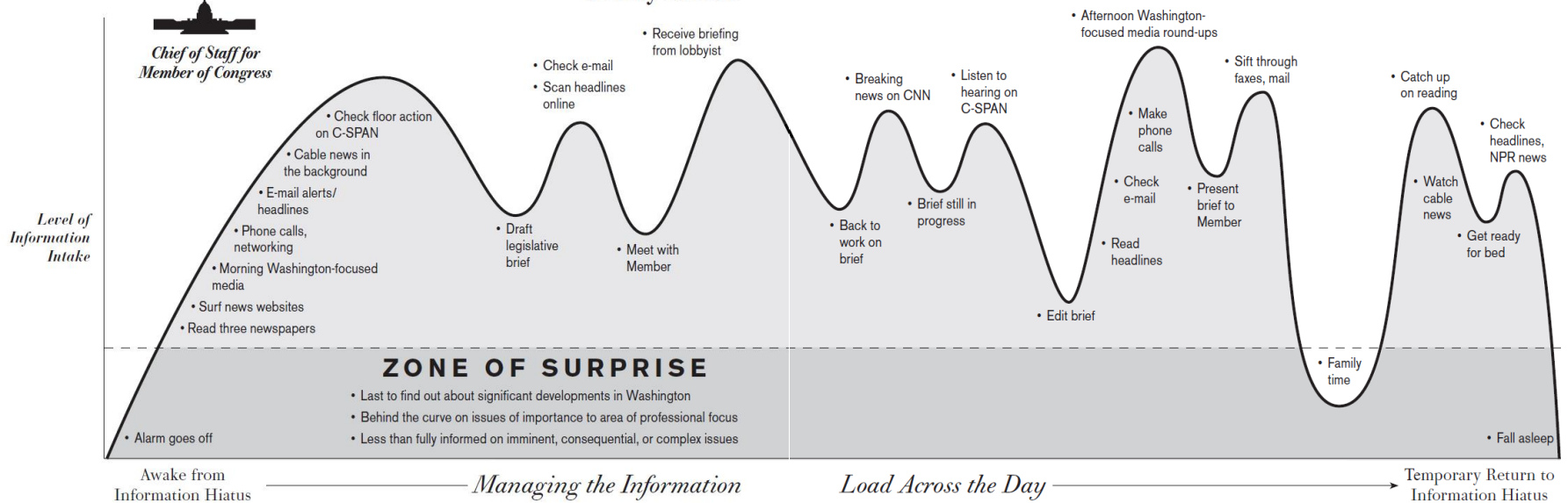
The view in 2002...

LEVERAGING THE INFORMATION

LOAD TO DO THEIR JOBS

A Day in the

Information Life



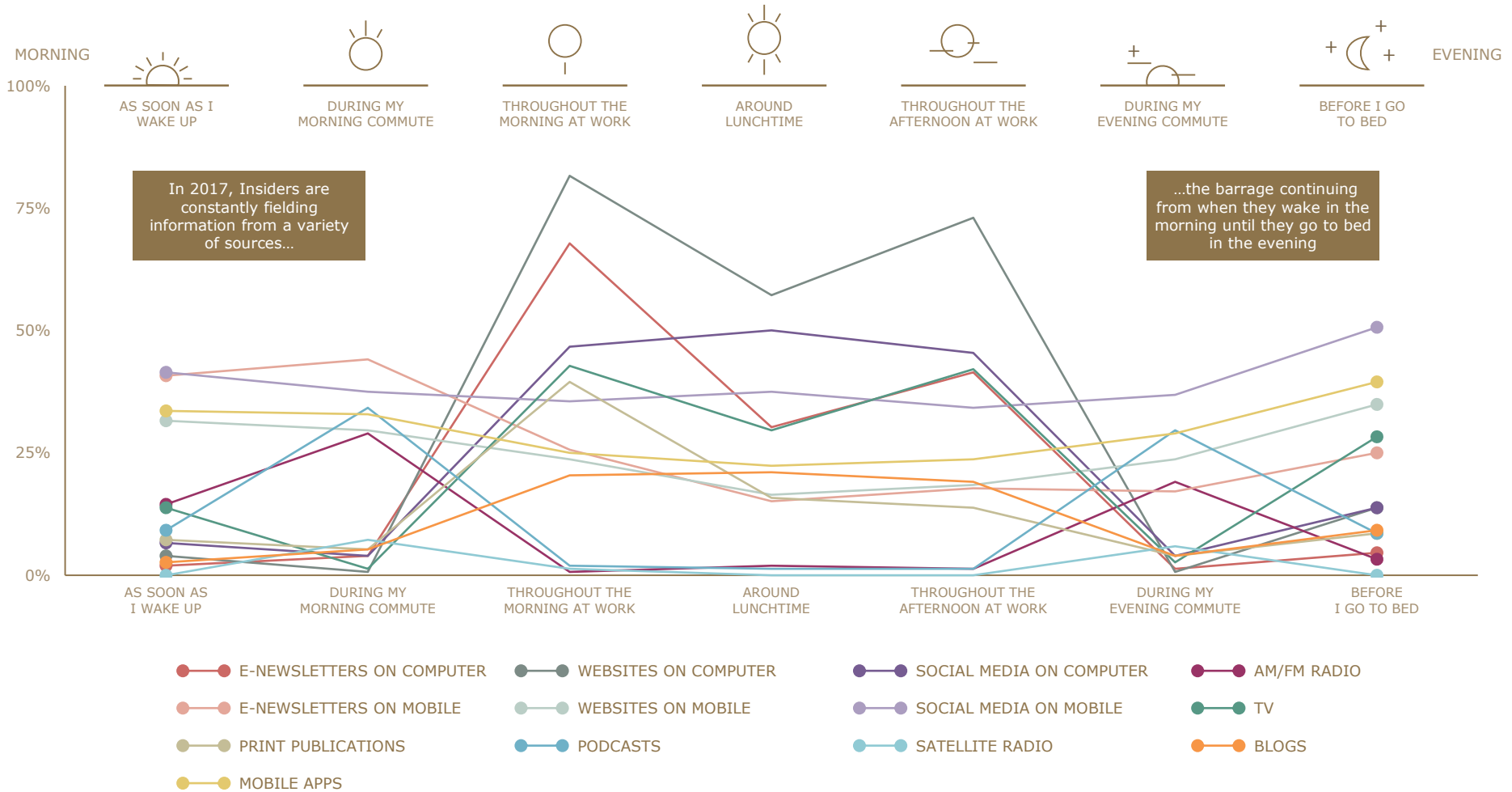
“I don’t know that I feel overloaded. You fall into a habit of knowing where to look for the information you need and knowing what not to bother with... I don’t personally feel barraged or deluged. There’s a lot out there, but I feel like I get through it.”

Capitol Hill Insider, 2002

A Day in the Life of a Capitol Hill Insider in 2017

Channels used for Washington news and information throughout the weekday

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS BY CHANNEL



Roadmap for today's discussion

○ Overview of 2017 respondents

● **Trusted and reliable sources** – Which sources do Capitol Hill insiders trust the most?
– What media outlets are most relied on by congressional staff?

○ Resources and decision-making

○ Social media

○ Channel and format preferences

○ Information consumption by time of day

○ Key takeaways in 2017

You can assume that **congressional staff won't get duped by “fake news,”** so for us it's more about wading through talking points and getting data and facts—on whoever's “side” those may come down.

Capitol Hill, Republican

The old axiom of **trust but verify has become even more important.**

Capitol Hill, Republican

No one source provides an accurate picture. **Multiple sources with corroboration** must be used to **filter agenda-driven reporting.**

Capitol Hill, Independent

Hill staff **know the talking points** and **watch the news all day, we have resources to fact-check a story.** The average person may not have the time or the resources to do the same.

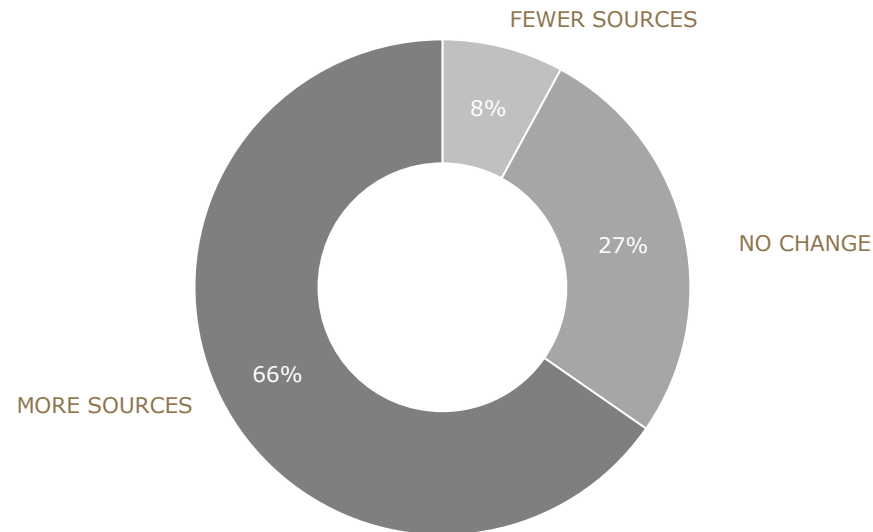
Capitol Hill, Democrat

Over-compensating by over-consuming?

Amid shifting levels of confidence in 2017, majority of Hill insiders report consuming more information compared to previous years

Amount of News and Information Sources Relied Upon, Compared to Previous Years

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS

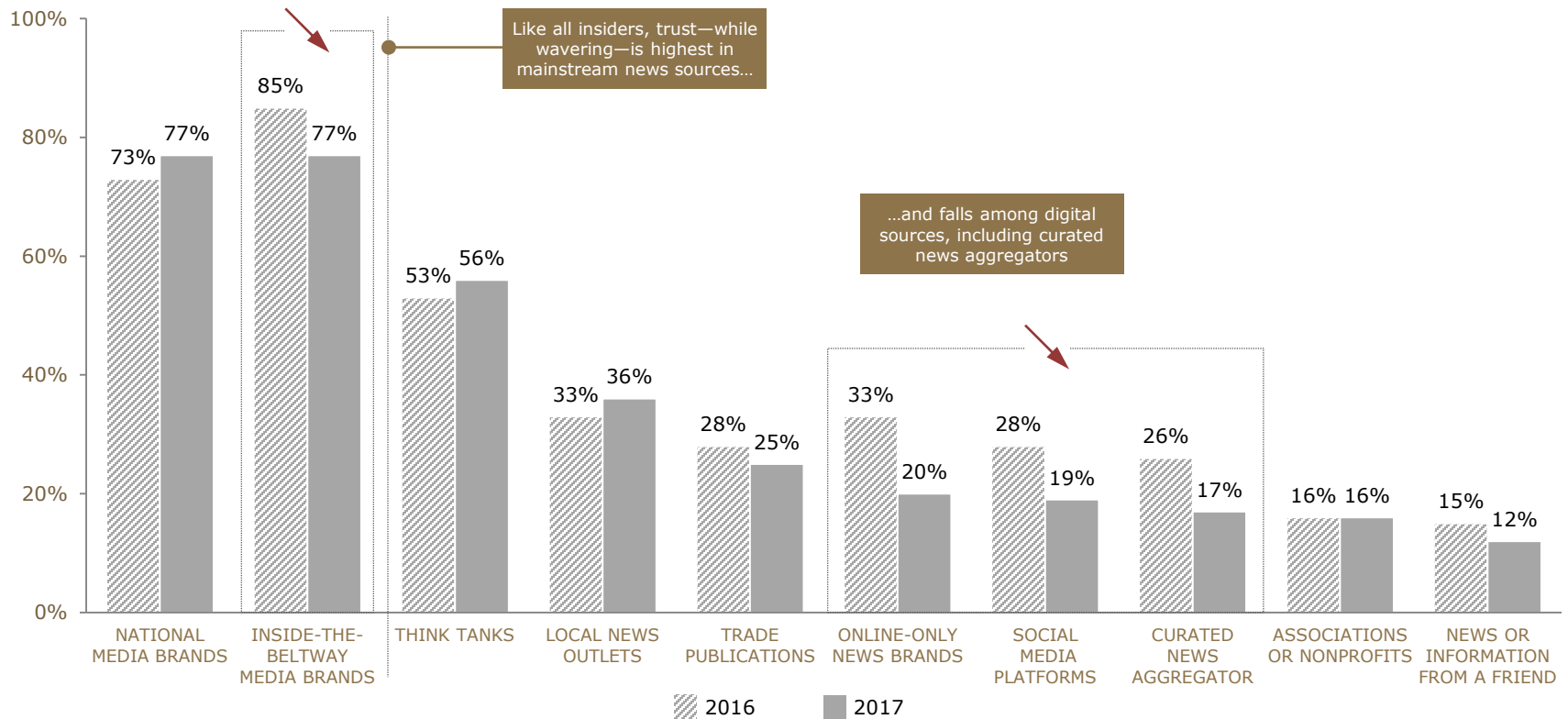


Surround sound approach (still) required

As congressional staffers re-evaluate their trust in various Washington news and information sources, private sector advocates will need to re-evaluate how their messages are distributed (and received) across a variety of mediums

Trusted Sources for Washington News and Information

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS, 2016 VS 2017



Source: Washington in the Information Age 2017; National Journal research and analysis.

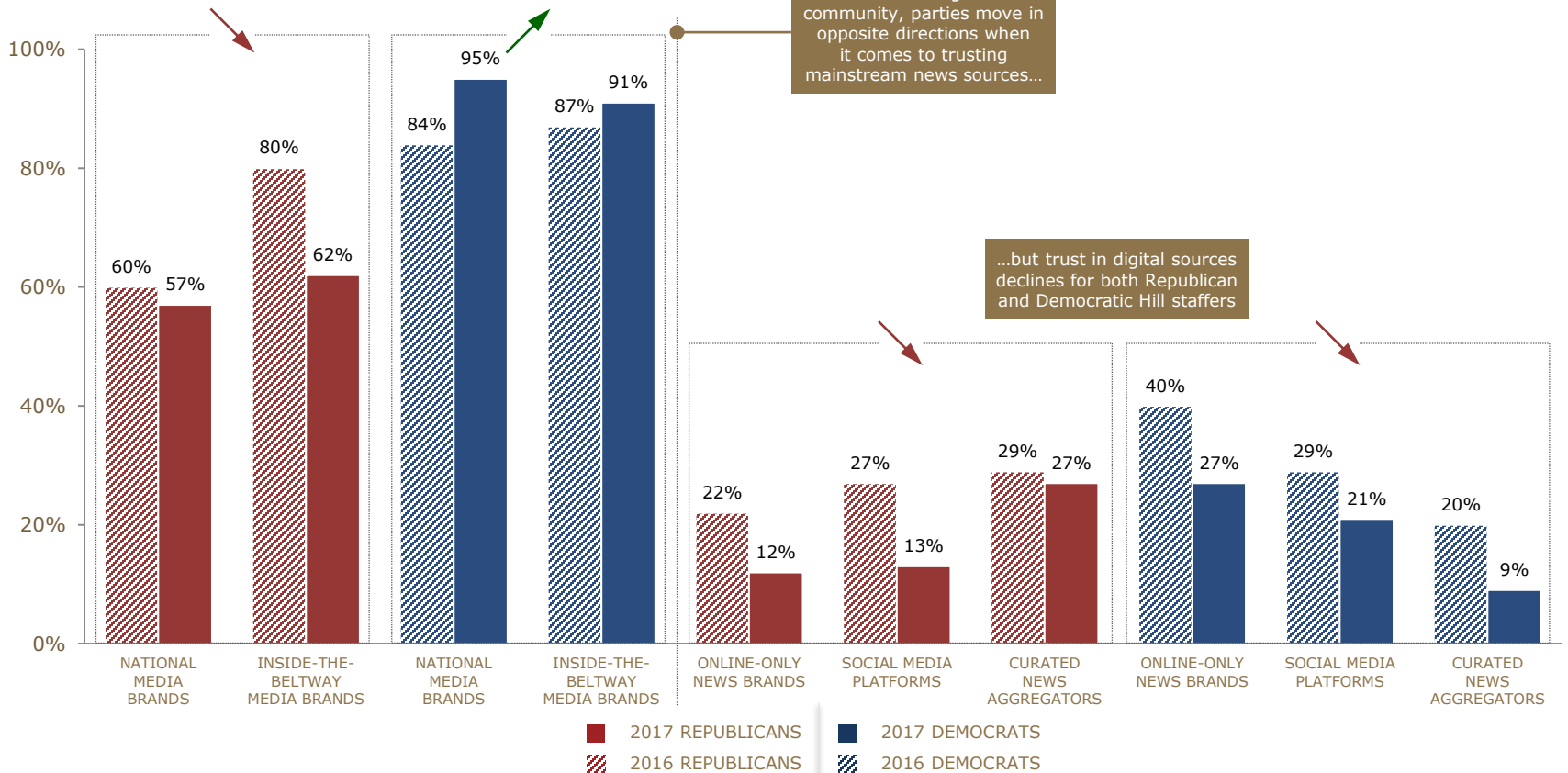
Mind the partisan gap in trust

Hill Republicans are losing confidence in inside-the-beltway brands, while Hill Dems' trust in mainstream media increases...

...and trust in online-only news sources and social media drops among respondents from both parties

Trusted Sources for Washington News and Information

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS, 2016 VS 2017



Similar to the larger insider community, parties move in opposite directions when it comes to trusting mainstream news sources...

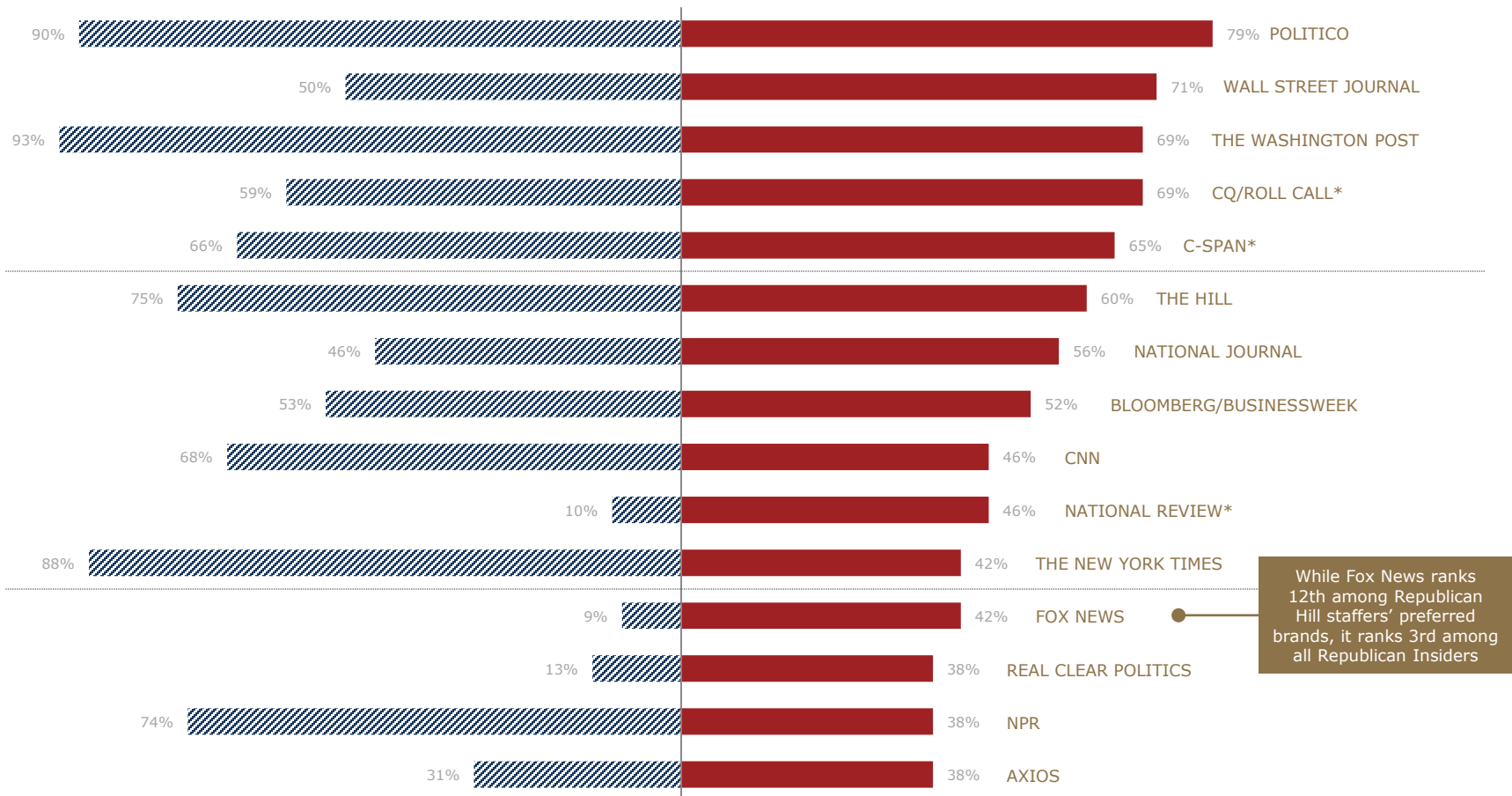
...but trust in digital sources declines for both Republican and Democratic Hill staffers

Choosing sides: Hill Republican picks

Clear party preferences among media brands of choice; Politico and Washington Post a top pick on both sides of the aisle

Republicans' Top 15 Media Brands (of 40+ tested)

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS BY PARTY



While Fox News ranks 12th among Republican Hill staffers' preferred brands, it ranks 3rd among all Republican Insiders

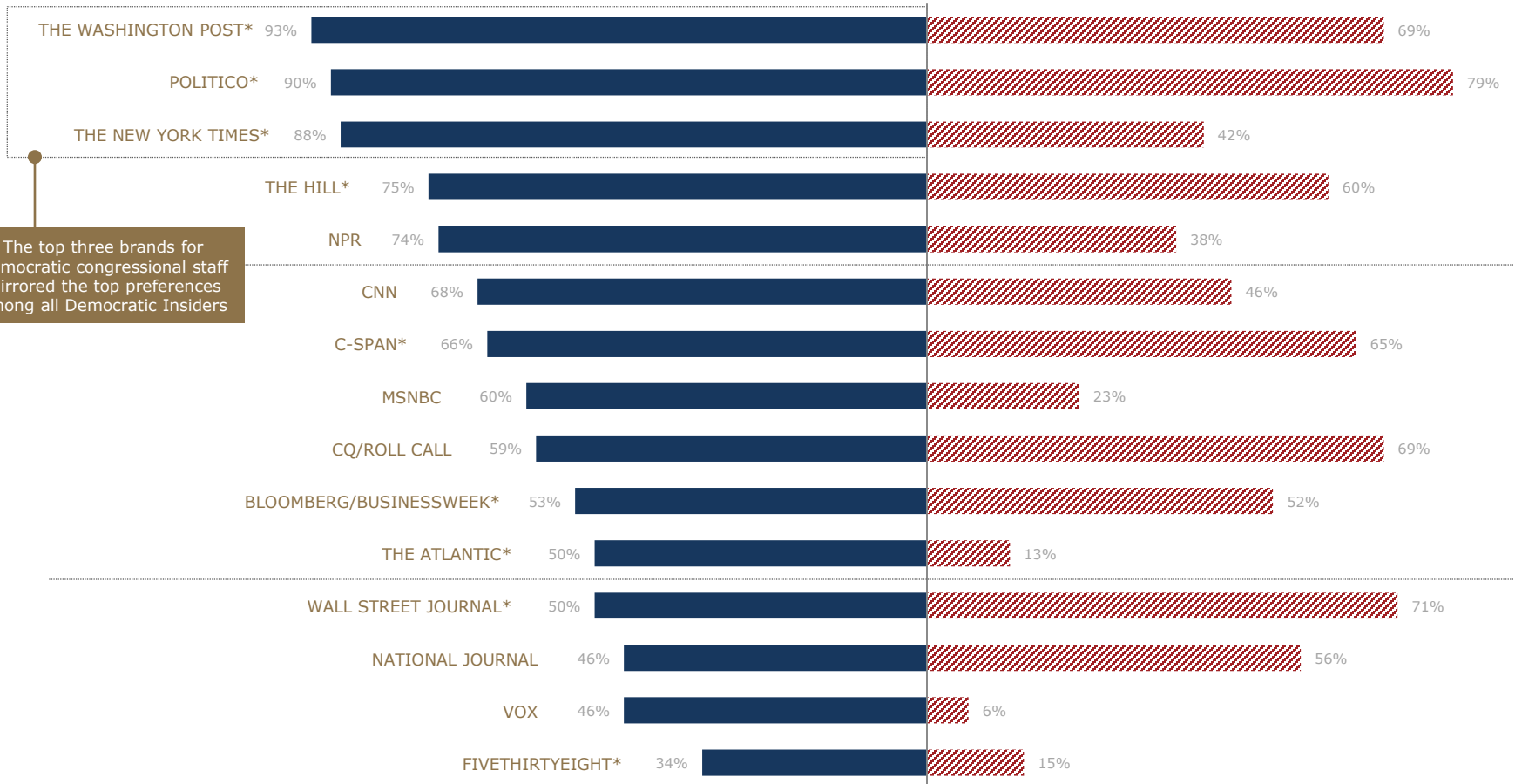
* Greater than 10 percentage-point increase since 2016 Washington in the Information Age survey.

Choosing sides: Hill Democratic picks

Clear party preferences among media brands of choice; Politico and Washington Post a top pick on both sides of the aisle

Democrats' Top 15 Media Brands (of 40+ tested)

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS BY PARTY



The top three brands for Democratic congressional staff mirrored the top preferences among all Democratic Insiders

* Greater than 10 percentage-point increase since 2016 Washington in the Information Age survey.

The name game

Insiders rely on a broad mix of editorial and reporting coverage across the political spectrum; more than 600 individual names cited, with over 200 cited by more than one respondent

Journalists Regularly Followed for Washington-Related Opinions, News or Reporting

MOST FREQUENTLY CITED NAMES AMONG RESPONDENTS (OPEN-ENDED)



* This visualization reflects data from Washington Insiders across all workplaces.

Roadmap for today's discussion

○ Overview of 2017 respondents

○ Trusted and reliable sources

● Resources and decision-making

- How do information resources help shape Hill opinions on policy issues?
- Where and how can one influence policy decisions?

○ Social media

○ Channel and format preferences

○ Information consumption by time of day

○ Key takeaways in 2017

Depth and perspective valued across the information cycle

Resources Utilized During Three Phases of Preparing for a Critical Vote

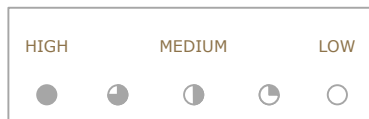
PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS

Compared to all insiders, Hill staff are **2X more likely** to cite **CRS** (and GAO and CBO) as a resource across all phases of policy decision-making...

"It's very **hard to find objective, non-anecdotal data** anymore—other than the **Congressional Research Service.**" *Chief of Staff*

...and **1.7X more likely** to turn to **lobbyists** when formulating opinions

"Social media as a driver of thoughts gets played up too much. Good **old-fashioned interactions** drive opinions." *Senior Policy Advisor*



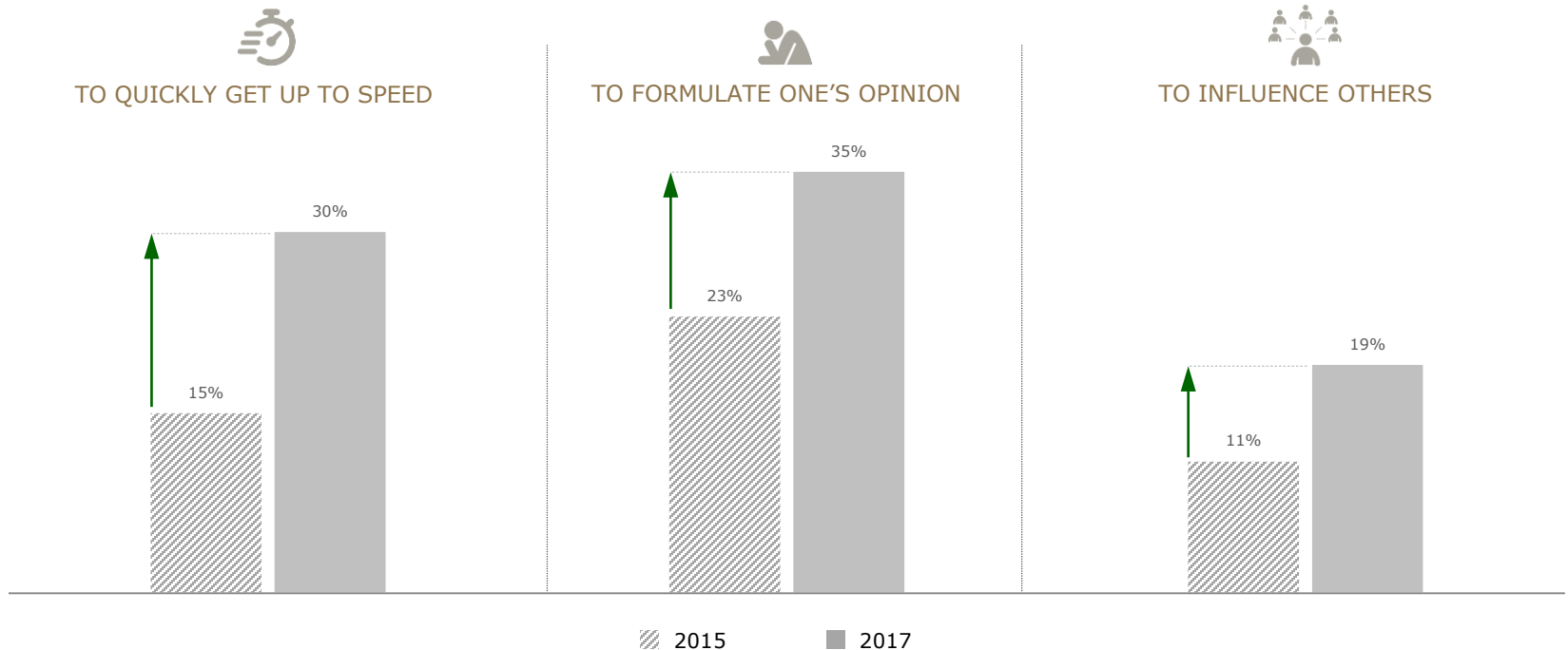
Resources Utilized in Preparing for a Critical Vote	TO QUICKLY GET UP TO SPEED	TO FORMULATE ONE'S OPINION	TO INFLUENCE OTHERS
News publications / websites			
Search engines (e.g., Google)			
Research reports / white papers			
Congressional Research Service			
Infographics / charts			
Social media			
Events / briefings			
Lobbyists			
Organizational websites			
E-newsletters			
TV			
Radio			
Online video			

Relying more on human resources

Between 2015 and 2017, an uptick in congressional staff turning to lobbyists as a resource in policy decision-making

Utilization of Lobbyists During Three Phases of Preparing for a Critical Vote

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS, 2015 VS 2017



What drives utility of organizational content?

DC insiders seek material that is thorough and easy to consume, but even the best content can't have an impact if delivered too late



Filling a Gap in Media Coverage

"...Analysis from think tanks offers the depth that news media often do not..."

"...Enviro nonprofits and their allies have largely picked up the investigative role that mainstream news organizations formerly performed..."

"...Sometimes these sources will start at the beginning, whereas newspapers take the story from the last story..."



Hearing it Directly From the Source

"...More often than not, when it's possible I try to get as close to the source of the news rather than rely on reports..."

"...If I care enough about the topic, I'll go find data sources for the charts and statistics people use as their examples..."



The Right Info in the Right Format

"...They save me time by highlighting in an easy-to-read fashion (typically) what are the most important policy/current issues in a particular industry/arena—with concise, relevant information..."

"...As long as you understand the source, I find that nonprofits often are the best at packaging and presenting information and perspectives in compelling and innovative ways. News outlets rarely invest the time and value speed over depth..."



Available at the Right Time

"The **single key** is for groups to **engage BEFORE a bill** has been **dropped or is moving** in the process.

Too many groups are **waiting till the end of the process** in a chamber to get involved. That **exasperates members and staff.**"

Senior Policy Advisor, House Committee

Note: Verbatim quotes have been lightly edited for clarity.

Heard on the Hill...

Congressional staff offer insight on what makes for effective research content and personal engagement

Packaged for My Needs

"A **one pager** is great when the legislation is already written and on the floor. A **white paper** tends to be more helpful in the thinking stages. On the fly when you're trying to get a speech done, **charts and graphs** are a lot more helpful." *Professional Staff, House*

Offer Context

"**Sending research out cold is ineffective**, I'm more likely to go through research as a follow up to a conversation or a meeting beforehand. If someone sends me a **blind email, I don't know where it fits into the most important issues** of the day." *Senior Staff, Senate Committee*

Summarized and Searchable

"When you hand me an impressive 70 page report that is very technical, I am going to read the **executive summary** and ask you to **send it in electronic form** to store it and then if the issue becomes hot and heavy, I may pull it up and do a **search for key terms** in the report. But I will be honest with you, I am not going to read a 75 page report." *Senior Counsel, House*

Meet (Only) When Necessary

"I see so many letters, research papers, website, op-eds etc.... What swings the balance is having a meeting and going back and forth on public policy... **Meeting all the time isn't effective and meeting never doesn't work either...** Tell me before a meeting I only need 15 minutes to give you a heads up on an issue or I just need 10 minutes to feel out what your boss is thinking about an issue or where she is leaning." *Senior Counsel, House*

Not Just What but When

"The most important thing external groups seeking to be effective should know is that **it's less about content and more about timing**. It's important for organizations to introduce themselves to the office well ahead of time when the issues are percolating." *Chief of Staff, House*

Note: Verbatim quotes have been lightly edited for clarity.

Roadmap for today's discussion

○ Overview of 2017 respondents

○ Trusted and reliable sources

○ Resources and decision-making

● Social media

- Which social media platforms are used in DC?
- What motivates congressional staff use of social media?

○ Channel and format preferences

○ Information consumption by time of day

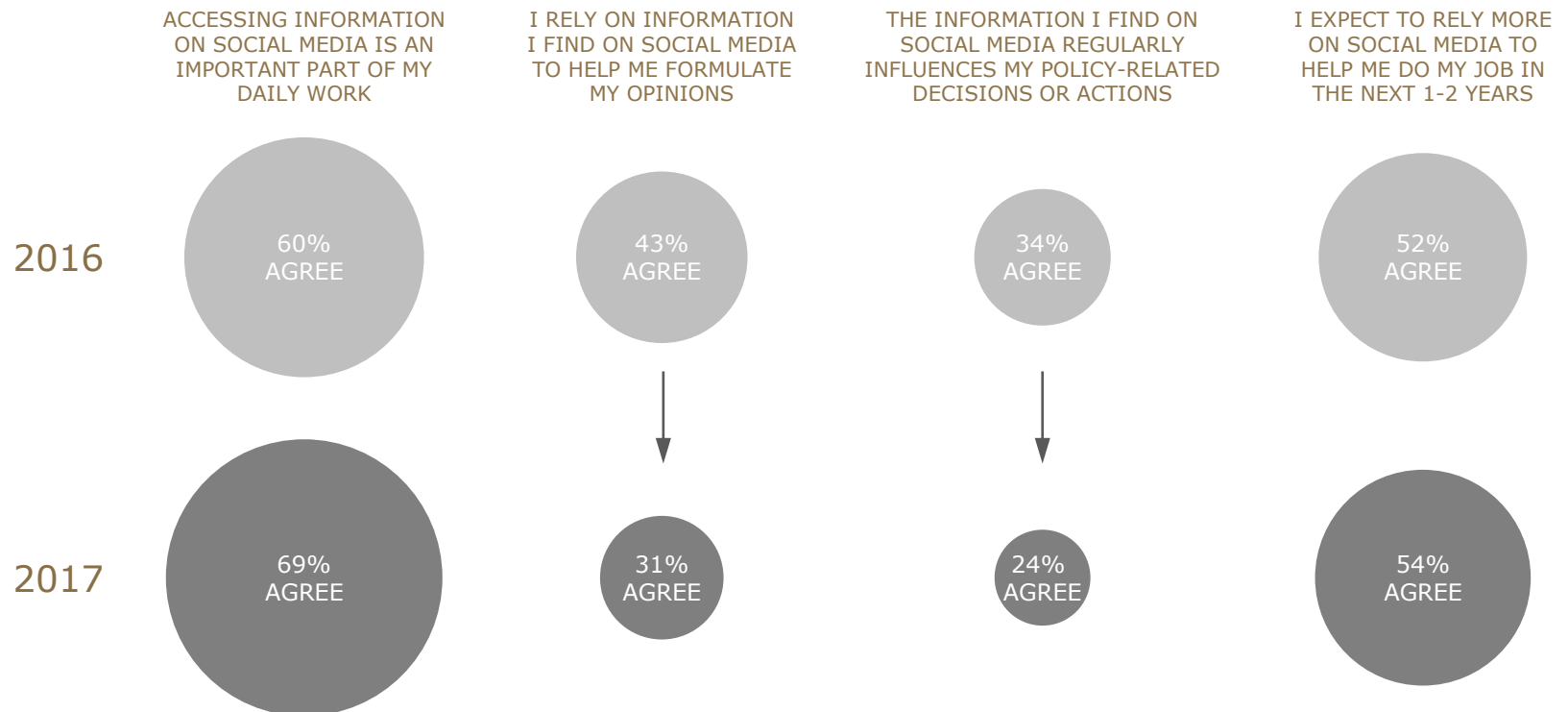
○ Key takeaways in 2017

A turning point for social media?

Despite a decline, many congressional staff still recognize social media’s influence on their policy perspectives and actions

Perceptions of Social Media’s Role in Daily Policy Work

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS, 2016 VS 2017

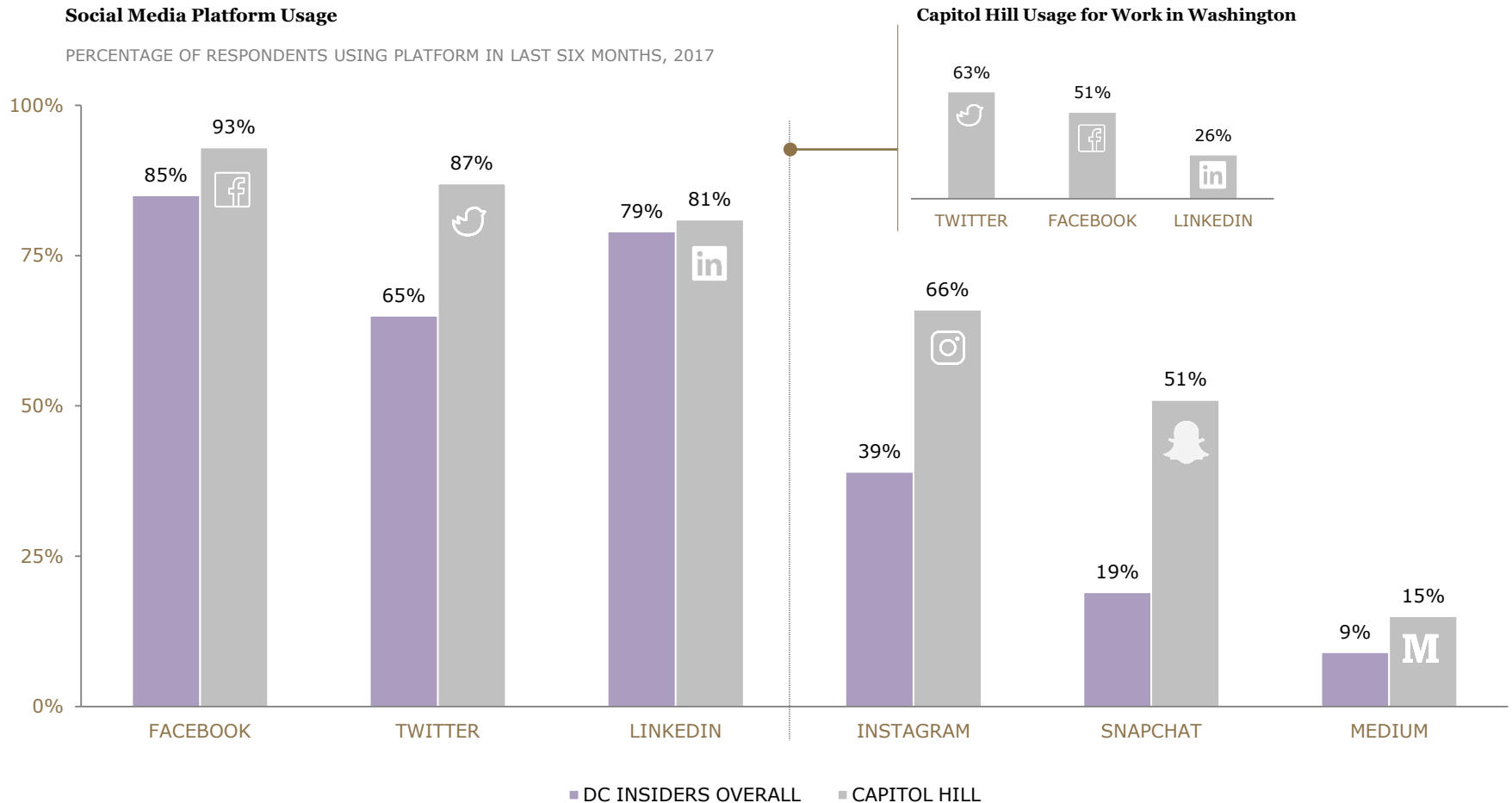


“I use **Twitter frequently** throughout the day to **read what is happening, but not to shape my opinion** on anything.”

Professional Staff, House Committee

The social networks

Congressional staff are more likely to use social media than other insiders for personal and professional purposes



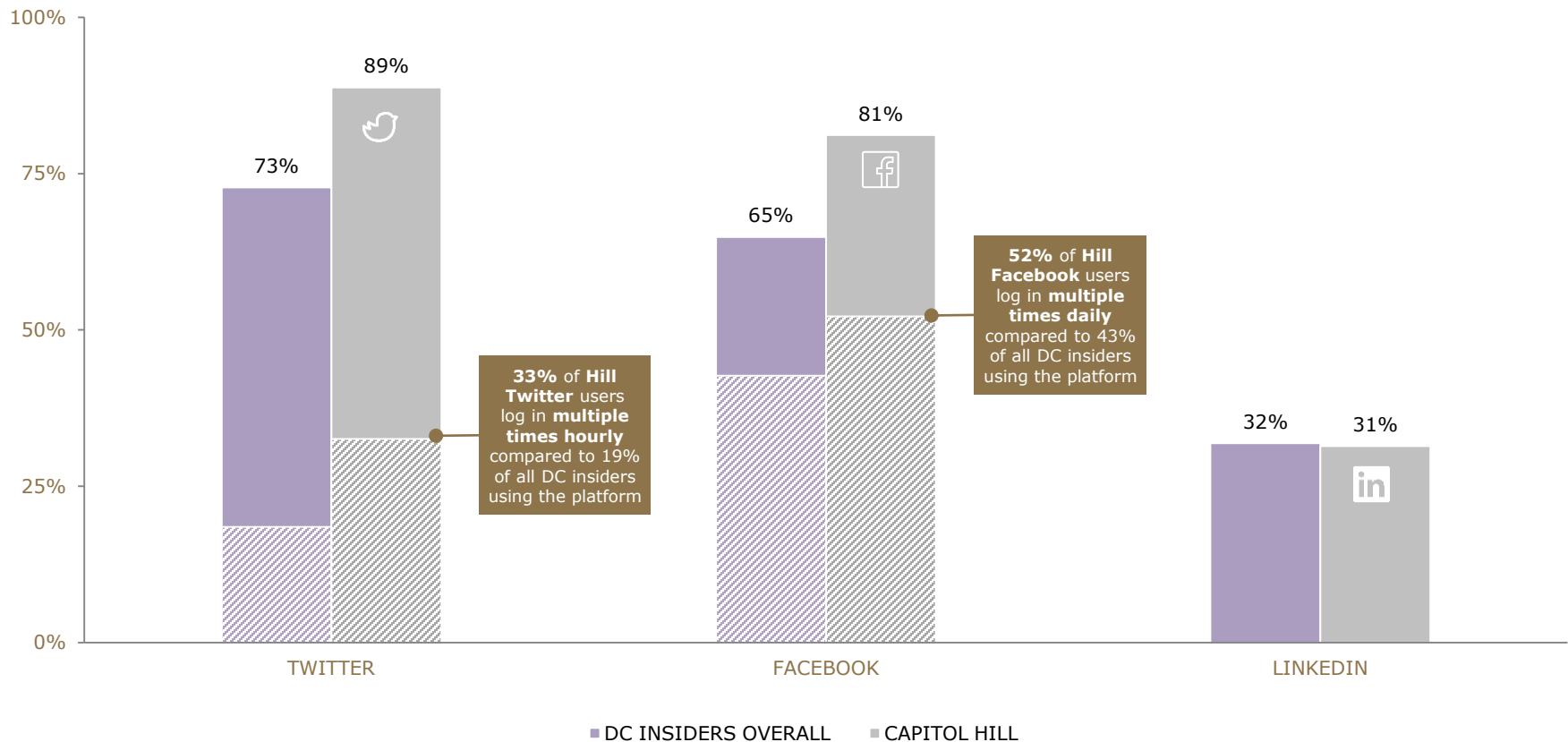
Source: Washington in the Information Age 2017; National Journal research and analysis.

Just checking...

Capitol Hill staff log into their social networks at a higher rate than peers in other workplaces

Frequency of Using Social Media Platforms as Part of Work

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS USING PLATFORM MULTIPLE TIMES DAILY IN LAST SIX MONTHS, 2017

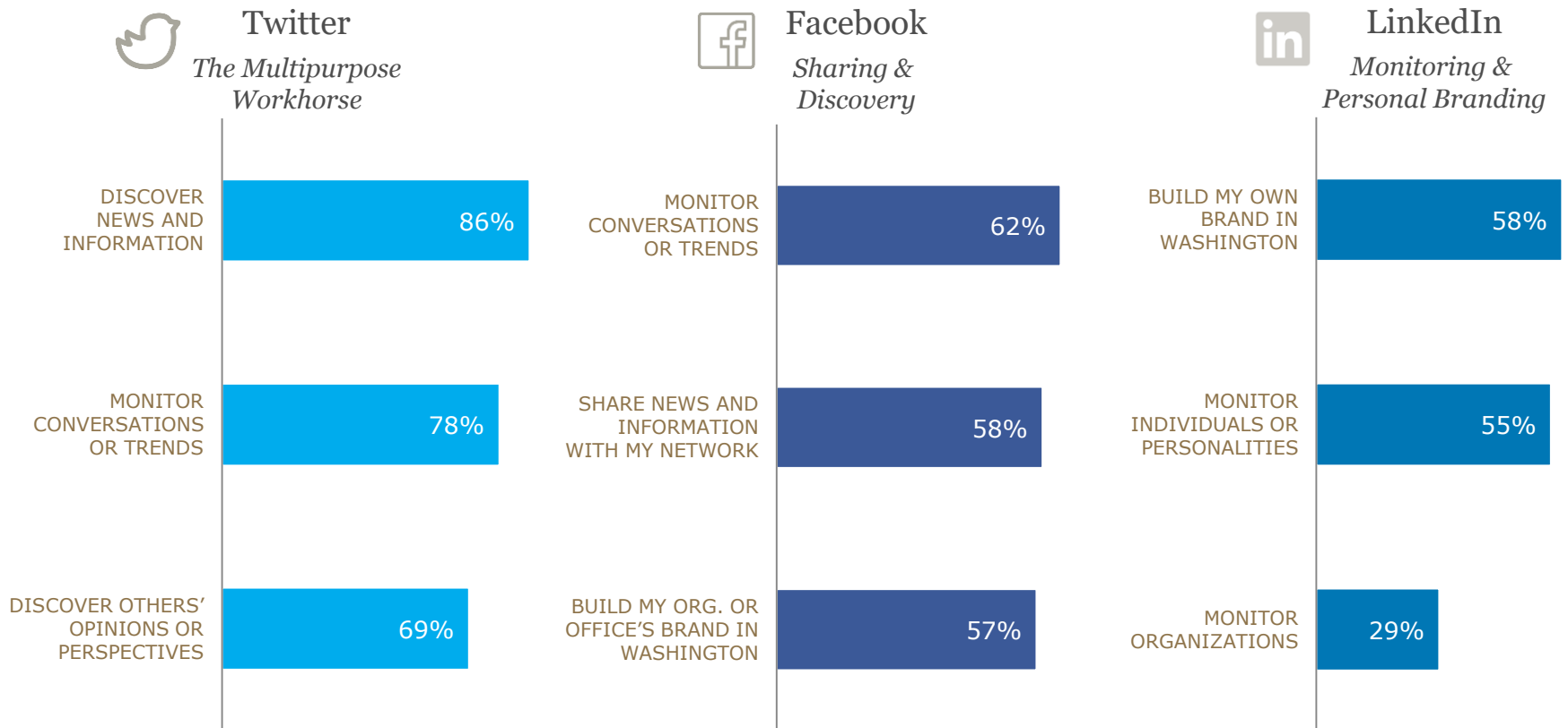


A platform for every occasion

Social media use cases vary across the three major social networks; monitoring sentiments among individuals a key activity

Primary Purposes for Using Social Media Platforms for Work in Washington

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS USING PLATFORM FOR EACH PURPOSE, 2017

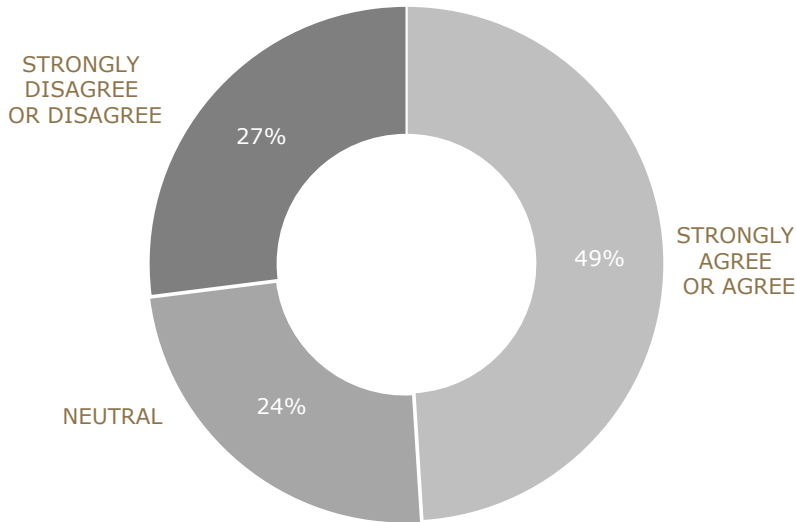


Capitol Hill to constituents: Can we talk (online)?

Half of Capitol Hill respondents believe social media enables more meaningful interactions with constituents, yet nearly 3-in-4 find that posts lack the detail needed to determine whether it is a constituent communication

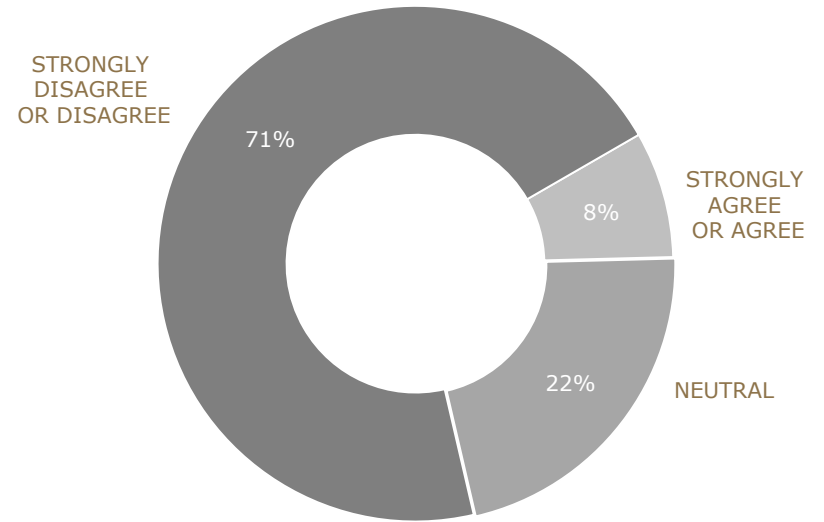
Social Media Enables Government Representatives to have More Meaningful Interactions with Constituents

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS



Most Social Media Postings to Government Representatives' Platforms Provide Enough Information and Context to Determine if a Post is from a Constituent

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS

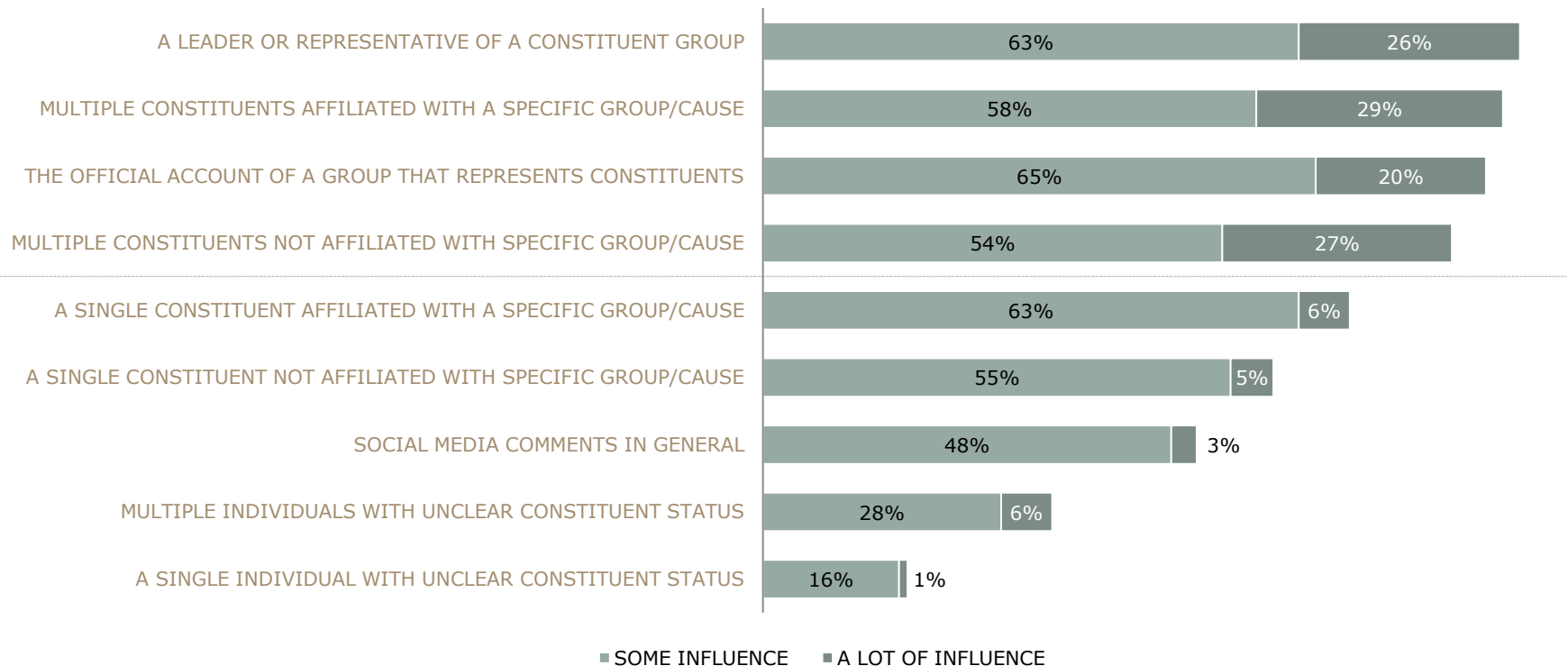


Not just size that matters

To persuade legislators with social media, aim for a high number of constituents with a clear agenda or tie-in to the district/state; a high volume of posts from individual supporters is not necessary

For a Member of Congress Who Has Not Arrived at a Firm Decision on an Issue, Influence of Social Media Posts Directed at their Office on the Member's Decision

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS



Help me, help you

Offering useful content and positive public recognition more likely to drive follows by congressional staffers; negative references on social and explicit “asks” are unlikely to deliver positive outcomes

Organization-Driven Actions that Make Congressional Staff More Likely to Follow an Organization on Social Media for Work

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS WHO USE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR WORK



Roadmap for today's discussion

○ Overview of 2017 respondents

○ Trusted and reliable sources

○ Resources and decision-making

○ Social media

● Channel and format preferences

- How do DC insiders access news and information today?
- What channels are congressional staff gravitating towards?

○ Information consumption by time of day

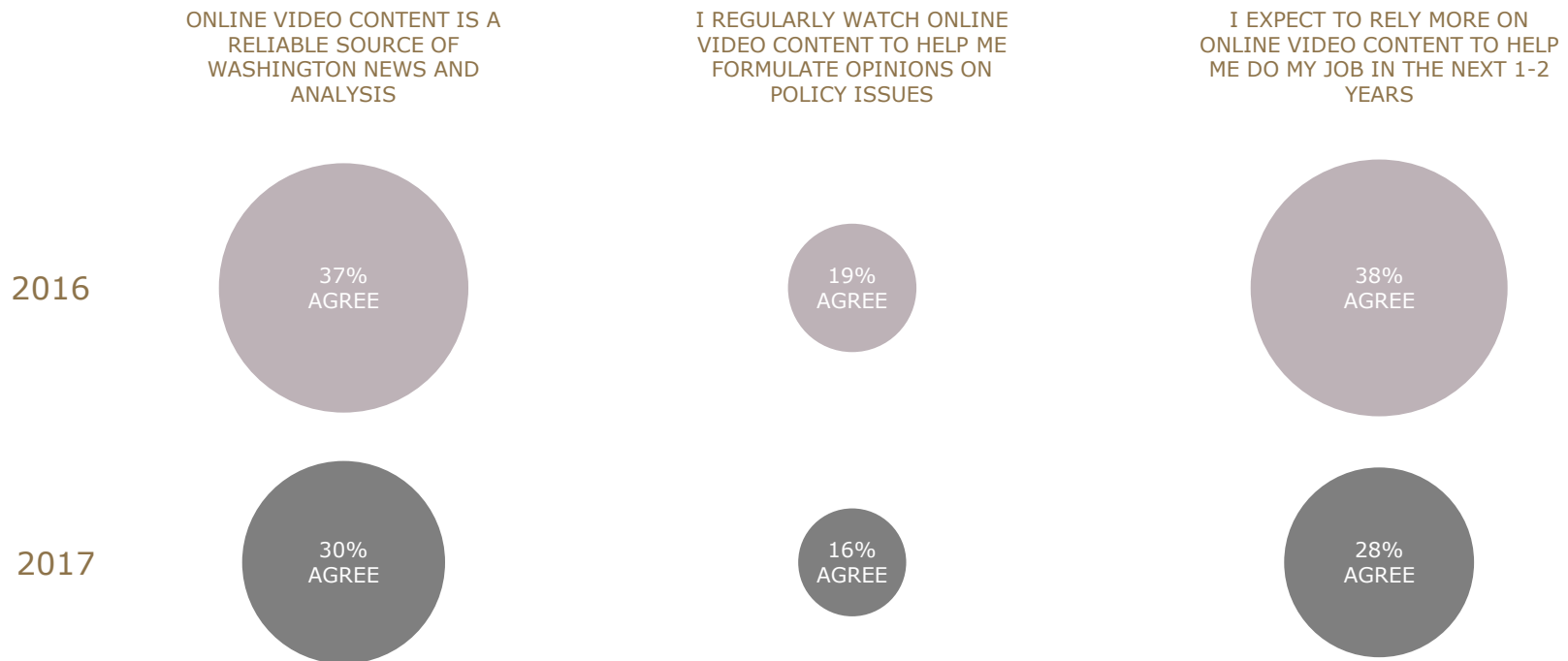
○ Key takeaways in 2017

Tuning out online video

Use of online video for Washington content continues to lag; insiders have an increasingly negative outlook on the utility of video as a resource for policy work

Perceptions of Online Video's Role in Daily Policy Work

PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS, 2016 VS 2017



“Videos can be helpful to get a **quick overview** of a subject, but they **tend to be even more prone to bias** than news articles.”

Legislative Director, House

DC Insider view: online video

Because it requires volume, video content is mostly inaccessible to me—can't watch it in meetings or public places, and it's inconsiderate in a shared office. I find it **very frustrating when content I'm interested in is only available in video** and not in text.

Sound bites do not assist in formulating policy on complex issues—that is all video offers.

On-line video **takes more time than it's worth**. Please **give me a summary paragraph with a link to more information** and I'm much better off.

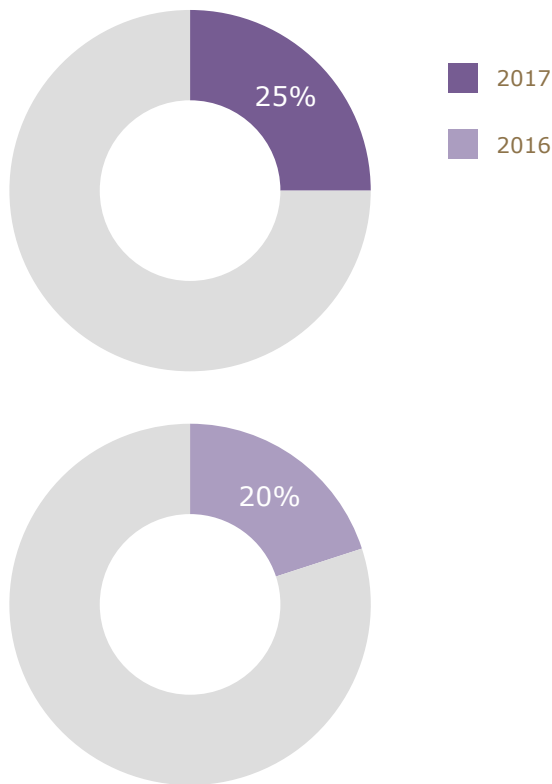
Auto-Play video is the worst feature ever. While I may watch a video or two on a website, embedded videos in news articles are terrible and I wish they were banned.

Podcasts part of the media diet

Podcast consumption increasingly part of DC insiders' workday; growth continues to be strongest among Capitol Hill staff, Millennials

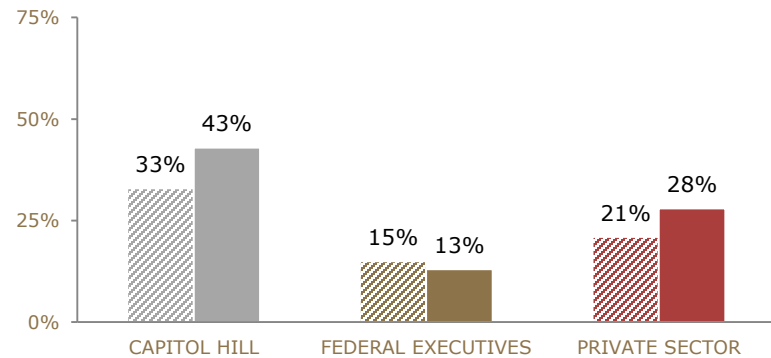
Insiders Who Report Listening to Podcasts Throughout the Day for Washington Focused News or Information

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS, 2016 VS 2017

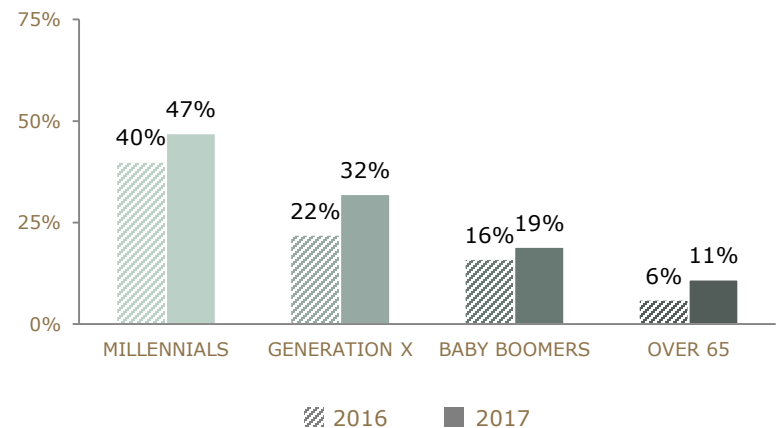


Characteristics of Insiders Who Listen to Podcasts At Least Once Throughout the Workday

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS, BY WORKPLACE



PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS, BY GENERATION



DC Insider view: podcasts

Would include **podcasts**, Pod Save America being the main one for helping to formulate my opinions. I trust them.

Podcasts are a growing source of information for me. I can download them before my morning and afternoon commute to stay caught up and hear new perspectives.

I listen to audio from TV via **podcasts**—Sunday Shows, Morning Joe.

More attention to podcasts would improve this research.

I also rely on **podcasts** from NYT, Slate, NPR, Pod Save America.

I listen to the **Sunday shows** either as a **podcast** or sometimes on C-Span radio in the car.

In previous years I would have gone more to national cable news agencies, but I no longer trust any of them... I rely more now on NPR—**including related podcasts**—and PBS.

Media organizations still drive **what I consume**, though it is now **spread around among print, cable, podcasts**, etc.

I don't turn to TV at all unless a relevant clip is emailed to me or shows up in a newsletter or my social feed. I **listen to a few policy podcasts** to stay on top of things and will tweet about them if I find them interesting.

Roadmap for today's discussion

○ Overview of 2017 respondents

○ Trusted and reliable sources

○ Resources and decision-making

○ Social media

○ Channel and format preferences

● Information consumption by time of day

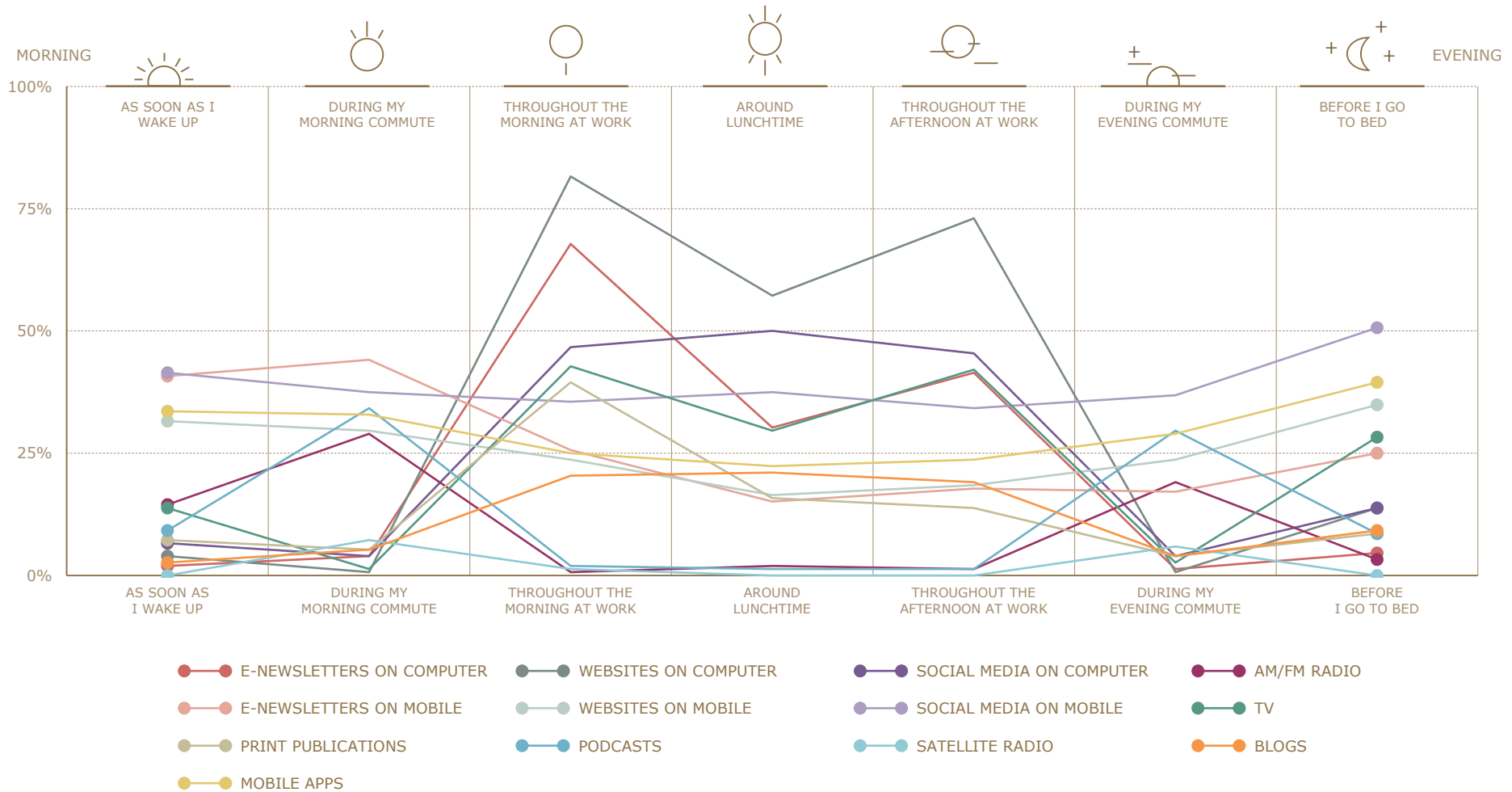
- Which channels do Capitol Hill staff rely on across the day?
- How do patterns differ across workplaces?

○ Key takeaways in 2017

A Day in the Life of a Capitol Hill Insider in 2017

Channels used for Washington news and information throughout the weekday

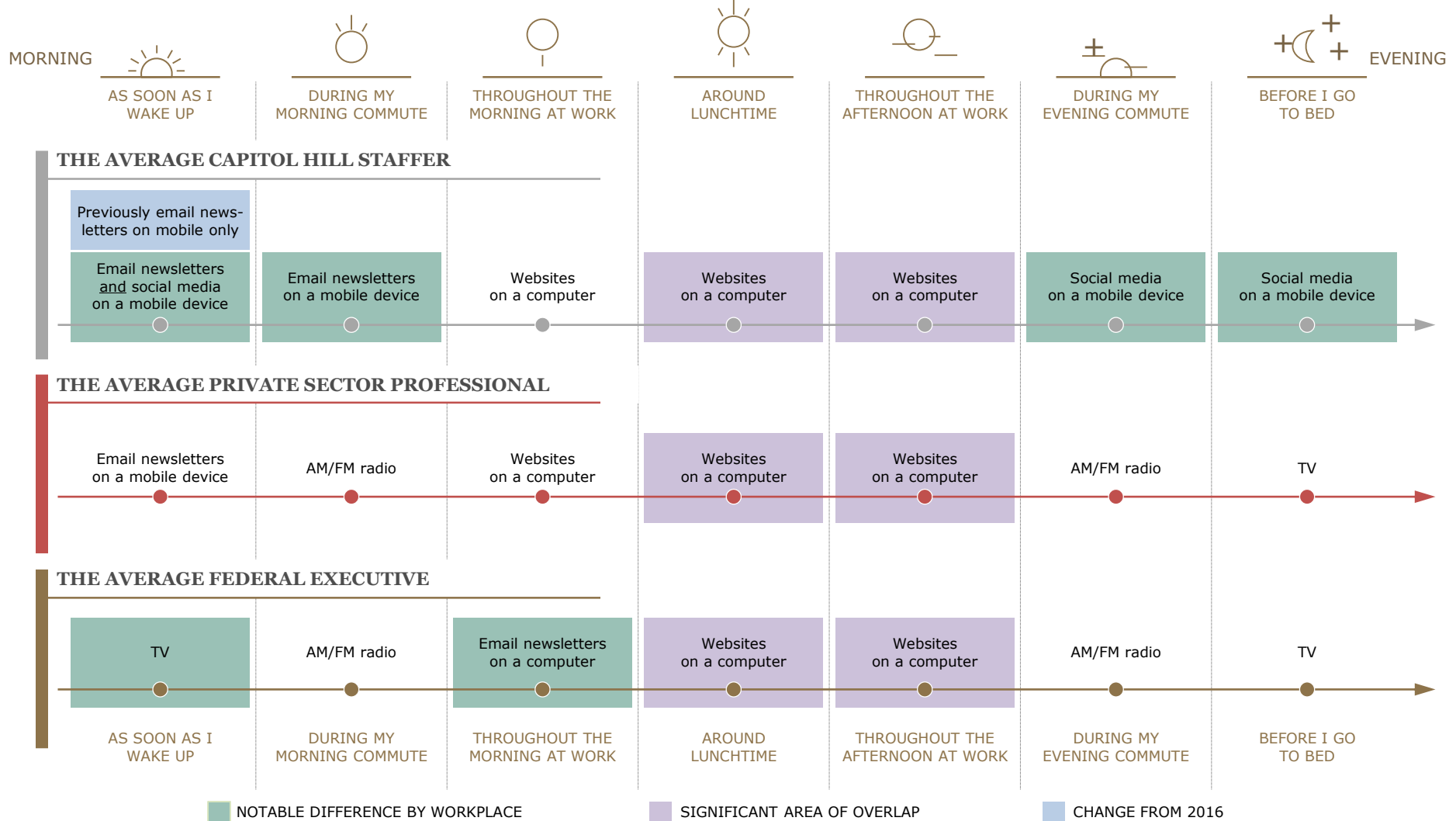
PERCENTAGE OF CAPITOL HILL RESPONDENTS BY CHANNEL



Source: Washington in the Information Age 2017; National Journal research and analysis.

The shrinking sweet spot

Key consumption channels largely unchanged across all workplaces; hard to target all groups in one place at the same time



Source: Washington in the Information Age 2017; National Journal research and analysis.

Roadmap for today's discussion

- Overview of 2017 respondents
- Trusted and reliable sources
 - Which sources do Capitol Hill insiders trust the most?
 - What media outlets are most relied on by congressional staff?
- Resources and decision-making
 - How do information resources help shape Hill opinions on policy issues?
 - Where and how can one influence policy decisions?
- Social media
 - Which social media platforms are used in DC?
 - What motivates congressional staff use of social media?
- Channel and format preferences
 - How do DC insiders access news and information today?
 - What channels are congressional staff gravitating towards?
- Information consumption by time of day
 - Which channels do Capitol Hill staff rely on across the day?
 - How do patterns differ across workplaces?
- Key takeaways in 2017

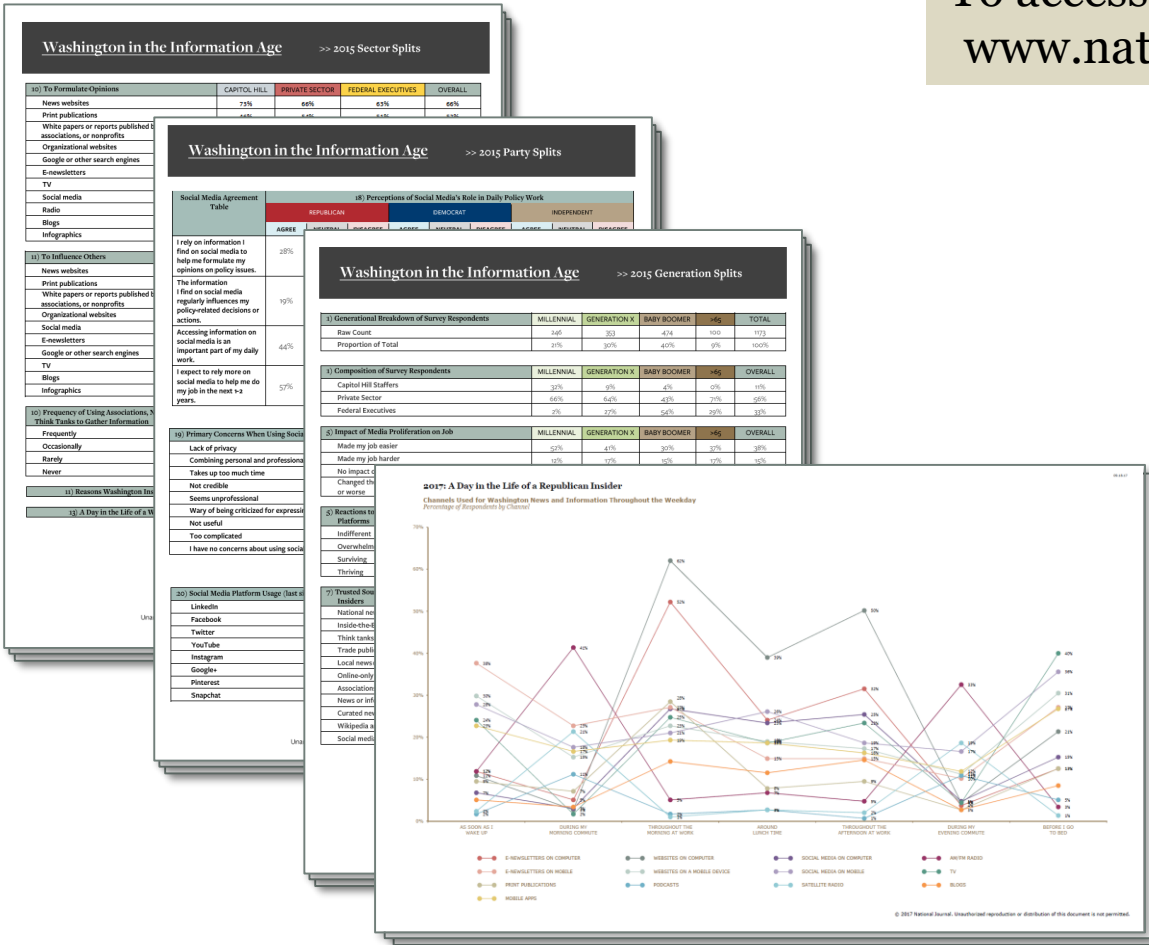
Key takeaways in 2017

1. More than ever, congressional staff are taking a "trust but verify" approach to information consumption, as a reaction to instability in the media environment. Republican and Democratic Hill staffers begin to move in different directions when it comes to trust in mainstream news, and insiders of both parties signal a loss of confidence in digital sources.
2. As congressional staff seek original, substantive content to support policy formulation, there is an even greater opportunity for the private sector to serve as a resource and fill the gap left by media organizations. In doing so, advocates must consider not only the substance of content, but the format and timing of delivery, to align to Hill staff needs across the decision-making cycle.
3. Compared to insiders across all workplaces—Capitol Hill, Federal Executives and Private Sector—congressional staff are much more likely to rely on lobbyists to formulate their opinions as they prep for a critical vote. Though these (overwhelmingly millennial) insiders display a preference for digital and mobile information channels, face-to-face interactions remain critical in Washington.
4. Despite declining confidence in social media as a source for news and information, congressional staff continue to recognize its impact on policy work. Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn each demonstrate distinct utility to congressional offices, but monitoring is a key benefit across the big three platforms. While social media alone may not drive a particular legislative outcome, Hill staffers note that posts reflecting constituent sentiment can have a major impact on (undecided) lawmakers' views.
5. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy. Insiders' media habits are highly diverse, and they enjoy enormous choice in when, how and what they consume. As the media landscape continues to fragment and trust is redistributed across channels, content must be differentiated across platforms in line with user needs, and distribution strategies updated to reach insiders where they are, both within the decision-making cycle and across a given day. Adaptability and specificity are critical for landing a message in the right place. Accordingly, communications and outreach strategies must be revisited frequently, to examine what's working to influence outcomes and what tactics need to be discarded.

Rich detail on DC insiders' information preferences

Media consumption habits cut by workplace, party and generation

To access the complete results, visit:
www.nationaljournal.com/wia-info



2017 TOPIC COVERAGE

Who Washington Insiders Trust and Rely on Most

- News and information sources
- Media outlets and brands

When and How Washington Insiders Seek Information

- Social media
- Mobile
- Print
- Television and radio

What Content and Formats Washington Insiders Prefer

- White papers
- Infographics
- Online video
- Podcasts
- Events

Day-in-the-Life of an Insider

- Workplace: Capitol Hill, Private Sector, Federal Executives
- Party: Republican, Democrat, Independent
- Generation: Millennial, Generation X, Baby Boomer, Over 65

RESEARCH TEAM

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Gina Kim

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