

Georgia News Landscape Analysis

GEORGIA NEWS COLLABORATIVE

Presented by The Pivot Fund

MAY 2023



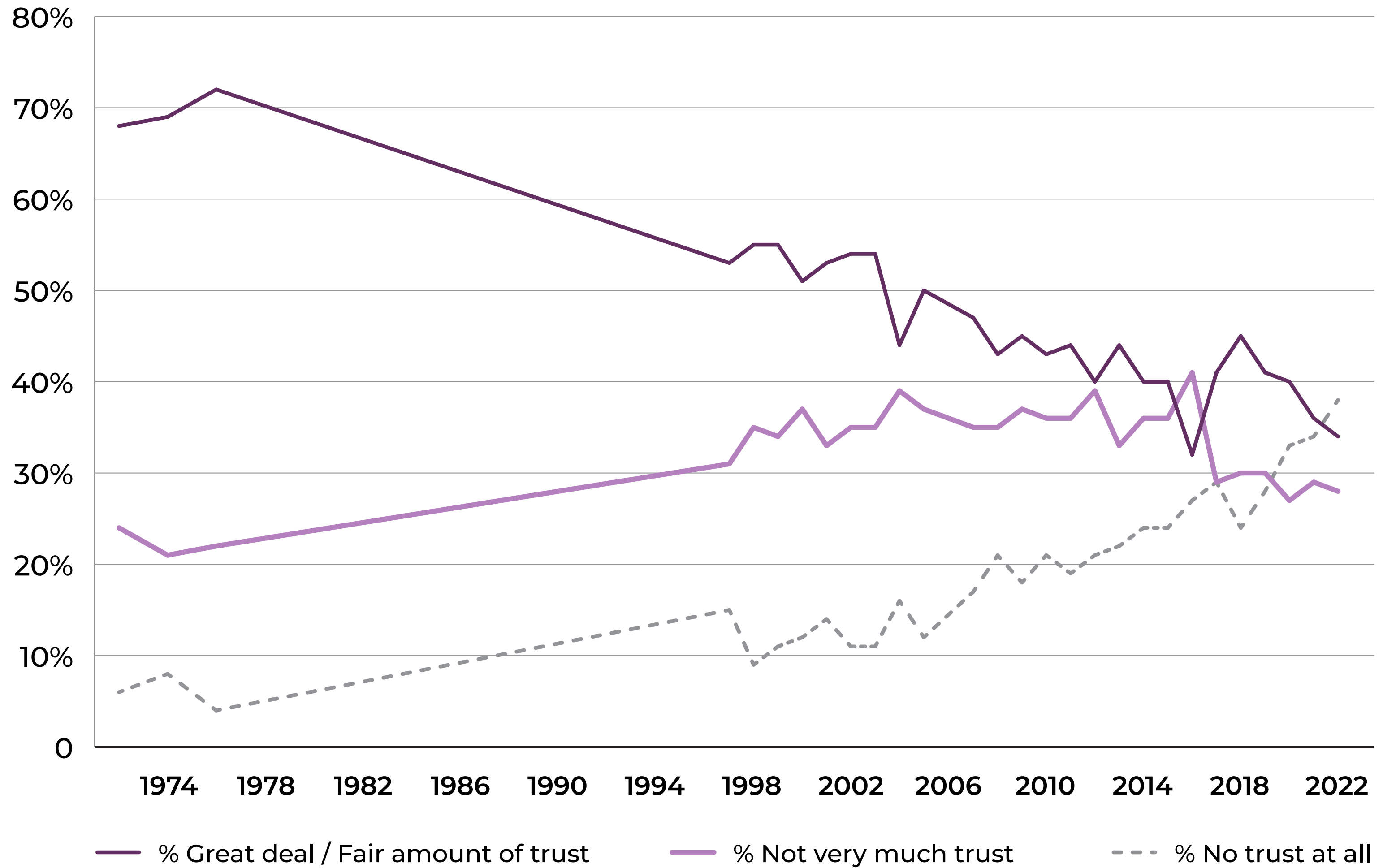
The Georgia News Collaborative is looking for ways to support local news across the state, to ensure that people can be informed participants in democracy.

It's a formidable challenge.

COVER PHOTO BY HENRI MATTHIEU SAINT LAURENT / PEXELS

Public distrust of media extends well beyond those long ignored or muted. And it's a problem that's been brewing for decades.

Americans' Trust in Mass Media, 1972–2022



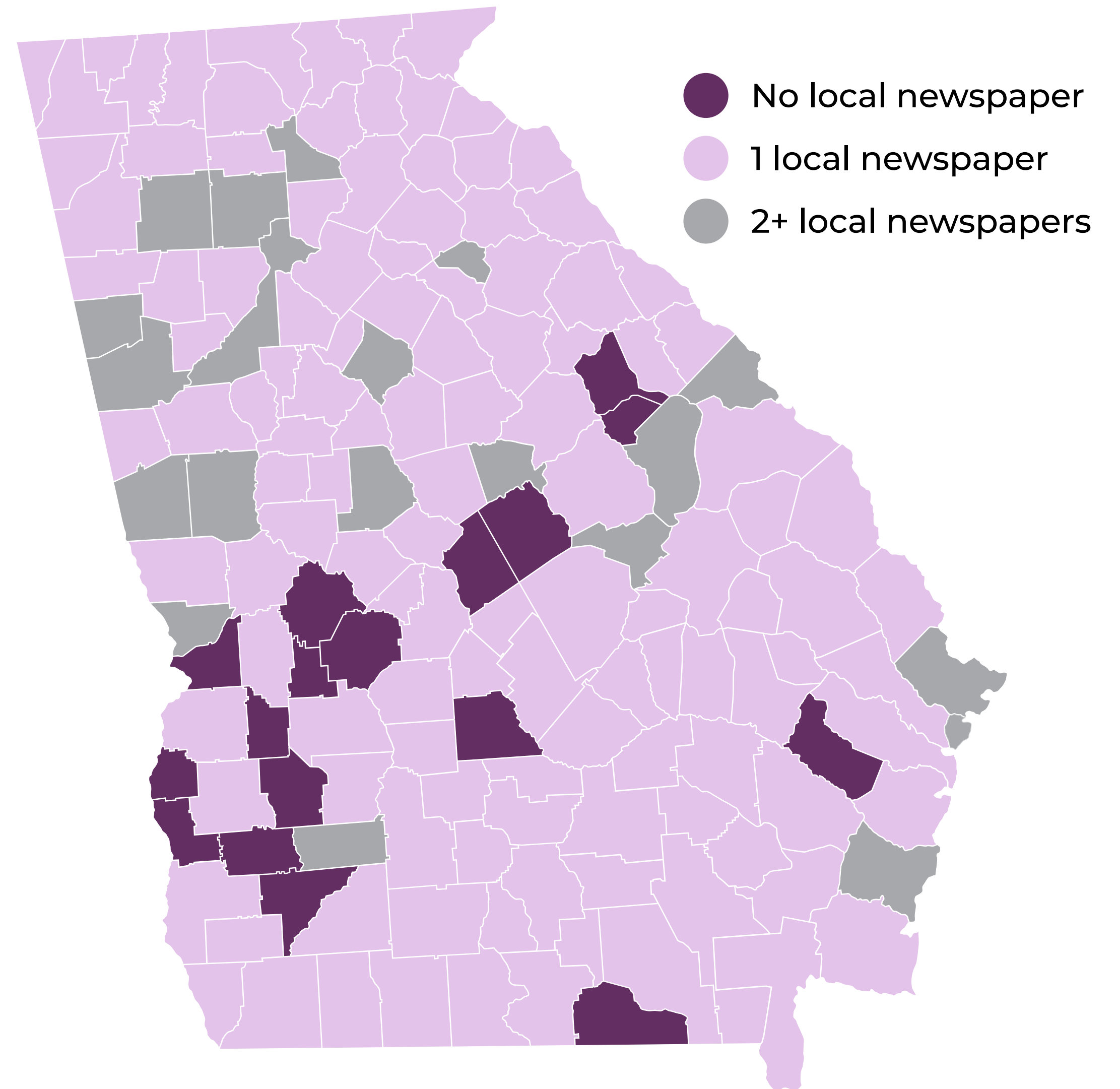
Source: Gallup

THE NEWS AND INFORMATION LANDSCAPE HAS CHANGED

Georgia has **17 counties with no newspaper, and 112 with only one.**

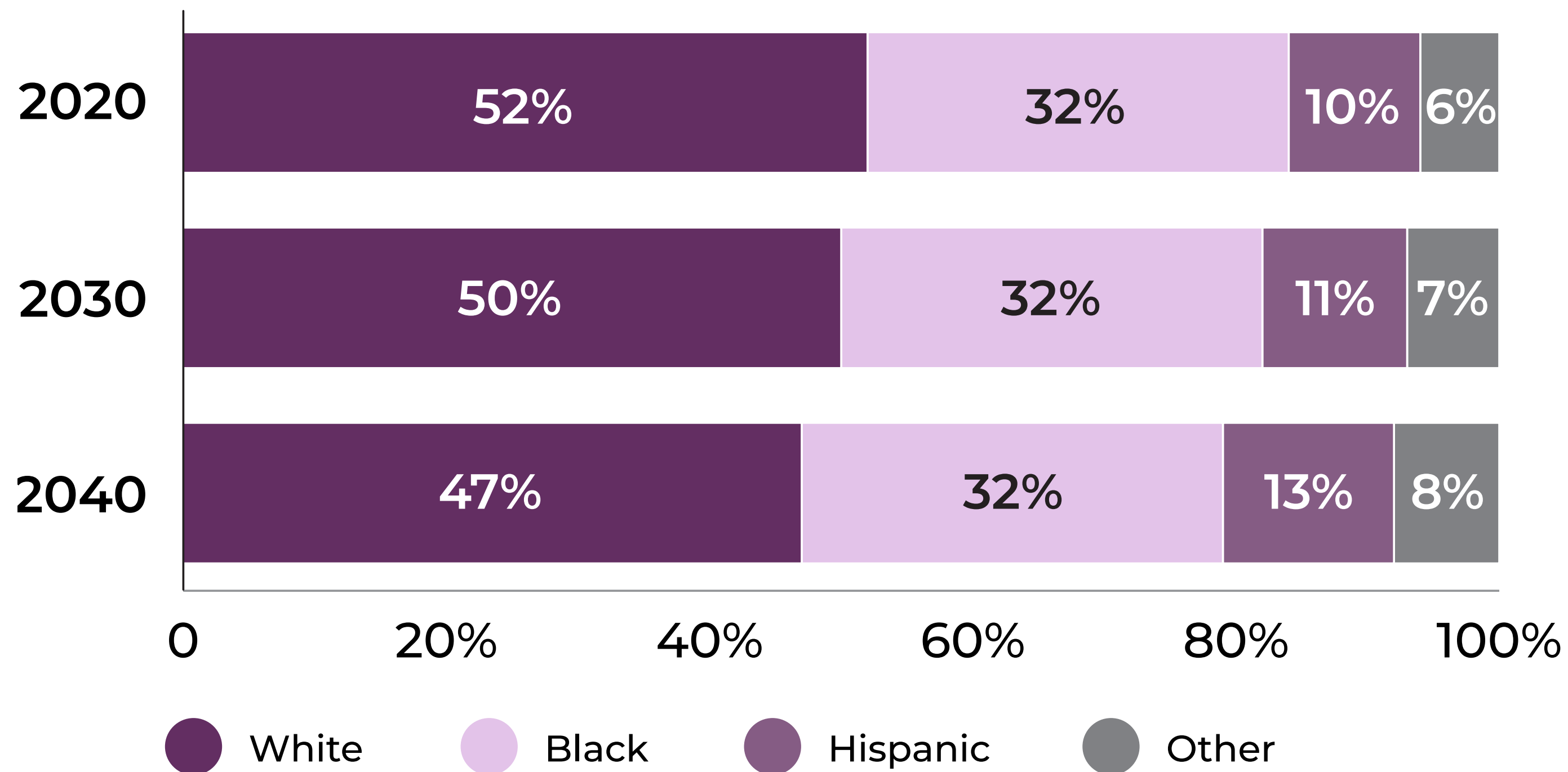
Digital platforms have seized attention as legacy media declines.

Source: The Expanding News Desert, Penelope Muse Abernathy, UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media



DEMOGRAPHICS HAVE ALSO CHANGED

Communities of color make up **48% of the state population**—and many of them don't trust legacy media.



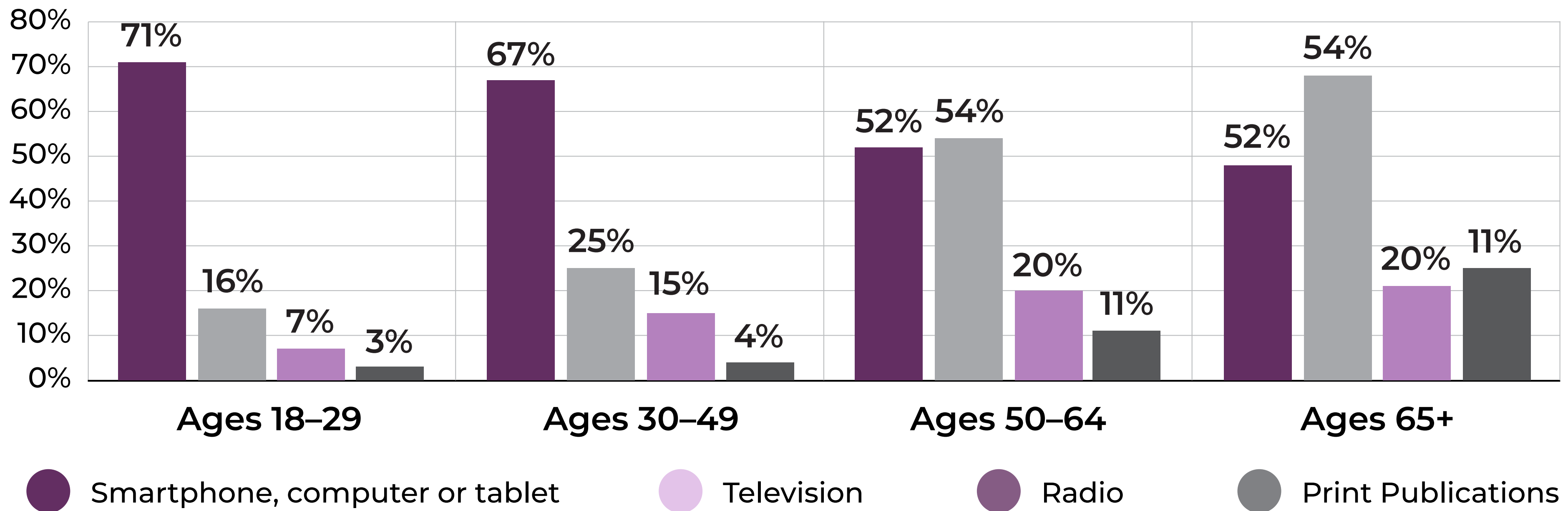
To meet the disruption of the 21st century, strategies and solutions must be multifaceted.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Governor's Office of Planning and Budget Population Projections (2020 Series)

Digital Disruption

The **shift in media consumption** is a national trend as **those under 50** turn more frequently to **digital devices** for news.

Percent of U.S. adults who get news often from digital devices, TV, radio and print publications



Source: Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug 31-Sept 7, 2020

A deep dive in Georgia shows **Facebook is a key channel** for news and information for young adults.

**“How do you
access community
information?”**

1. Word of mouth from family and friends

2. **Facebook** (49% of white respondents, 54% of Black respondents)

3. Television

4. Radio

5. Newspaper

6. Church

“How do you access local news?”

1.
Facebook
37%

2.
Television
21%

“What digital platforms do you use to access information about events in your community?”

1.
Facebook
58%

2.
Instagram
7%

Architects of Necessity

People of color are resourceful. Several are **using Facebook to deliver local information** and connect their communities, including:

Richa Aggarwal

Her private Facebook group “Indians in Cumming, GA” has **16,400 members.**

Seema Garg

Her Facebook group “Indians in Atlanta” has **44,000 members.**

Facebook can give a voice to underserved communities, but it's **not a sustainable solution.**

- Facebook's visibility **algorithms change without warning.** This means news organizations cannot control who sees their posts at any given time.
- There is **no built-in way to earn revenue** on Facebook's platform.

To succeed, news organizations that start on Facebook need to expand to platforms they control.
(e.g. their own websites)



Elizabeth Galarza

Pasa la Voz

- Started as a Facebook page in 2018, serving the immigrant community in and around Savannah
- Reached 20,000 followers
- After 2022 Pivot Fund investment:
 - hired an editor
 - added website and text/WhatsApp alerts
 - audience grew 35% in six months



Monica Pirela

Notivision

- With cameraman husband, broadcasts a weekly Spanish-language broadcast on Facebook from Warner Robins
- Also syndicates to Spanish-language radio
- Focuses on local events, education, public health, immigration and crime



April Ross

BeeTV Network

- Ross started by streaming live news on Facebook, before she acquired the TV station in 2021
- Based in LaGrange, BeeTV reaches 11 South Georgia counties on Spectrum cable
- After Pivot Fund investment, added a sports reporter and grew its audience by 140%

OTHER DIGITAL PLATFORMS



Janice Allen Jackson

Local Matters Podcast

Launched in March 2020 in Augusta, where the local paper was better known for covering the Masters than the African American community.

Focused on helping people understand role of local/state government rather than partisan politics or candidate endorsement.



Dan Whisenhunt

Decaturish.com

Launched to fill gaps in coverage in DeKalb County, Metro Atlanta, striving for a critical mass of subscribers willing to pay for news.

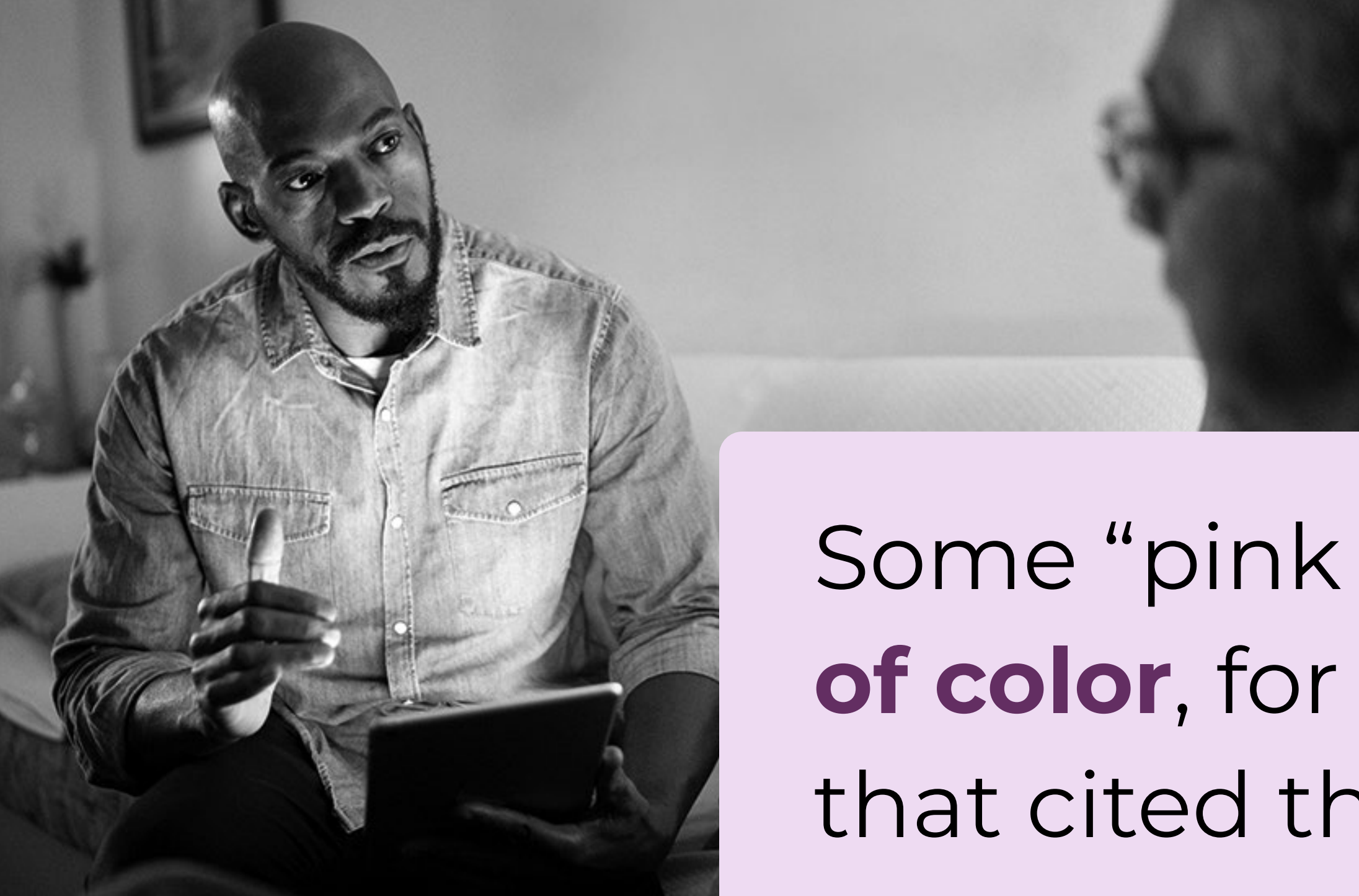
“If we can get 10,000 people paying the six bucks a month, I’ll cover the s**** out of the county.”

The Downside of Digital

The spread of digital access has **enabled misinformation and disinformation**, especially through websites designed to look like local news



These are sometimes called **“pink slime,”** in reference to the animal byproducts that constitute meat in some fast-food restaurants



Some “pink slime” websites **target communities of color**, for example with anti-vaccine messages that cited the Tuskegee syphilis experience

They pose a threat to democracy when they publish information **aimed to mislead or alienate Black voters**, who accounted for 48% of registration growth since 2020

Some of the most visible “local news” sites in Georgia are neither independent nor local.

- Metric Media has 1,000+ websites nationwide, including 30 in Georgia. It has been **associated with conservative candidates.**
- All on Georgia, present in 20+ Georgia counties, **was founded by a Republican former state representative.** Many stories are bylined “AllonGeorgia” indicating no local reporters.
- Newsbreak, which calls itself a local news app, **simply aggregates stories.**

Understanding Georgia

Georgia has **10.8 million** people and **159 counties**.

It's the **13th fastest growing state** in terms of numeric change.

The poverty rate of **14%** is **higher than the national average** of **11.6%**.

Atlanta Metropolitan and coastal areas, including Savannah, are **experiencing growth**, while the **rural population is shrinking**.

The **white population is declining**—from **65%** in 2000 to **52%** in 2020
By 2040, no single ethnic or racial group will make up more than **50%** of the state's population.

66

This demographic shift will prove to be a challenge to legacy media and traditional coverage models. These brands are haunted by a century of cultural incompetency along with outright racist practices. African Americans in particular often view coverage efforts by long-time traditional newspapers, weekly and daily, with skepticism.”

GEORGIA NEWS LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS REPORT

Georgia's media ecosystem is in **critical condition.**

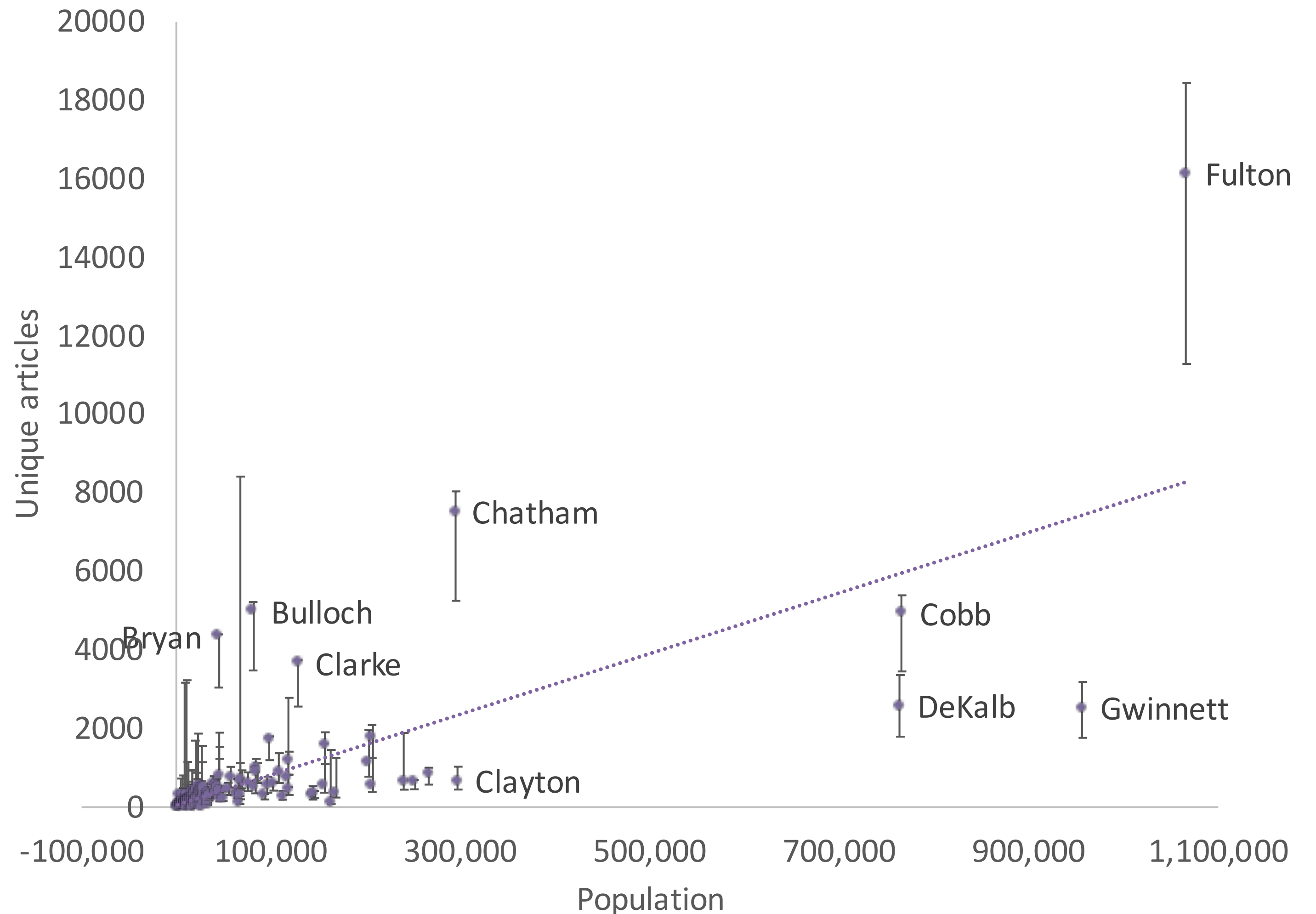
- 24 daily newspapers (down 35% from 2013) having an **average circulation of 1%** of the state's population.
- Local news outlets **struggle with financial stability** and sustainable business models.
- Survivors are being **purchased by large chains** that are consolidating operations; Augusta Chronicle is now printed in Gastonia, NC — 3 hours away.
- Local advertising **revenue is going to Google and Facebook.**
- Black and Hispanic **communities are underserved by media**; Native American population are barely served at all.

Existing outlets aren't meeting needs

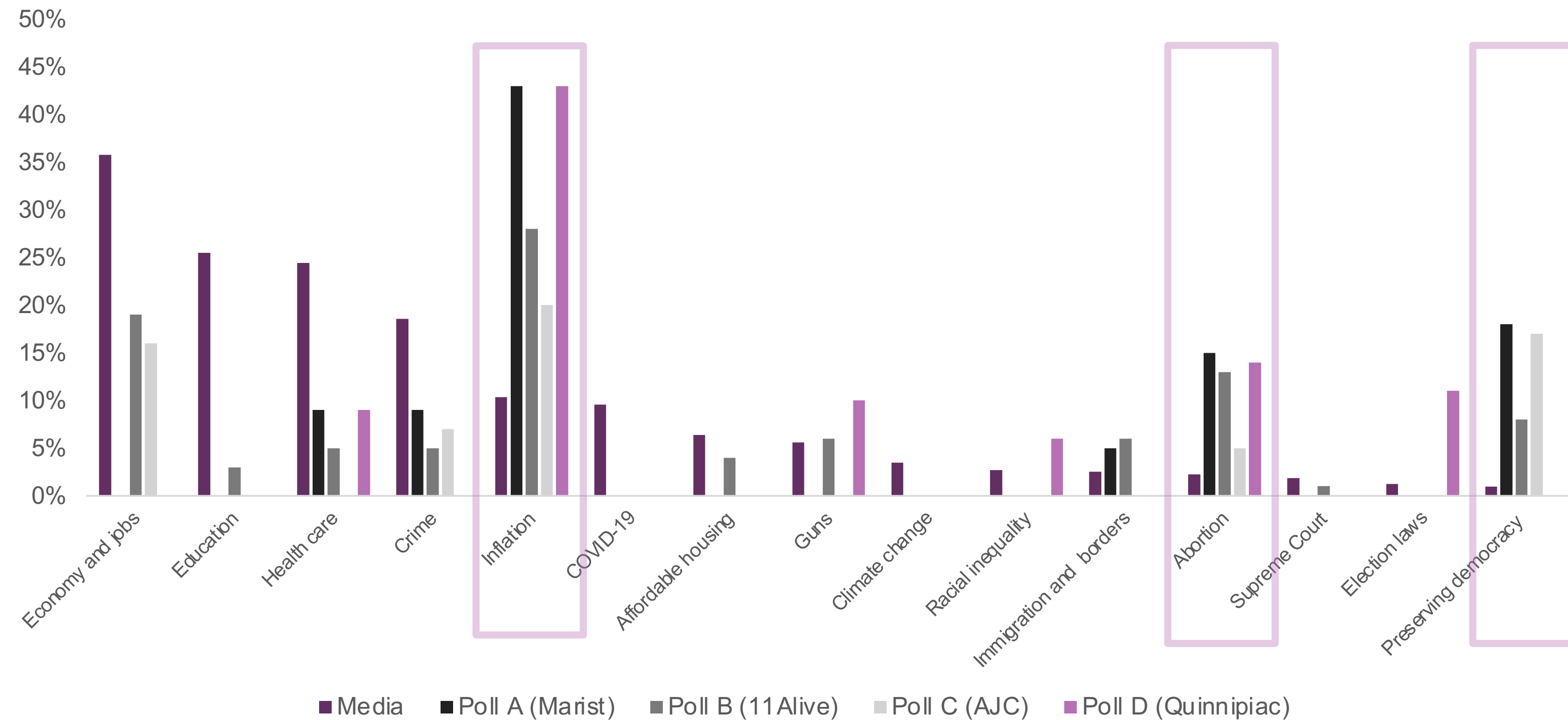
Many counties get **less coverage than expected** based on their population, according to an analysis by researchers at the Center for Media Engagement.

NOTE: BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF 187,422 ARTICLES FROM GEORGIA NEWS SITES POSTED BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 15 AND OCTOBER 15, 2022 AND LOCATIONS MENTIONED IN 10+ SENTENCES AND ORGANIZATIONS MENTIONED IN 10+ ARTICLES

Georgia counties by population size and media coverage



News coverage doesn't fully align with people's interests

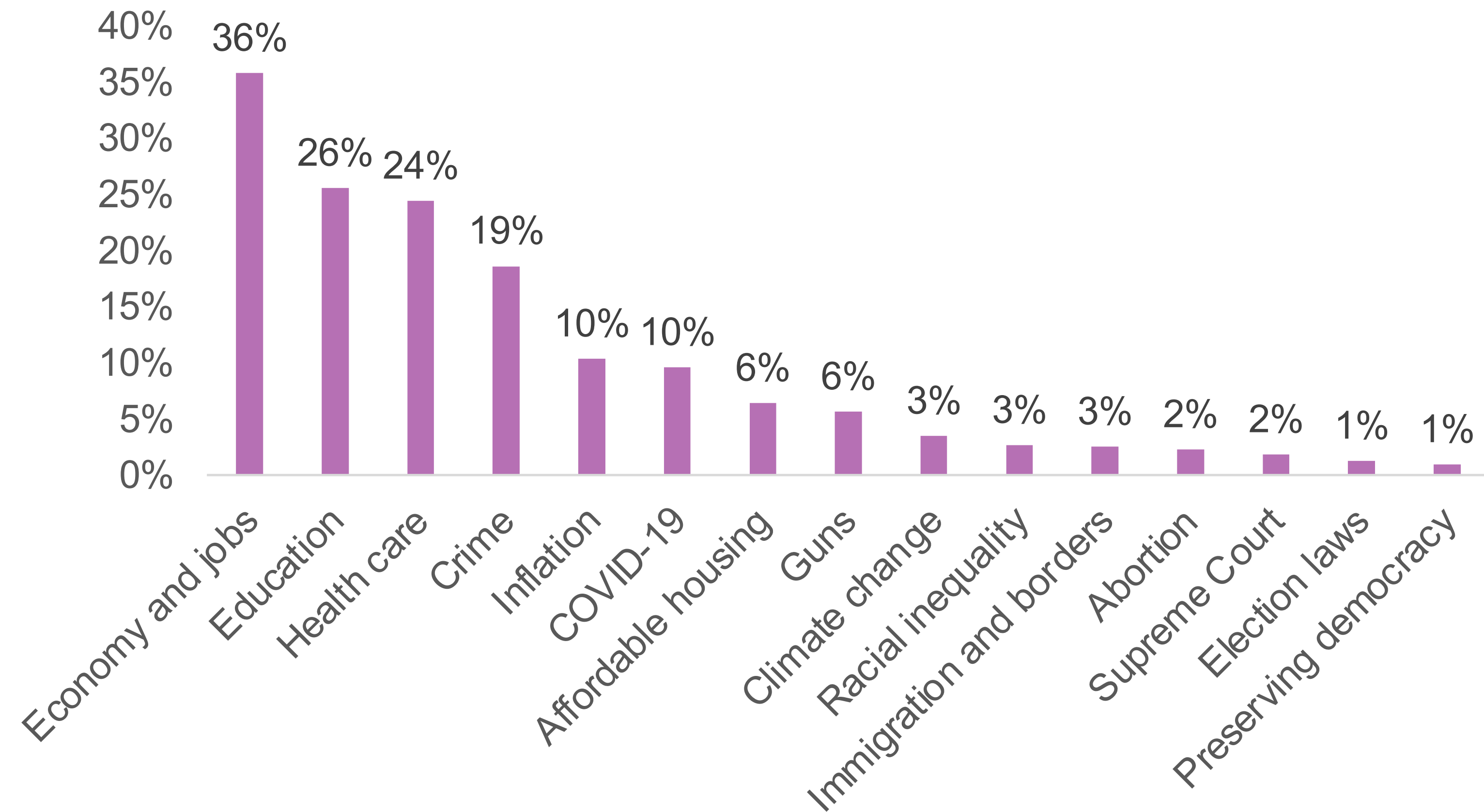


Inflation, abortion, and preserving democracy / election laws were among the most important issues to Georgia residents, according to various polls.

NOTES: THE COMPARISON WARRANTS SOME CAVEATS AS THE QUESTION WORDING AND RESPONSE VARIED ACROSS THE POLLS, SOME POLLS WERE OF SUBPOPULATIONS OF GEORGIA (E.G. LIKELY VOTERS), AND THE POLLS WERE NOT FIELDLED ACROSS THE ENTIRE TIME PERIOD OF OUR MEDIA ANALYSIS. SEE MORE DETAILS IN THE FULL REPORT.

Yet **economy and jobs, education, and health care** were the topics most commonly covered in the Georgia media.

Average percent of articles per Georgia news site mentioning each topic

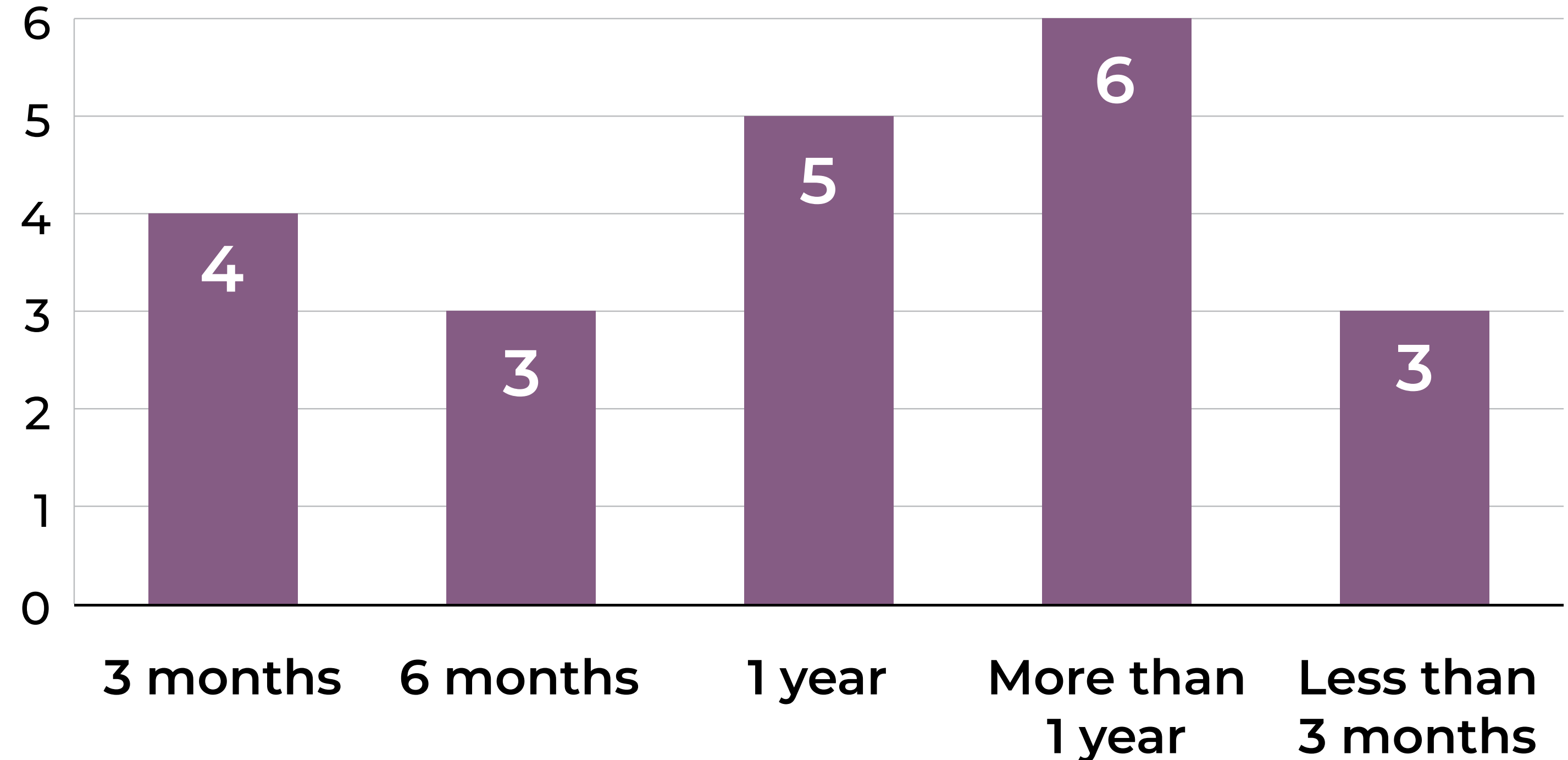


NOTES: BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF 187,422 ARTICLES AND 141 FACEBOOK POSTS ACROSS 228 GEORGIA NEWS SITES FROM SEPTEMBER 15 TO OCTOBER 15, 2022.

MANY PUBLISHERS ARE STRUGGLING TO STAY AFLOAT

14% of publishers have only enough cash on hand to **fund 3 months of operations**

Q: “Financially speaking, how healthy is your organization? How long could your organization survive on current cash reserves?”

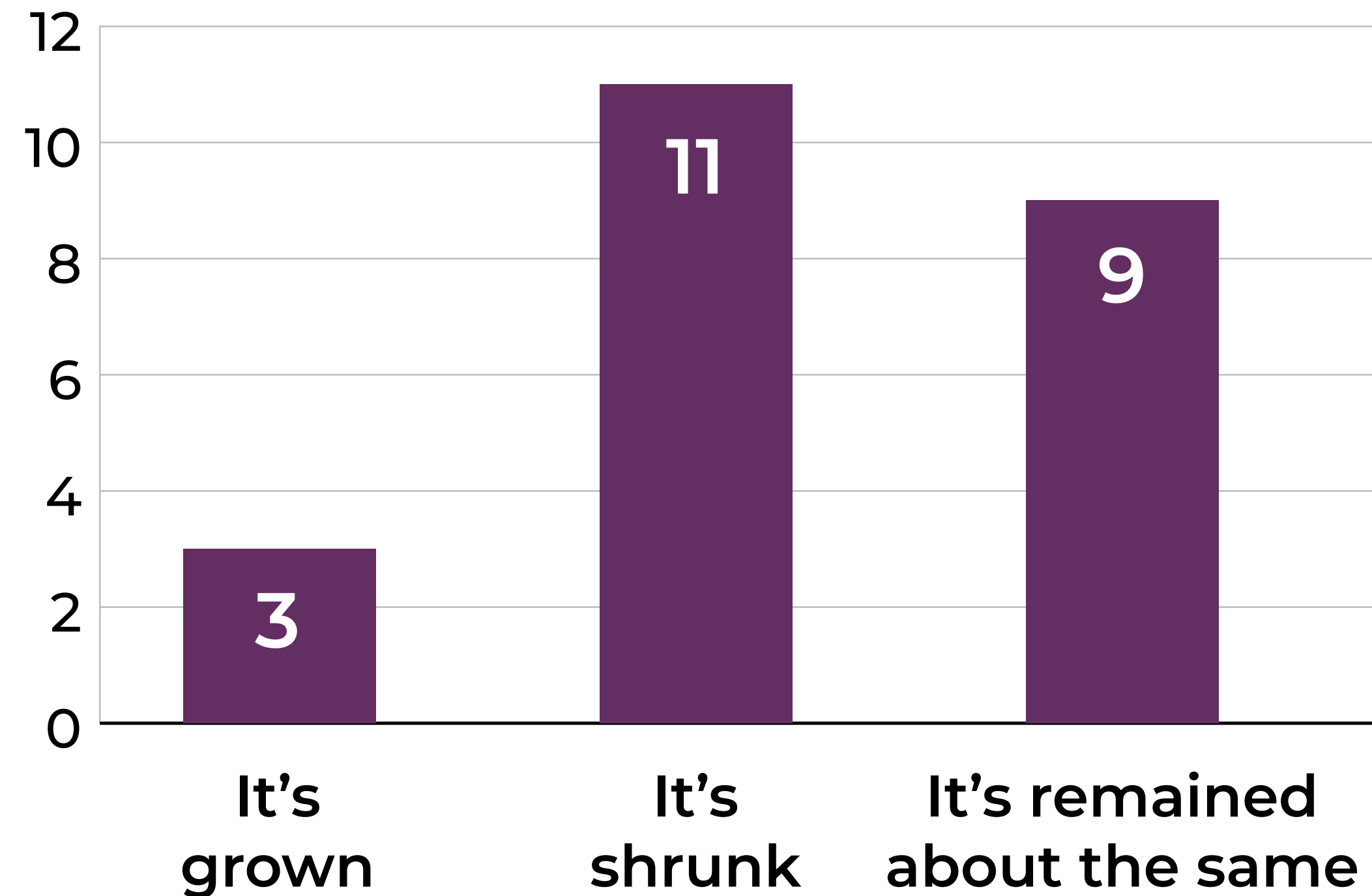


RESPONDENTS TO PIVOT FUND SURVEY OF GEORGIA PRESS ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

SUBSCRIPTIONS AREN'T COMING CLOSE TO REPLACING AD REVENUE

48% of publishers say their **circulation has shrunk** in the past 5 years

Q: “During the past five years, which best describes your circulation?”



RESPONDENTS TO GEORGIA PRESS ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP POLL

NONPROFITS AND JOURNALISM STUDENTS TRY TO FILL GAPS



Capitol Beat

News Service Bureau

Capitol Beat is a nonprofit founded specifically to cover state government.

The Red & Black

The Red and Black is the University of Georgia student newspaper. It provides valuable local coverage of Athens.



The Oglethorpe Echo, in Lexington, filled out its newsroom with UGA journalism students and became a nonprofit.

Legacy Media Is Not Giving Up



Dublin Courier Herald Publishing Co. **has actually expanded** and now has 14 titles.

“Good old community journalism, it works,” said DuBose Porter, the publishing company’s chairman.
“We’re reconnecting communities.”

The True Citizen

True Citizen in Waynesboro is 140 years old.

“Weekly newspapers aren’t as threatened as the dailies in bigger cities because we don’t have as much competition for ad dollars, like TV, radio and other media,” said Roy Chalker, True Citizen editor and publisher.

“We’ve expanded our coverage of rural communities — if they have local government, we try to be there to let people know what their elected officials are doing.”

Black Georgians Aren't Convinced

Even though the Dublin Courier Herald Publishing Co. has a presence in Warner Robins, Centreville and Perry, Rutha Jackson launched the African American Tri-City Newspaper.

“We publish the main events and issues pertaining to the African American community with the idea of getting people more involved and impacting future generations,” Jackson said.

Still, the initial run was only 300 print copies, and she continues to search for a sustainable model.



Sherrell Byrd is another leader who sees the shortage of coverage of the Black community as an opportunity, but her quarterly lifestyle magazine is not yet profitable.



“

Our community is predominantly Black. While there are other print publications in South Georgia, they don't reflect that. **I wanted to create something that showcases Black people's work** and how they're contributing to the community.”

SHERRELL BYRD – ALBANY, GA

WHAT'S NEXT?

- ✓ Stabilizing Georgia's media ecosystem requires investing in existing experiments as well as cultivating audiences on the platforms they use.

- ✓ The impact of investing in legacy news outlets is limited by their shrinking reach to Gen Z and Millennials, as well as a skepticism from communities of color.

- ✓ Investing in outlets such as BeeTV, Notivision, Georgia Virtue, and Pasa La Voz can help shift power dynamics through deep community engagement

WHAT'S NEXT?

- ✓ Developing a social media incubator can help startups reliant on social media to mature into sustainable websites or newsletters

- ✓ Closing the digital divide gap is essential. Only 72% of rural households have broadband, compared to 87% overall in the U.S., and 86% in Georgia.

- ✓ Building cultural competency in newsrooms and avoiding elitism when covering ethnically and economically diverse populations is key.

The stakes are high.

- Georgia's local news landscape is **unstable, incomplete, and unequal**.
- As the state becomes more and more diverse, **local news has never been more important**. It can counter disinformation, boost civic participation, build trust, and connect people to their communities.
- **Building local news requires meeting people where they are**—on the platforms they use, through people they trust, working with different business models
- Innovators are showing that **it's possible to meet the information needs of diverse communities**—and of citizens in a democracy.

Methodology

The Georgia News Collaborative commissioned researchers from the Pivot Fund and University of Texas to conduct a landscape analysis of the state's media ecosystem.

PART I: GEORGIA LOCAL NEWS LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Jean Marie Brown | Director of Research, Evaluation & Impact, The Pivot Fund

Tracie Powell | Editor, CEO, The Pivot Fund

Jessica Leigh Lebos | Georgia Freelance Writer & Researcher

Sheena Louise Roetman | Georgia Writer and Editor

Pivot Fund researchers used information from the Census Bureau, datausa.io and Pew Research to complete a holistic approach to analyzing the ecosystem. The researchers conducted interviews across the state with key stakeholders and polled members of the Georgia Press Association.

FULL REPORT:
[HTTPS://BIT.LY/3SBISMI](https://bit.ly/3SBISMI)

Methodology

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PART II: OVERVIEW OF THE GEORGIA MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

Yujin Kim, Emily Graham, Caroline Murray, and Natalie Stroud

Center for Media Engagement

Moody College of Communication

University of Texas at Austin

The Center for Media Engagement, commissioned by the Georgia News Collaborative, analyzed news stories published between September 15 and October 15, 2022 from 228 Georgia news organizations. The firm Marquee Data helped us to copy the text of articles from each news organization's website, known as "scraping." In total we analyzed 187,422 scraped articles from Georgia news websites and 141 Facebook posts from three outlets that existed only on Facebook. We used computational approaches to examine the topics mentioned, locations mentioned in 10+ sentences across all the coverage, and organizations mentioned 10+ articles across all the coverage.



Thank you.



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