

Survey Report

2013 California Community Newspaper Readership Survey [California Newspaper Publishers Association]

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The Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute
School of Journalism
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Introduction

The purpose of the 2013 California Community Newspaper Readership Survey was to examine attitudes, perceptions, and readership of local residents about community newspapers in general, and publication of public notices in print and other platforms in particular on behalf of the California Newspaper Publishers Association (CNPA). Center for Advanced Social Research (CASR) of the Reynolds Journalism Institute and Missouri's School of Journalism completed 498 telephone interviews (using both landline and cell phone numbers) with adults aged 18 or older in California in April and May 2013.

Survey Instrument

The survey questionnaire was designed to collect the following information.

- Readership of community newspapers
- Values of community newspapers to local residents
- Primary reason of not reading the community newspapers
- Source of information about public meeting or notices
- Likelihood of seeking out public/legal notices if posted on the Internet
- Readership & perceptions of public notices in community newspapers
- Primary sources of information about local community
- Use of the Internet for local news and information
- Use of ads in community newspapers
- Use of coupons from both online and non-online sources
- Demographics

Sampling Methodology

The sample of telephone numbers of the survey was randomly generated based on the zip codes from the membership database of the California Newspaper Publishers Association. The random digit aspect of the sample was designed to minimize respondent bias and provide representation of both listed and unlisted telephone numbers (including not-yet-listed). The

design of the sample ensured this representation by random generation of the last two digits of telephone numbers selected on the basis of valid area codes and telephone exchanges.

To reach an adequate number of young adults, other demographic groups such as Hispanics, and the “cell phone only” cohort (AAPOR, 2010), both landline and cell phone number frames were included in the sample.

NOTE FROM PNRC: FROM THIS POINT FORWARD, INFORMATION THAT DOESN'T PERTAIN TO PUBLIC NOTICE WAS DELETED.

Source of information about public meeting or notices

Respondents were then asked about the sources of information that they usually rely on about public meetings or public notices. Table 4 displays their responses.

TABLE 4: When you are seeking information on public meetings or notices, which sources do you usually rely on for this news?

[Check all that apply]

Description of response categories	Percent (%)
Other Internet or online sources	48.0
Local newspaper	38.6
Local television	30.3
Word of mouth	26.5
Friends/Co-workers	24.1
Local newspaper's website	21.7
Local radio	19.5
Family members	16.7
Magazines	9.8
Other – specify	9.6

The survey shows that the Internet or online sources are now an important source of information about public meetings or notices, as 48% of residents in California would usually rely on them. This is clearly an indication of how powerful the new media have become in people's daily lives. It also implies that online platforms, now including smartphone and tablet, have the potential of becoming an effective source of information about public meetings or notices for the newspaper industry.

Local newspaper is still an effective medium for delivering information about public notices, as nearly 39% of residents would rely on printed local newspapers, and 22% would access local newspaper's website for the information.

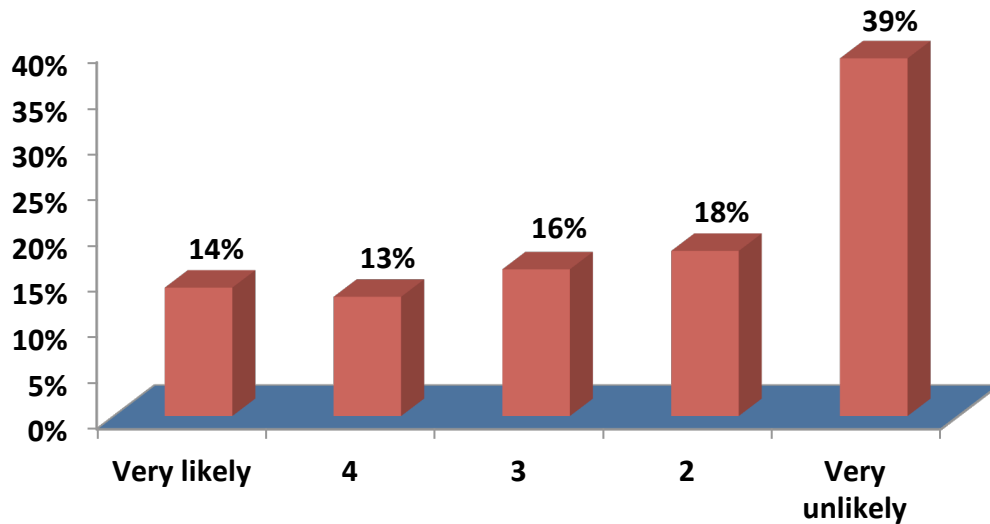
It should also be noticed that there was no dominant source of information about public meetings or public notices, according to the survey participants. This is truly a reflection of today's new media environment in which audience members now have more sources of information, receive more information, and share more information.

Likelihood of seeking out public/legal notices if posted on the Internet

When asked *"how likely do you think you would be to seek out and read public and legal notices if they were posted on the Internet?"* a combined 57% of respondents answered "unlikely" (39% "very unlikely" and 18% "somewhat unlikely"), whereas a combined 27% said "likely" (14% "very likely" and 13% "somewhat likely"). Both "likely" and "unlikely" respondents also provided their reasons; they can be found in Appendix B – Open-Ended Responses.

Regression analysis shows that age was significantly and negatively associated with the likelihood measure, suggesting that younger adults would seek out or read public and legal notices online more likely than their older counterparts. Other demographic measures such as education, income, gender, and length of residence did not reach statistical significance.

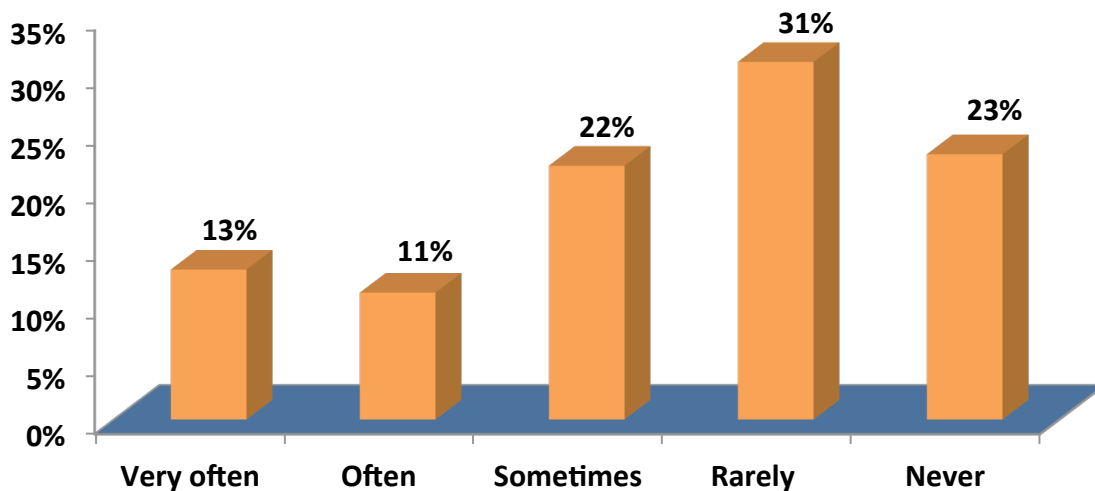
How likely do you think you would be to seek out and read public and legal notices if they were posted on the Internet?
[n = 490]



Readership & perceptions of public notices in community newspapers

As shown below, 13% of readers “very often” read legal or public notices in a newspaper, 11% “often,” whereas 31% said “rarely,” and 23% “never.”

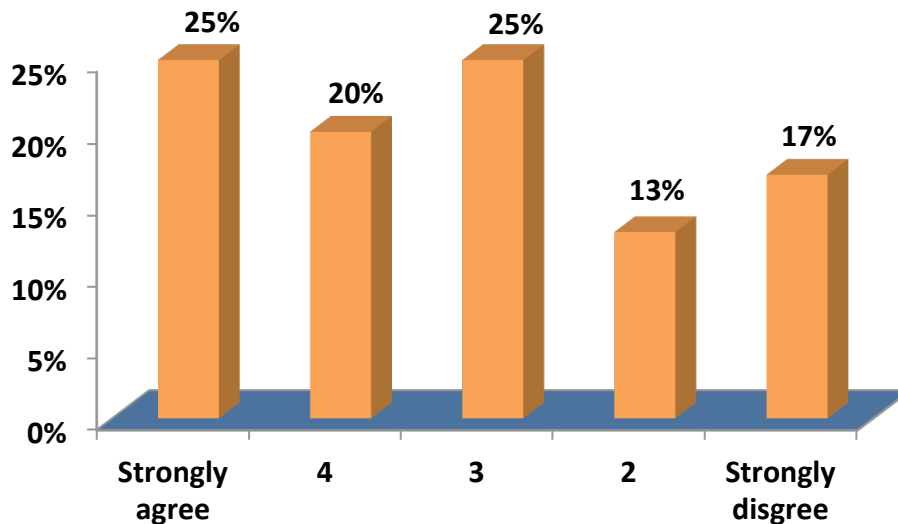
How often do you or other members of your household read legal or public notices in a newspaper?
[n = 298]



Regression analysis shows that frequency of readership of legal or public notices in a newspaper had a negative association with level of education, and a positive association with ownership of homes. These findings suggest that (1) people with lower level of education read the notices significantly more often than those with higher level of education, and (2) people that own their homes read legal or public notices in newspapers significantly more often than those who did not own their homes.

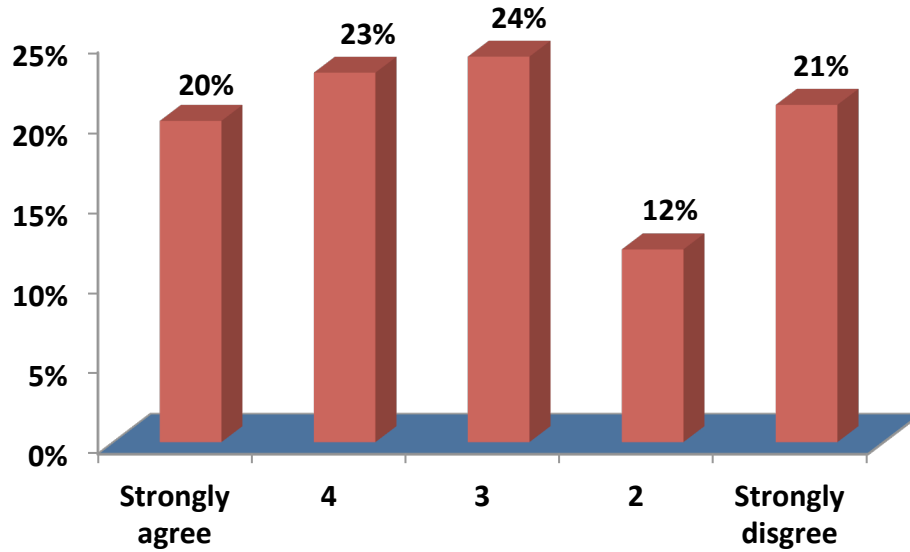
The survey then asked respondents a series of questions designed to collect their opinions and perceptions of publishing public notices in community newspapers. Responses were coded on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 being “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree.”

**The requirement to publish public notices in local newspapers
helps keep local officials more honest**
[n = 478]

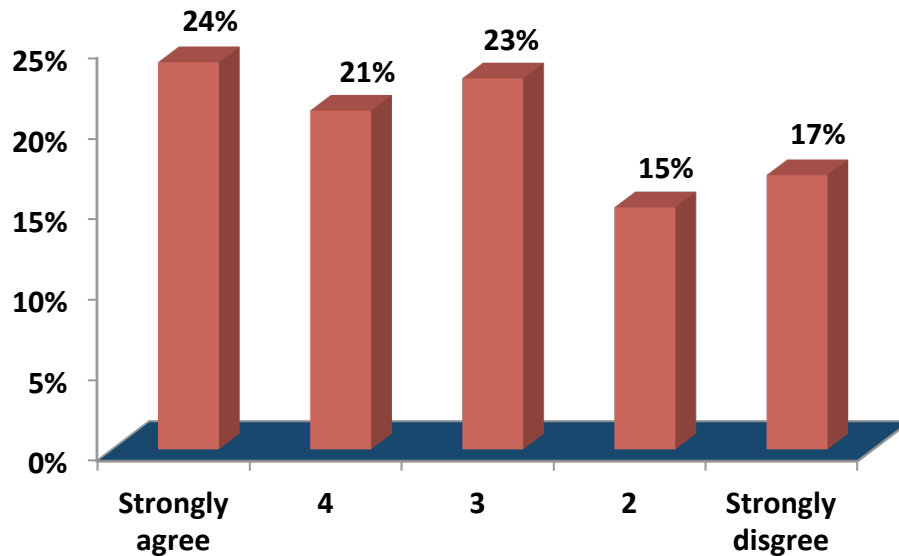


As shown above, 45% of respondents agreed that the requirement to publish public notices in local newspapers helps keep local officials more honest, whereas 30% disagreed. One-fourths of respondents (25%) chose a neutral stand.

**Publishing public notices in local newspapers helps
make local officials more careful about how they spend taxpayers' money**
[n = 477]



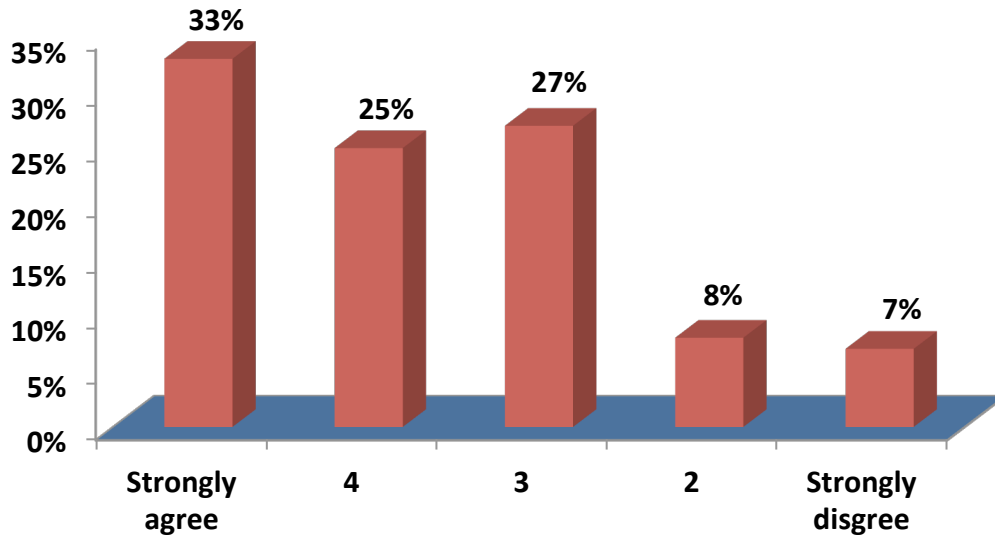
Publishing public notices in local newspapers is money well spent
[n = 484]



Similarly, 43% of respondents agreed that publishing public notices in local newspapers also helps make local officials more careful about how to spend taxpayers' money, and one-third (33%) disagreed.

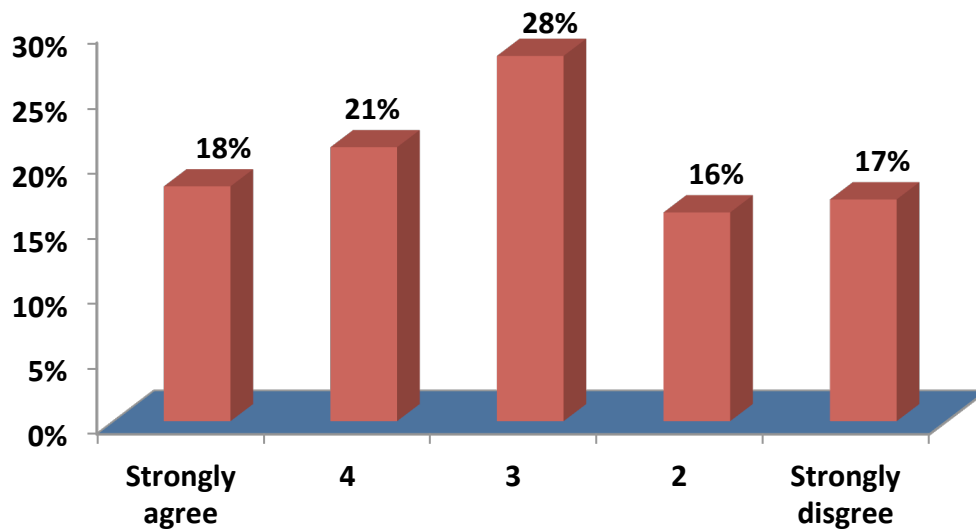
Forty-five percent of respondents agreed that publishing public notices in local newspapers is money well spent, while 32% disagreed.

Local residents are better served when an independent party like a newspaper is required to provide notices rather than government agencies
[n = 465]



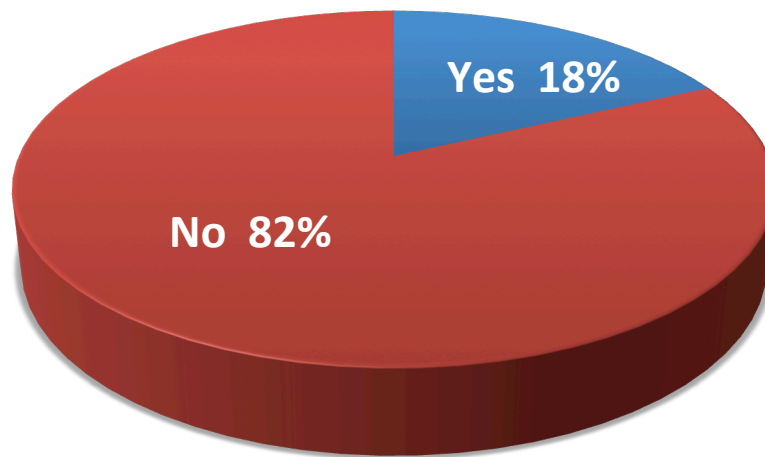
Residents in California liked the idea that newspapers, rather than government agencies, publish public notices to inform the public, as 58% of respondents agreed that local residents would be better served when a newspaper is required to provide notices. Only 15% disagreed.

My newspaper is a government watchdog that protects me, my family and my community by publishing stories that hold government, politicians and all other powerful institutions accountable
[n = 292]

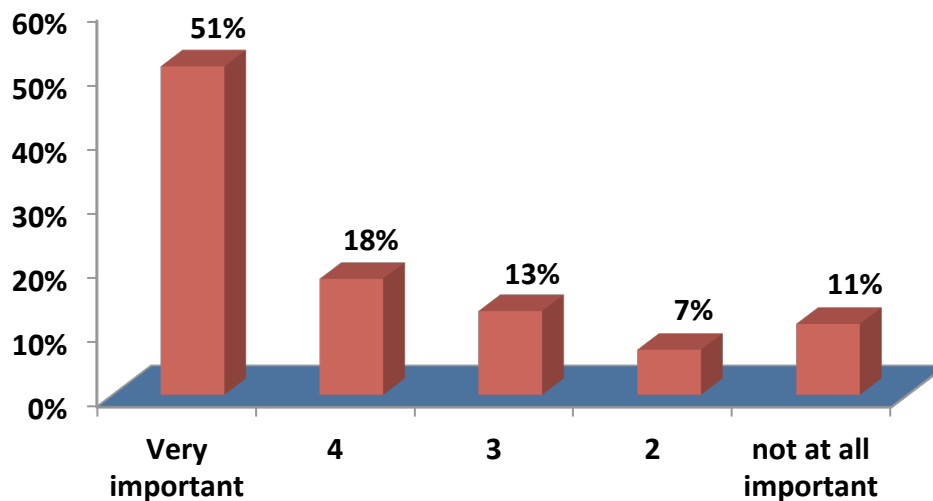


When asked “*my newspaper is a government watchdog that protects me, my family and my community by publishing stories that hold government, politicians and all other powerful institutions accountable?*” readers of community newspapers split their opinions, as 39% agreed, and 34% disagreed. Their differences in opinions could be a reflection of how a given community newspaper has been doing in its function of being a watchdog.

**Do you think it is appropriate for a government agency
to notify the public ONLY on its own website about its activities?
By activities we mean things such as giving out government contracts
or approving a hazardous waste site**
[n = 480]



**How important do you think it is for government agencies to advertise important activities in newspapers,
like notifying delinquent taxpayers that their property could be seized or raising fees or rates?**
[n = 489]



Majority of residents in California (82%) did not think it appropriate for a government agency to notify the public ONLY on its own website about its activities. Similarly, 68% of respondents felt it either very or somewhat important that government agencies advertise important activities in newspapers, like notifying delinquent taxpayers that their property could be seized or raising fees or rates. These findings reinstate the important role that community newspapers could play in notifying the public about government activities, in both print and online platforms.

TABLE I: Mean scores regarding perceptions of publishing public notice in newspapers

Question Items	Mean Score	Sd. Deviation
1. The requirement to publish ... officials more honest	3.22	1.41
2. Publishing ... how they spend taxpayers' money	3.10	1.41
3. Publishing public notices ... is money well spent	3.21	1.41
4. Local residents are better served ... agencies	3.68	1.21
5. * My newspaper is a government watchdog that ...	3.05	1.34

Notes:

1. The question items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
2. n = 498.
- * This question item was directed to readers of community newspapers (n = 299).