



a cybersecurity division of  MacPaw

Scams & Disinformation Survey Report

Intro

2024 brings the election season, and we can already see how malicious use of deepfakes and AI is hampering the American electoral contest. Incidents like fake Joe Biden robocalls are calling for a high level of alert and cybersecurity awareness from the public.

With this survey, we aimed to **examine the landscape of scams and disinformation in the United States**, as well as the ability of Americans to tell facts from fiction. We asked the American public about their encounters with fraudulent content, where it happened, and what they do now to protect themselves from being manipulated.

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Methodology

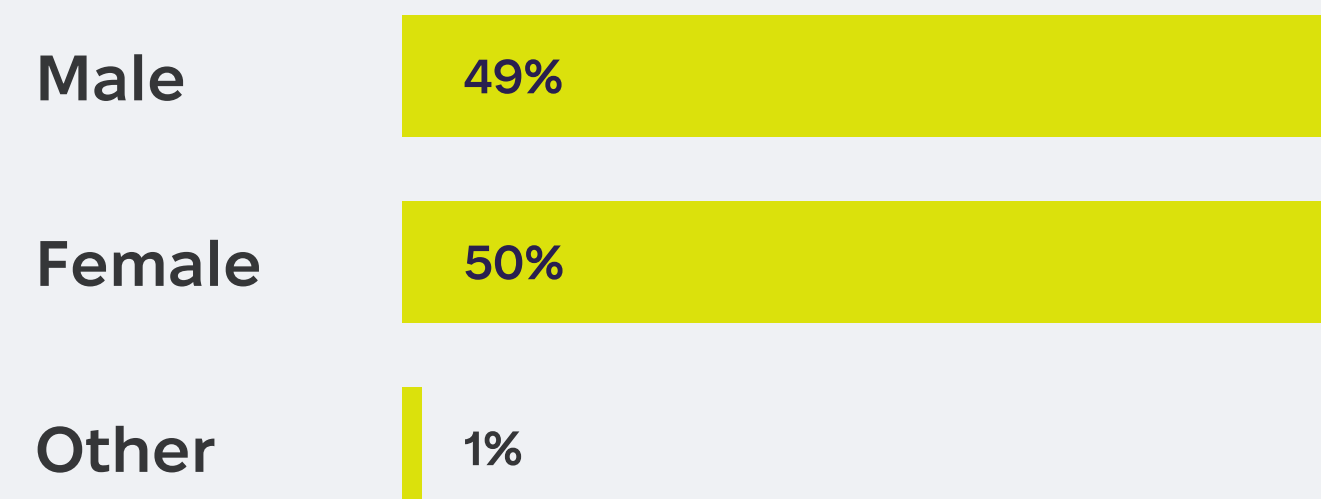
Method: Online survey

LOI: 15 min

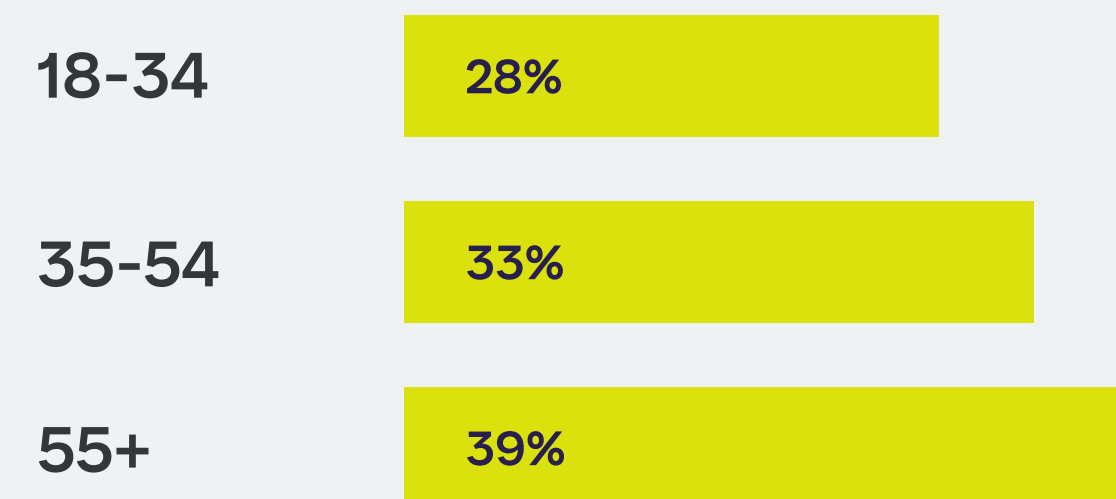
Sample: 1,035 respondents, USA, age 18+

Fieldwork: March 2024

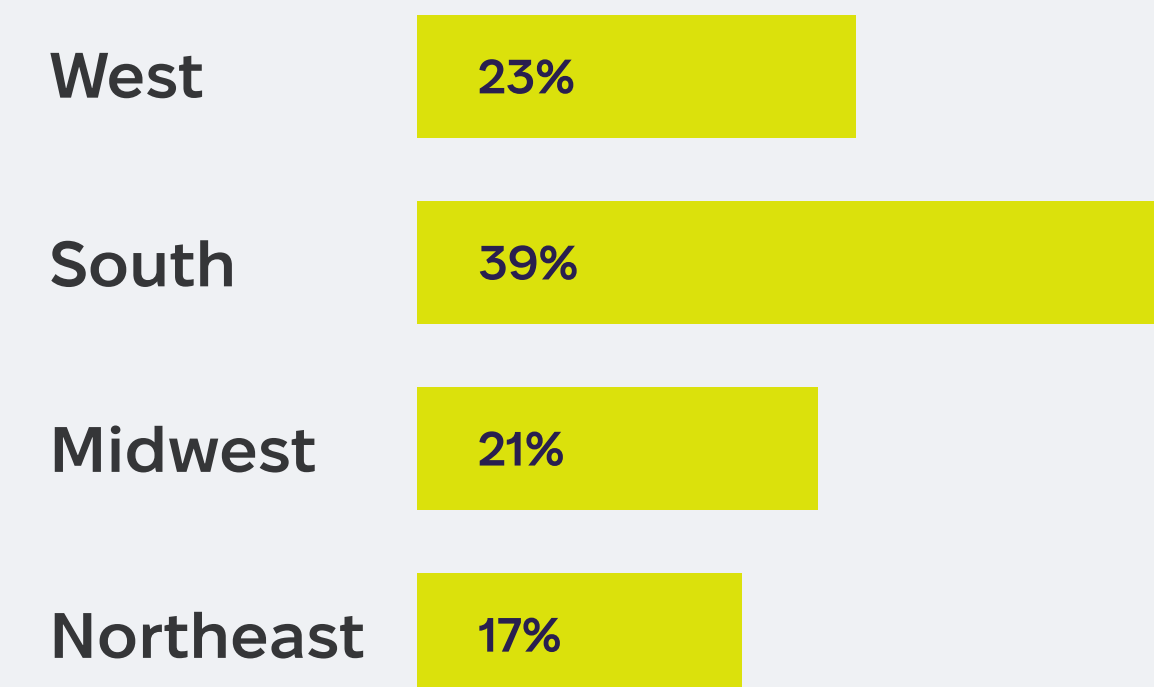
Gender



Age



Region



Key findings

67% of Americans have experienced at least one type of scam in the past 12 months.

Younger Americans are more susceptible to scams.

52% of Americans have experienced some type of political scam over the past year.

Half of Americans said they come across fake or manipulative news at least once a week.

64% of respondents believe that AI gives more advantage to scammers than those who fight them.

Most Americans expect to see misleading information on social media. Online news and podcasts are also ranking high.

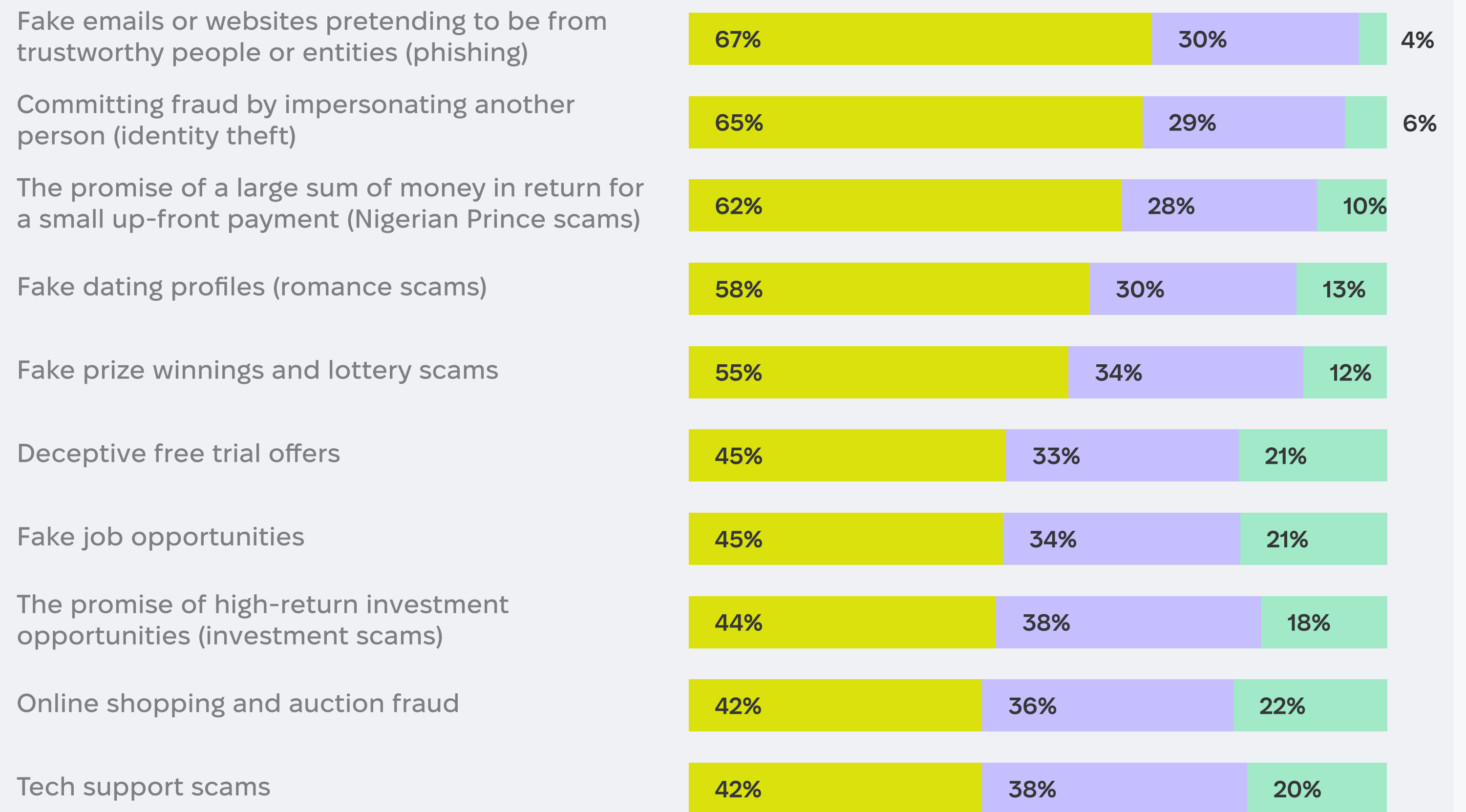
Scam awareness and encounters

Americans are generally less aware of political scams than of non-political fraud and phishing. Only 36% of respondents heard about deepfakes of politicians and knew how they work, which is alarming in the era of widespread AI use. At the same time, phishing, disinformation, and fake news are so common that the level of public concern for them doesn't hit the highest rates anymore. Instead, people are more worried about less frequent voting fraud or a type of scam they've never encountered before.

More than 90% of Americans heard about phishing, identity theft, and Nigerian prince scams.

What types of scams have you heard about over the past year?

- Yes, I heard, and I know how it works
- Yes, I heard, but I'm not sure how it works
- No, I haven't heard about this over the past year



In general, **67%** of Americans have experienced at least one type of scam in the past 12 months.

63% of those who heard about phishing have personally experienced or witnessed it.

The shares of respondents who experienced a certain type of scam over the past year.

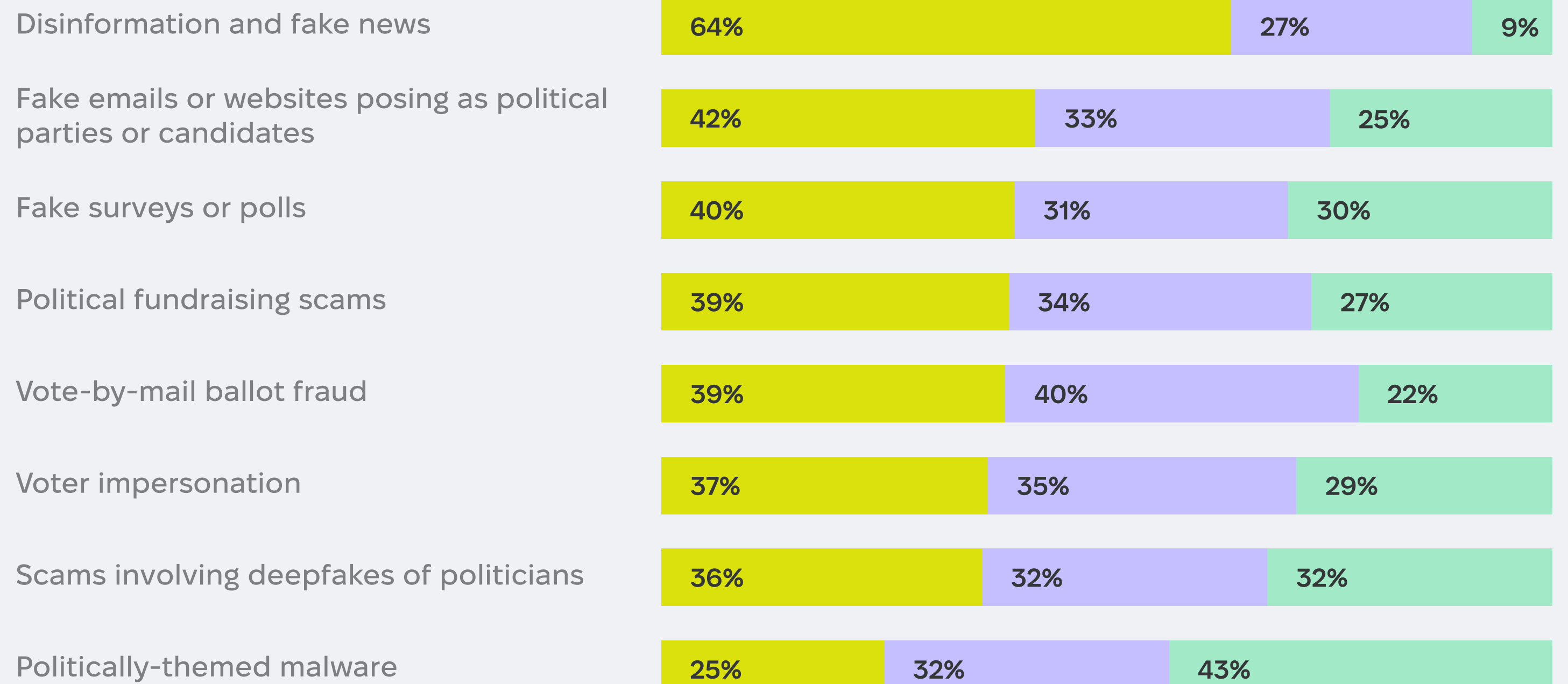


64% of Americans have never heard about scams with deepfakes of politicians or are unsure how they work.

On average, respondents are less aware of political scams than of non-political fraud and phishing.

What types of scams have you heard about over the past year?

- Yes, I heard, and I know how it works
- Yes, I heard, but I'm not sure how it works
- No, I haven't heard about this over the past year



52% of Americans experienced at least one type of political scam over the past year.

Most respondents have personally encountered disinformation and fake news.

The shares of respondents who experienced a certain type of scam over the past year.

Disinformation and fake news

42%

Fake surveys or polls

19%

Fake emails or websites posing as political parties or candidates

17%

Political fundraising scams

10%

Scams involving deepfakes of politicians

10%

Vote-by-mail ballot fraud

6%

Politically-themed malware

6%

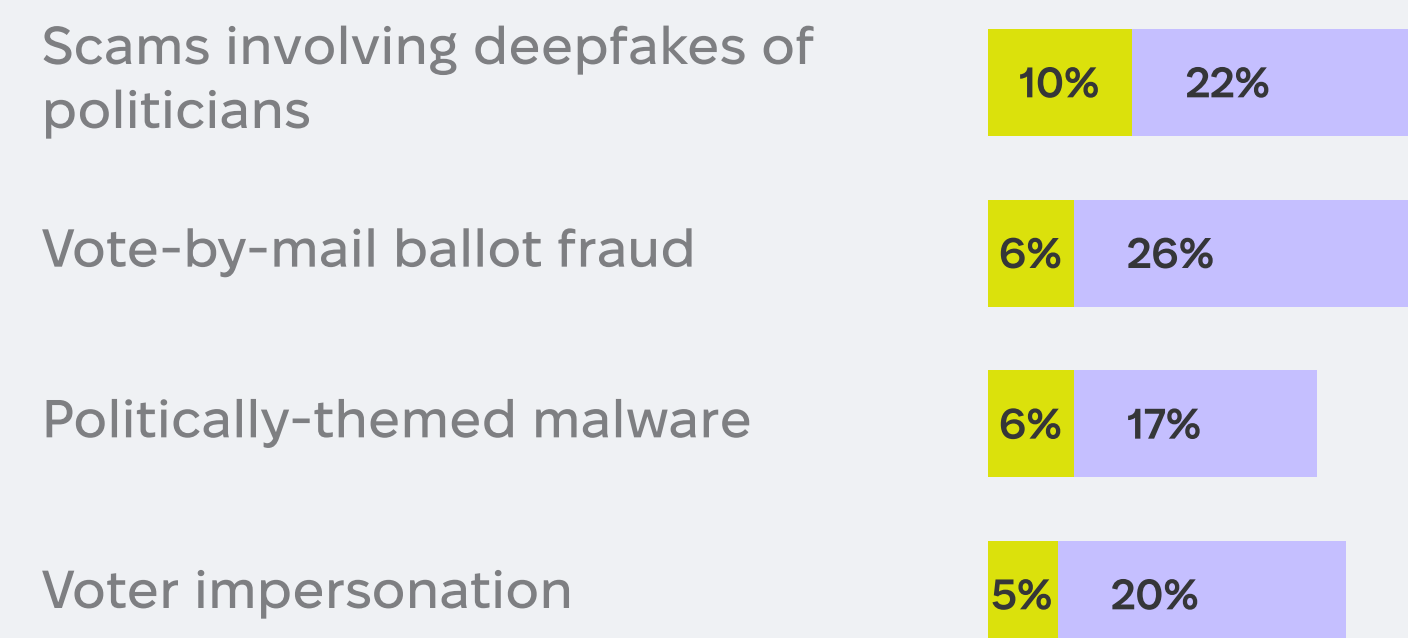
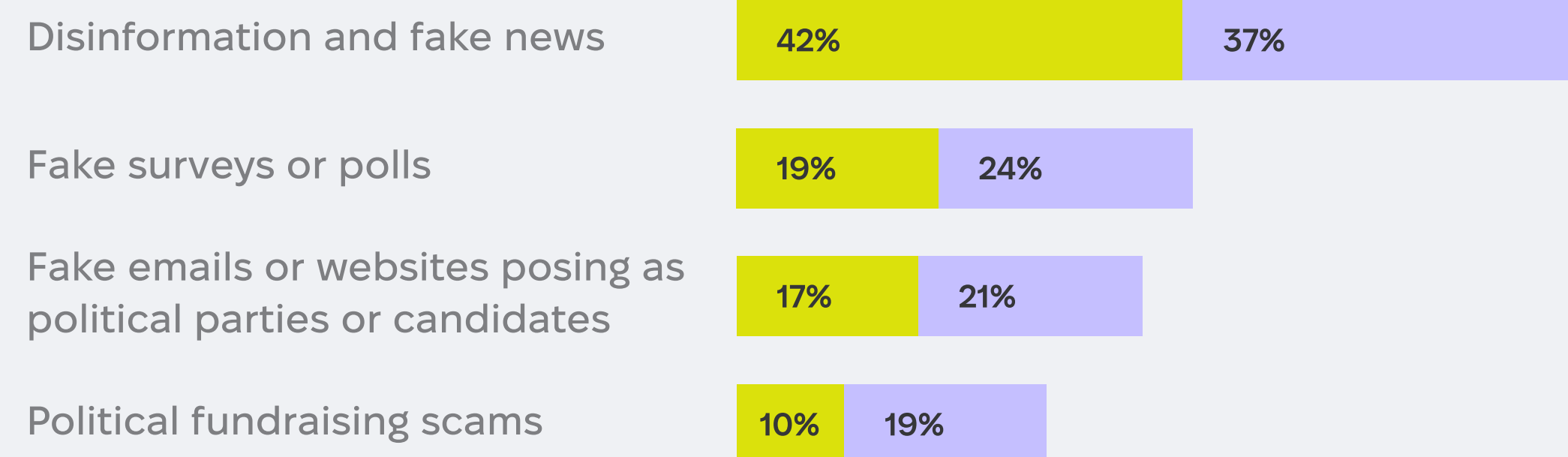
Voter impersonation

5%

Less common voting fraud is more concerning than widespread disinformation and fake news.

- Respondents are concerned about political scams even if they haven't personally experienced those.
- Respondents are less worried about disinformation and fake news, even though it occurs more frequently.

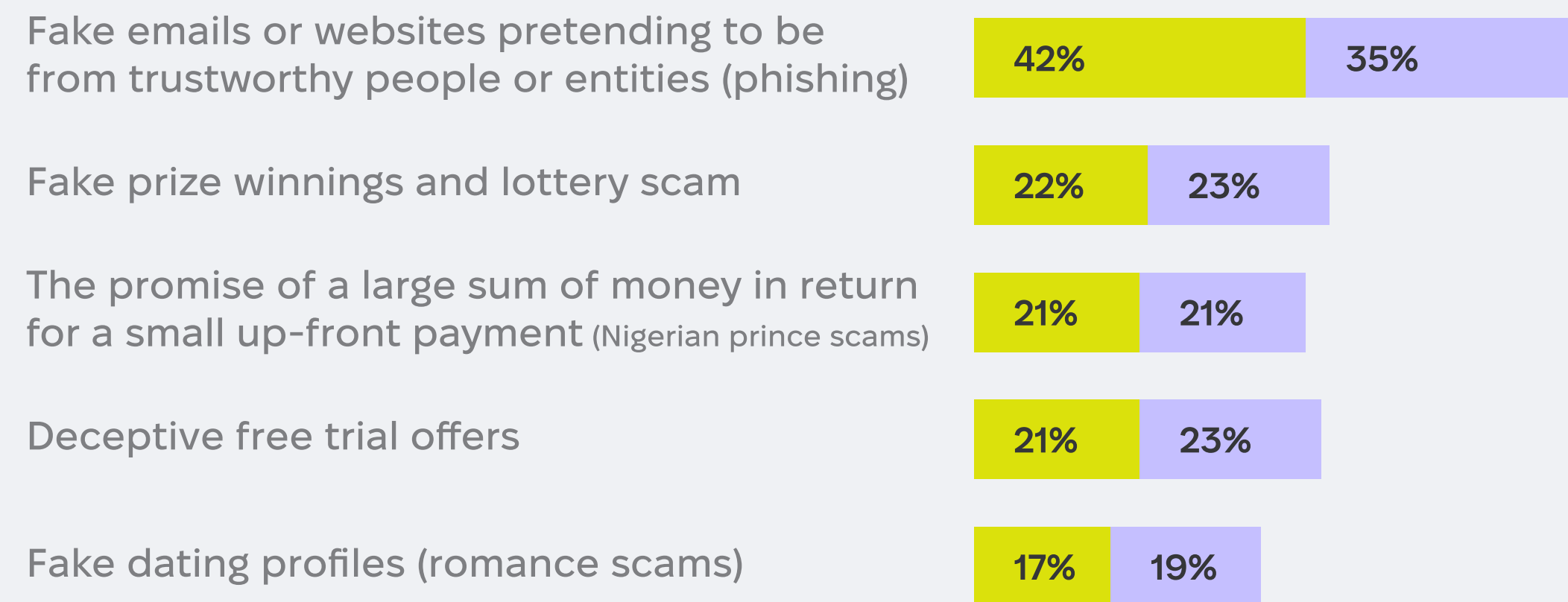
● Experience ● Concern



Similarly, Americans worry about identity theft even if they haven't personally experienced it.

- Although only **16%** of respondents have encountered identity theft, as much as **39%** are concerned about it.
- The share of Americans concerned about phishing is lower than the share of those who have personally experienced it.

● Experience ● Concern

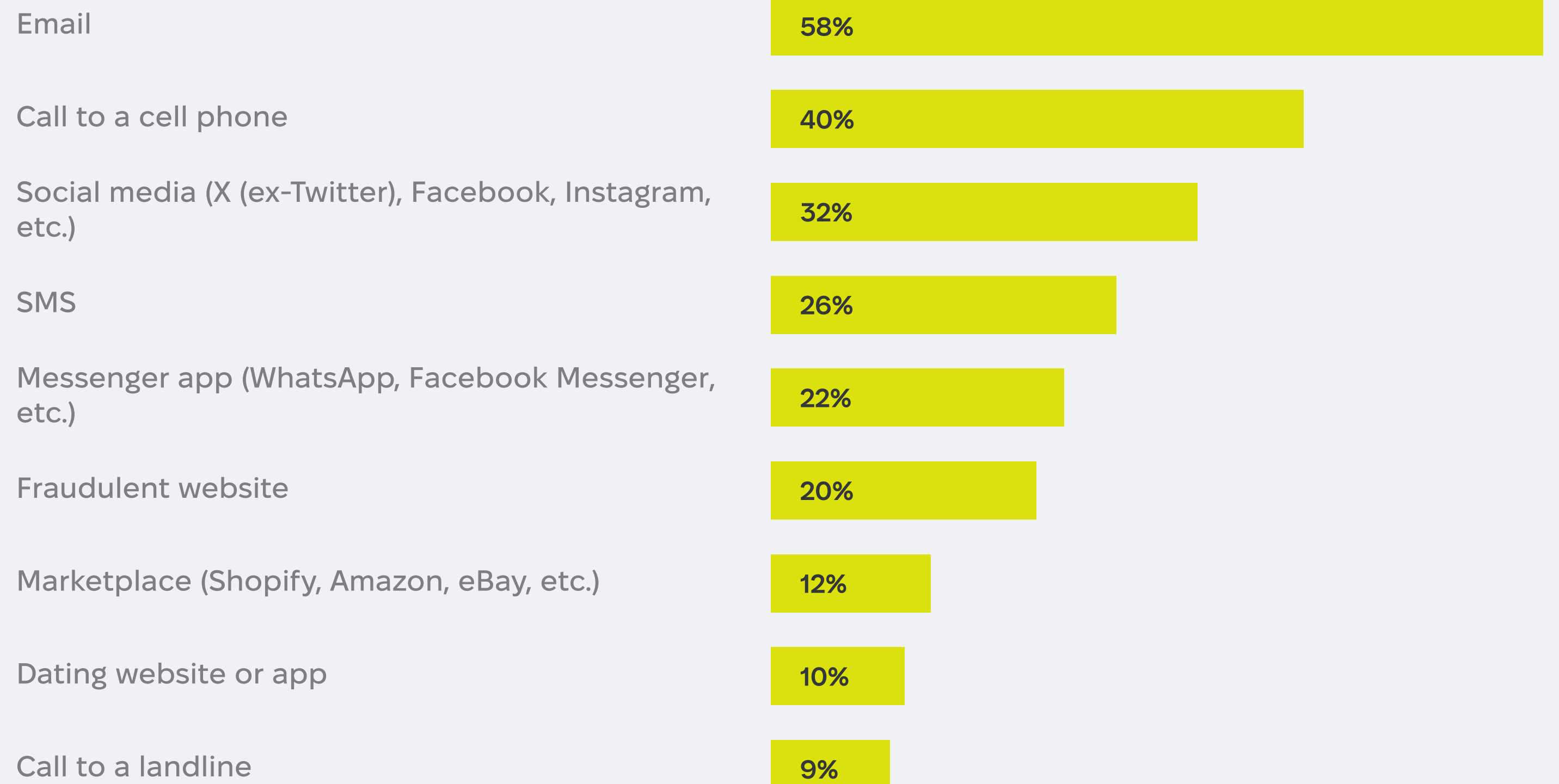


Dealing with scams

In 40% of encounters, scammers used phone calls to reach out to potential victims – alarming statistics while voice cloning tech is gaining momentum. Although most Americans are wary of the latest scam trends and don't engage with scammers, 1 in 4 interacts with them and deals with negative outcomes afterward. Surprisingly, it is younger people who are more susceptible to scams, especially while on social media and dating platforms.

Email is still the preferred medium for scammers.

What communication channels did the scammers use the last time you encountered a scam?



Dating platforms and social media are where scammers prey on young adults.

Americans aged **18-24** are more susceptible to scams on dating websites/apps and social media than older age groups.

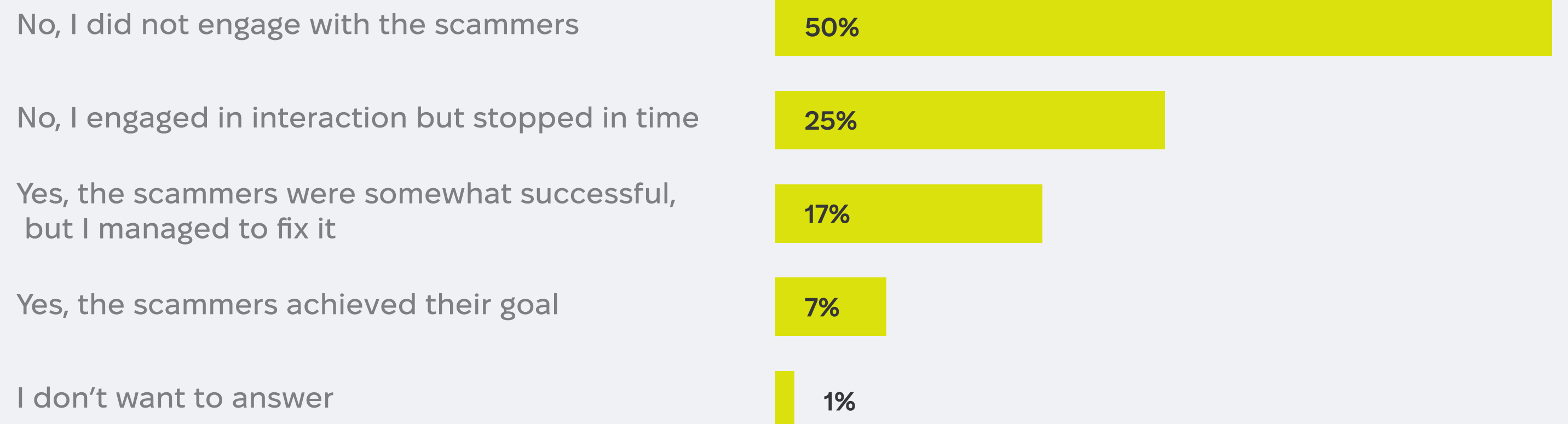
18% of 18-24 year-olds came across scams on dating platforms (compared to 10% overall).

50% of the 18-24 group has encountered scams on social media (against 32% overall).

75% of those who faced a scam did not interact with scammers or managed to stop in time.

- One in four Americans dealt with negative outcomes from interacting with scammers.
- **56%** of respondents said they became much more careful online after facing a scam.

Were the scammers successful?



Surprisingly, **younger Americans** are more susceptible to scams.

65% of people aged 18-24 have engaged with scammers, compared to **35%** of those in the 65+ group.

31% of those under 35 faced negative consequences from scammer interactions, while only **17%** of the 55+ group experienced the same.

81% of Americans believe they do everything in their power to avoid online scams...

The share of respondents that agreed with the following statements.

Internet scams have become more sophisticated over the past few years.

85%

I do everything in my power to avoid online scams.

81%

No one is immune from becoming a victim of online scams.

80%

Now I'm better at identifying fakes and scams than before.

71%

AI technologies contribute to scams and fakes.

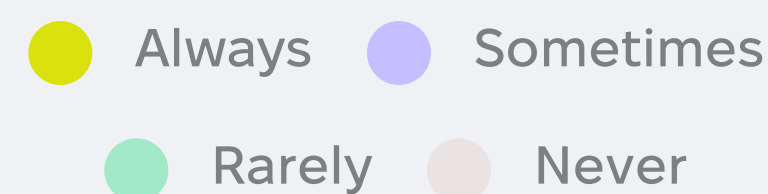
64%

AI technologies help detect and prevent scams and fakes.

44%

...but **only 39%** of respondents always report suspicious content or scams.

How often do you use the following measures?



I am cautious about "too good to be true" offers or calls for immediate action.



I limit the amount of personal information shared online and on social media platforms.



I use strong, unique passwords.



I take a thorough look at emails: senders' email addresses and the content inside.



I use anti-malware protection (antivirus and other security software).



I regularly update my software and operating system.



I take time to research online sellers and read reviews before making a purchase.



I verify the legitimacy of websites by checking their URL.



I report suspicious content or scams.



I stay informed about the latest tactics used by scammers.



Battling disinformation

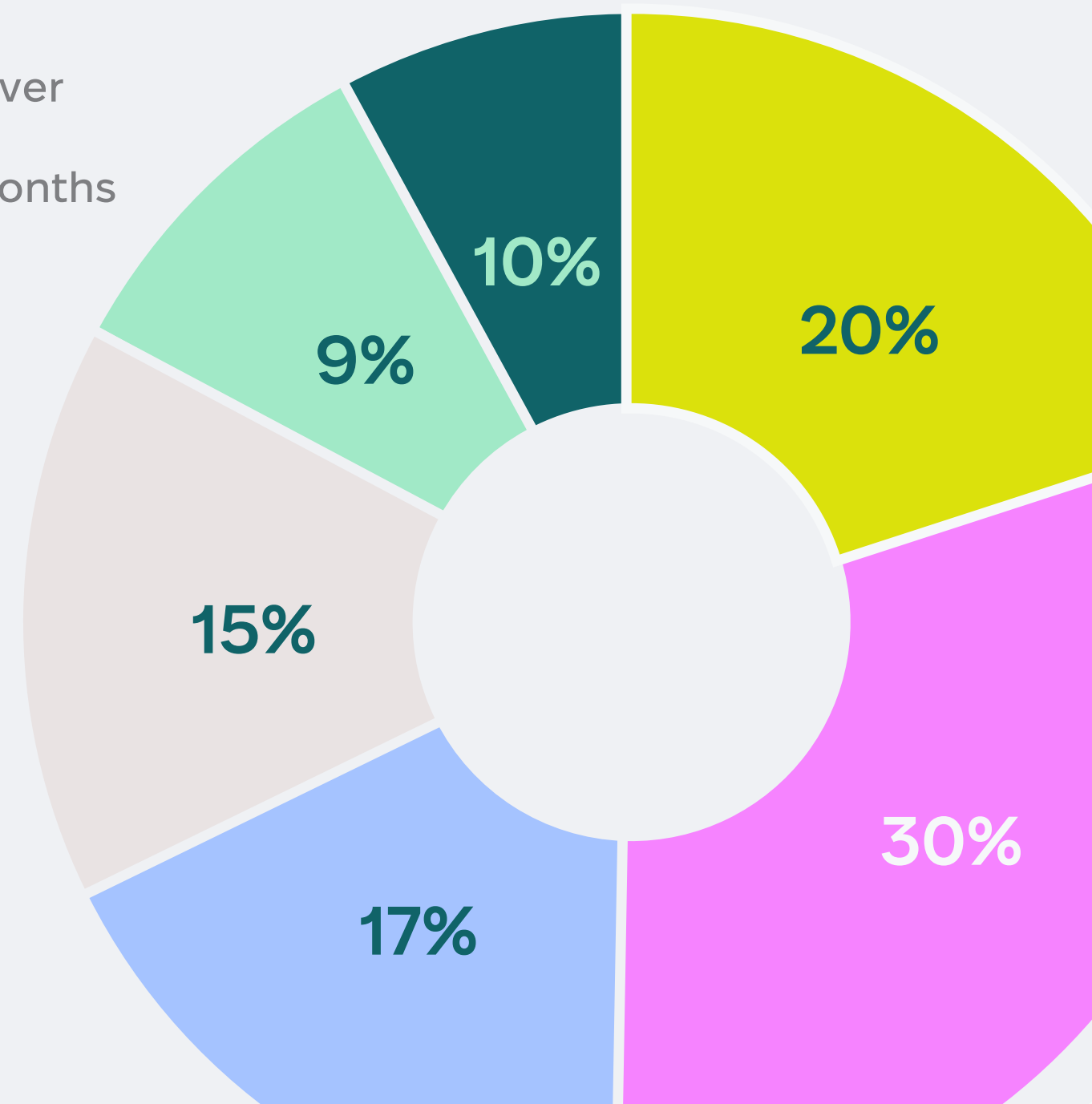
Americans are well aware that misinformation proliferates on social media, so they avoid sharing unverified information. However, instead of using fact-checking websites for verification, they rely on other unspecified resources. This still gives them the confidence to highly rate their ability to detect fakes and disinformation.

50% of respondents come across news they find fake or manipulative at least once a week.

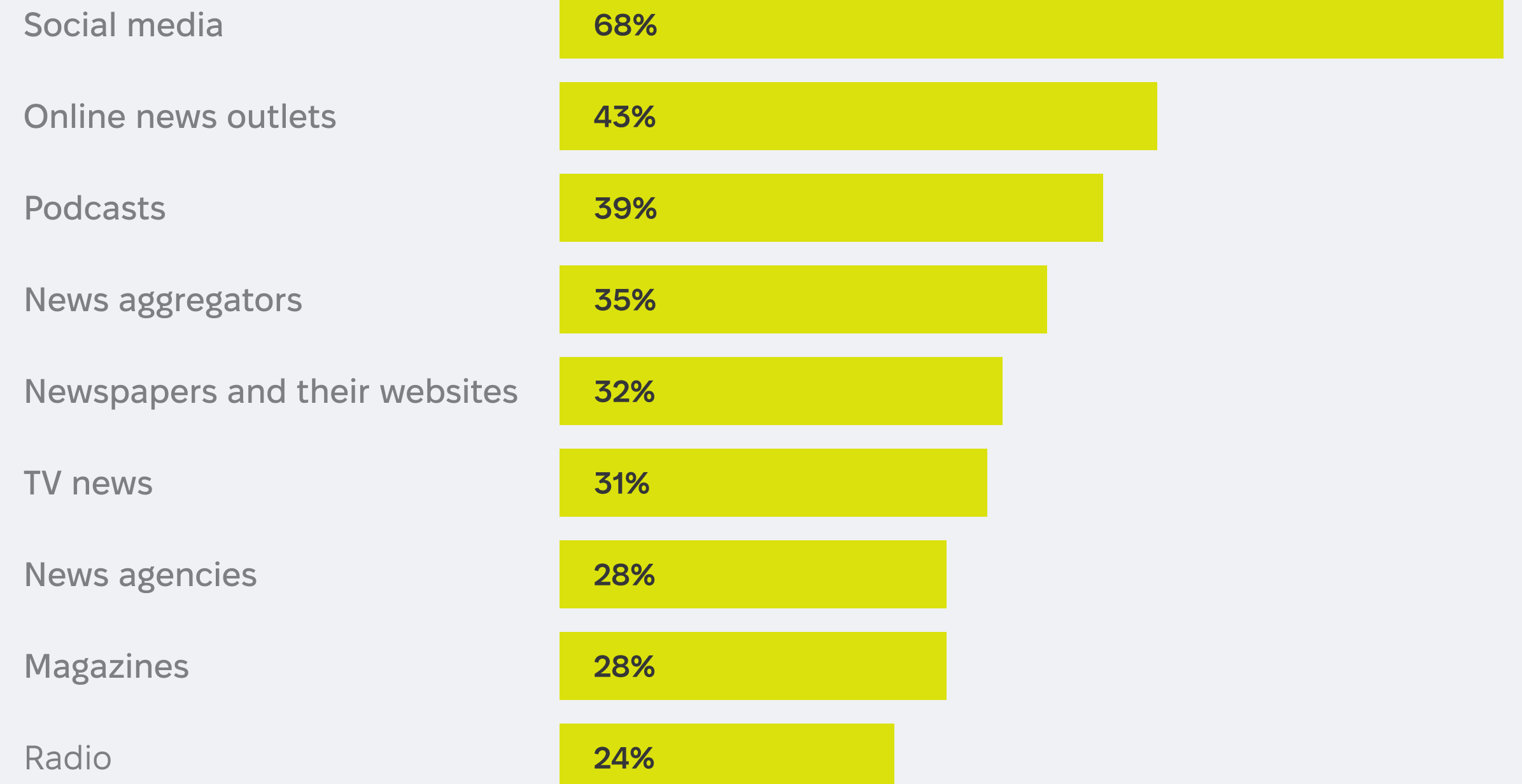
Most Americans expect to see misleading information on social media. Online news and podcasts are also ranking high.

How often do you come across news that you find fake or manipulative?

- Don't know
- Less often or never
- Once in a few months
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Daily



Share of those who think it is likely to encounter misleading information in a particular source.*

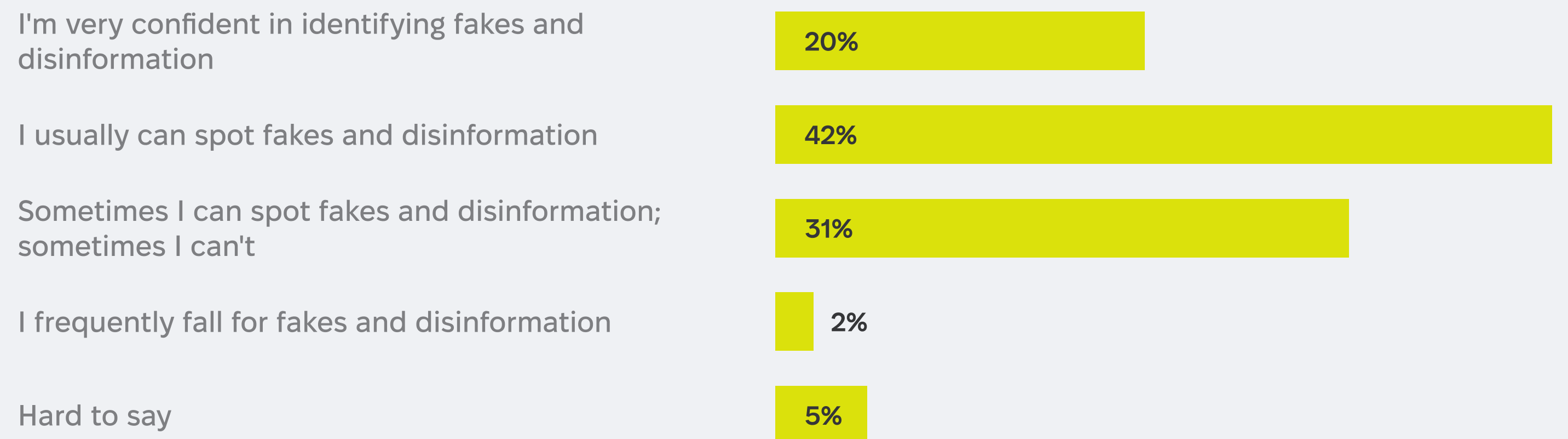


*among those who use a particular news source; selected 4 or 5 on a five-point scale.

More than **60%** of respondents highly rate their ability to detect fakes and disinformation.

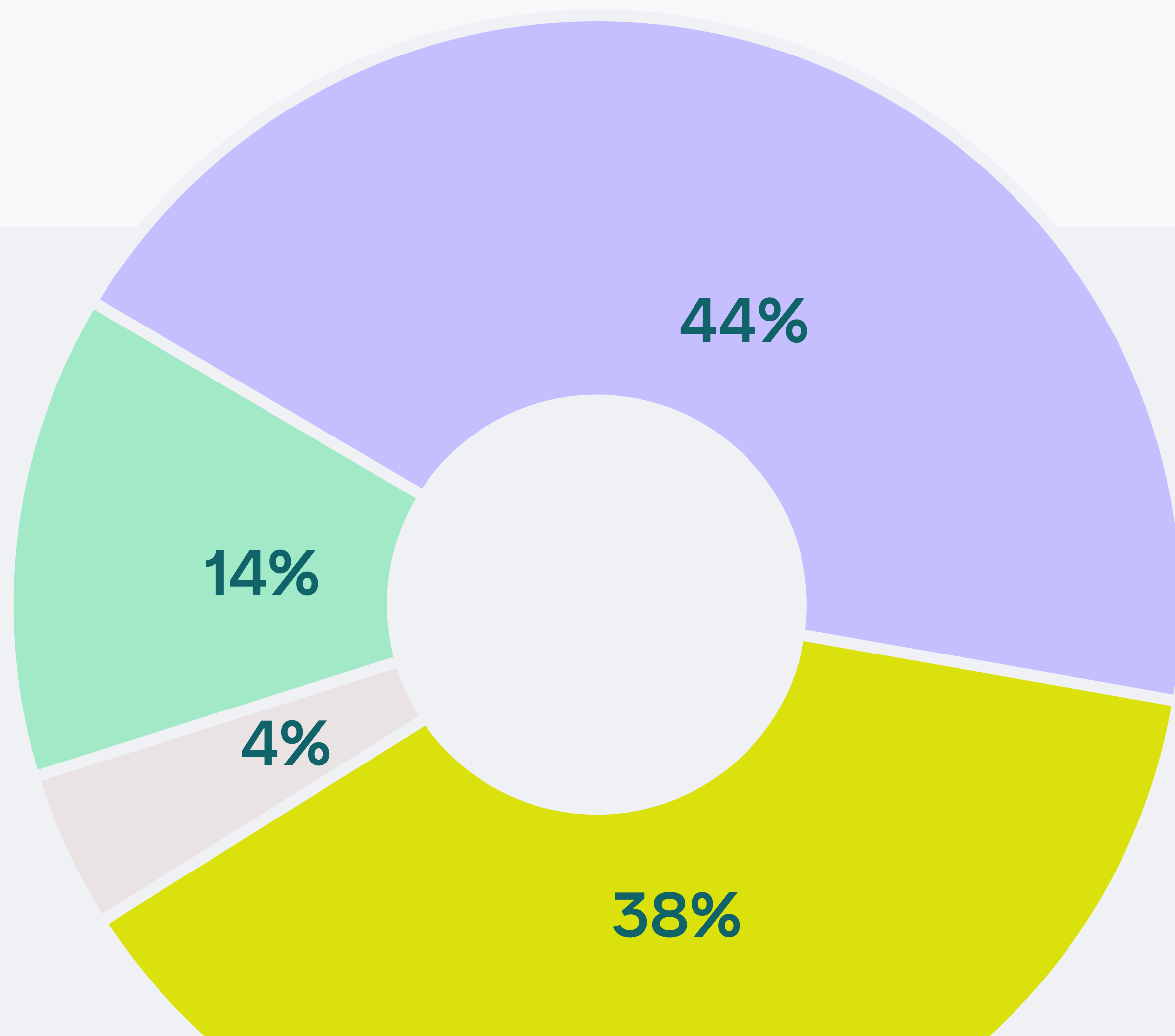
28% of Americans under 35 believe they can identify fake news and disinformation, compared to **12%** of those aged 55 and older.

The share of respondents that agreed with the following statements.

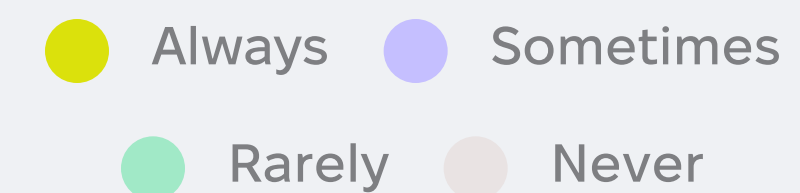


Those confident in identifying fake news tend to verify before sharing.

Over **80%** of those who share news stories on social media verify them at least sometimes.



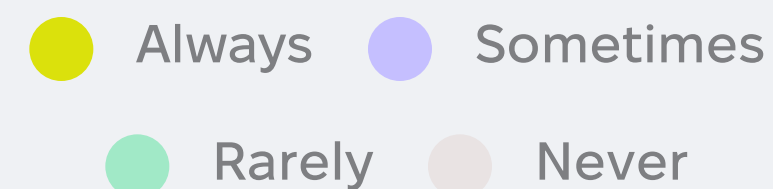
How often do you verify news stories before sharing them on social media?



But 40% of Americans rarely or never use fact-checking websites to verify information.

- Respondents prefer to verify information through unspecified sources they deem reliable.
- The older the respondents, the more cautious they are about sharing unverified information on social media.

How often do you use the following measures?



I avoid sharing unverified information on social media platforms.



I am cautious of sensational or emotional content designed to provoke a reaction.



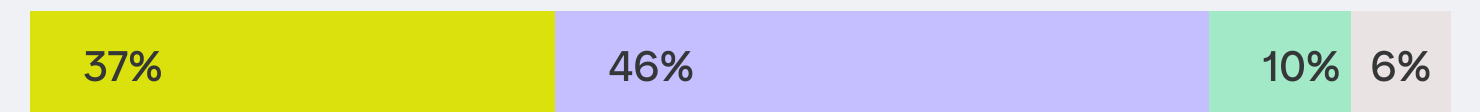
I verify information from reliable sources before accepting it as truth.



I educate myself about the common signs of fake news and disinformation.



I discuss questionable information with knowledgeable people before forming an opinion.



I report suspicious or potentially misleading content to the platform it's on.



I use fact-checking websites to validate information (AFP, FactCheck.org, PolitiFact, etc.)



Spotlight on Mac users

Contrary to the popular belief that Mac computers are safer, the attacks on macOS are skyrocketing, including fraud techniques that target Mac users specifically. Our survey shows that Mac users are better informed about scams and disinformation, making them more cautious than the rest of the respondents. As a Mac-focused cybersecurity team, we think these findings are important for increasing general awareness and promotion of healthy security practices among the American public.

Mac users are more aware of political scams.

The average percentage of high awareness about various political scams among Mac users is **48%**, while in the overall group this figure is **40%**. Mac users generally show greater awareness of different types of scams (**53% vs. 47%**).

Mac users are more likely to come across disinformation.

Compared to **46%** of the general sample, the share of Mac users who encountered disinformation amounts to **54%**. This is likely due to Mac users often consulting more news sources and being more likely to read newspapers, visit online outlets, and listen to podcasts.

Mac users are more concerned about deep fakes.

41% of them are concerned as opposed to only **32%** of the overall group. At the same time, Mac users are more confident that AI can help fight scams (**54% vs. 44%**).

Moonlock is a division of MacPaw that focuses exclusively on the **cybersecurity needs of Mac users**. Moonlock aims to create innovative products that seamlessly protect people from modern threats. With its mission of creating cybersecurity tech for humans, Moonlock is committed to packaging complex technologies into tools anyone can use and making cybersecurity accessible to everyone.

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