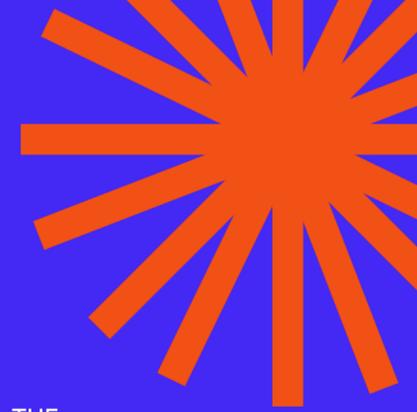




SXSW 2026



SOUNDS PROFITABLE

THE BUSINESS
OF
PODCASTING

The Last Quarter:

Understanding America's Podcast Holdouts



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Approach Overview

This report profiles **The Last Quarter — the approximately 25% of American adults (18+)** who say they have never consumed a podcast. Drawing from The Podcast Landscape 2025 survey (N = 5,034), this segment represents the last untapped quarter of the U.S. adult population for the podcast industry.

Understanding who these holdouts are, what media they currently consume, why they have avoided podcasts, and what might draw them in provides critical strategic intelligence for publishers, advertisers, and platforms seeking to grow the podcast audience.



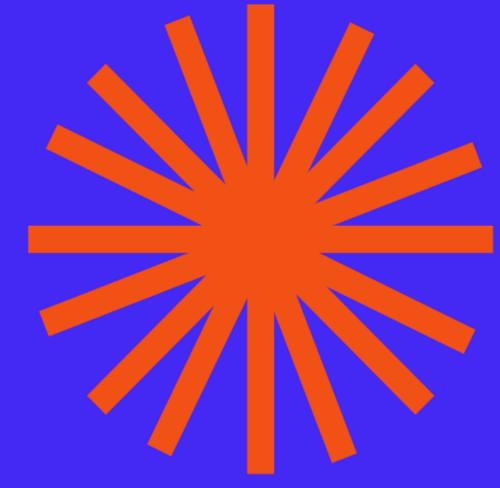
The holdout segment consists of respondents who selected “I have never consumed a podcast.”

- **Sample Size:** 1,187
- **Share of total:** ~25%
- **Defining trait:** Complete podcast holdouts



The Podcast Landscape 2025

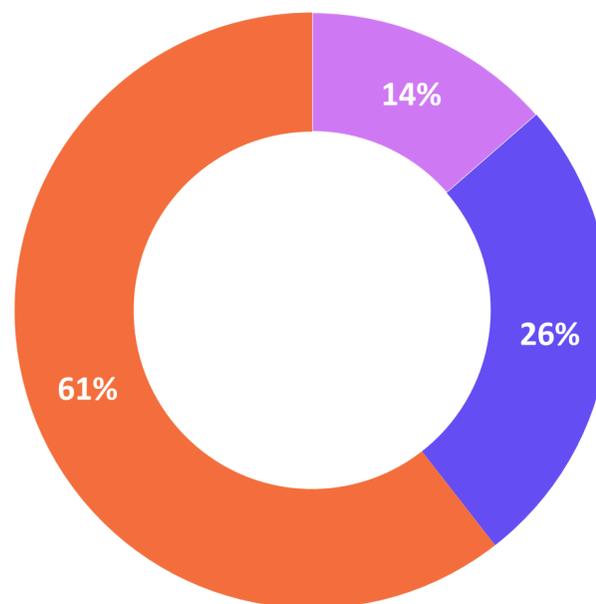
Demographic Profile



Holdouts skew older and more female

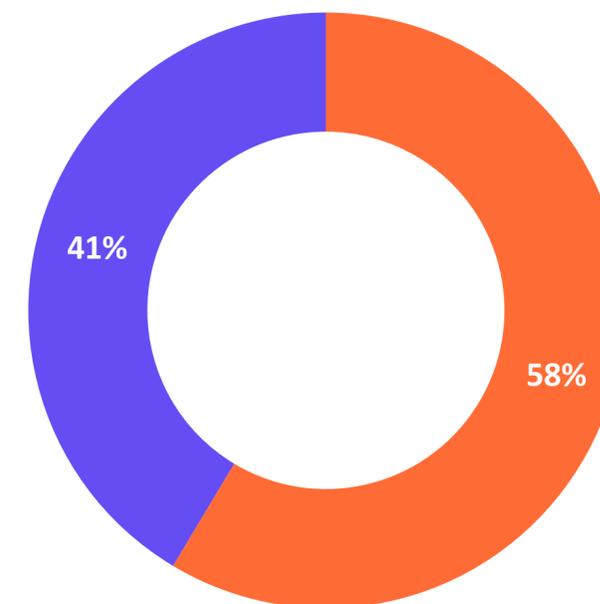
Age & Gender

Age Distribution



■ 18-34 ■ 35-54 ■ 55+

Gender Distribution



■ Female ■ Male



Women comprise 58% of non-listeners despite being ~51% of the U.S. adult population, suggesting a disproportionate opportunity to reach women not yet in the podcast audience. The 61% aged 55+ indicates non-adoption is largely generational.

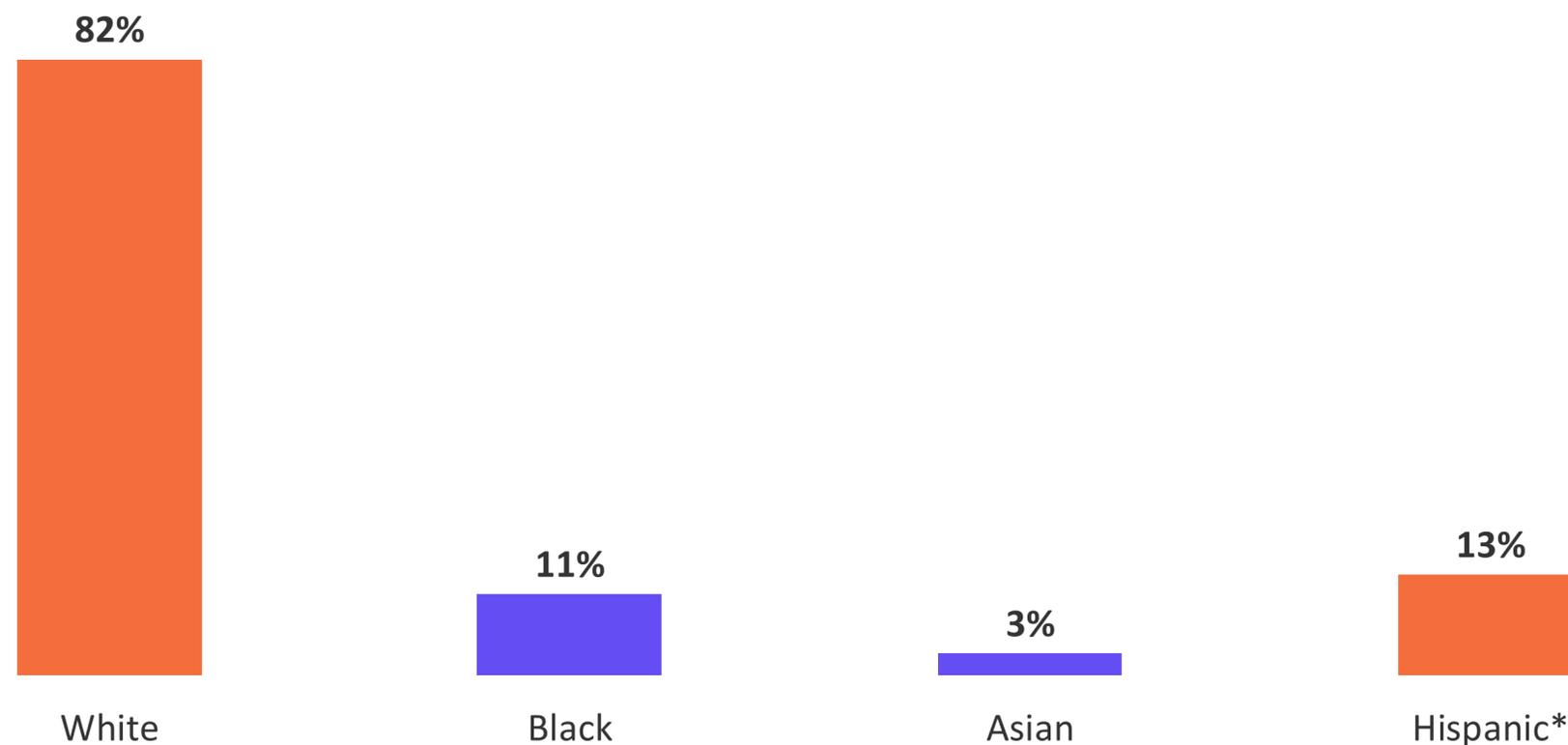
- This analysis is based on The Podcast Landscape 2025 survey conducted by Sounds Profitable (N = 5,034 American adults 18+).
- All percentages are weighted unless otherwise noted. Multi-select questions may sum to more than 100%.

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Holdouts are predominantly White (82%, versus ~61% of U.S. adults).

Race and Ethnicity of Holdouts



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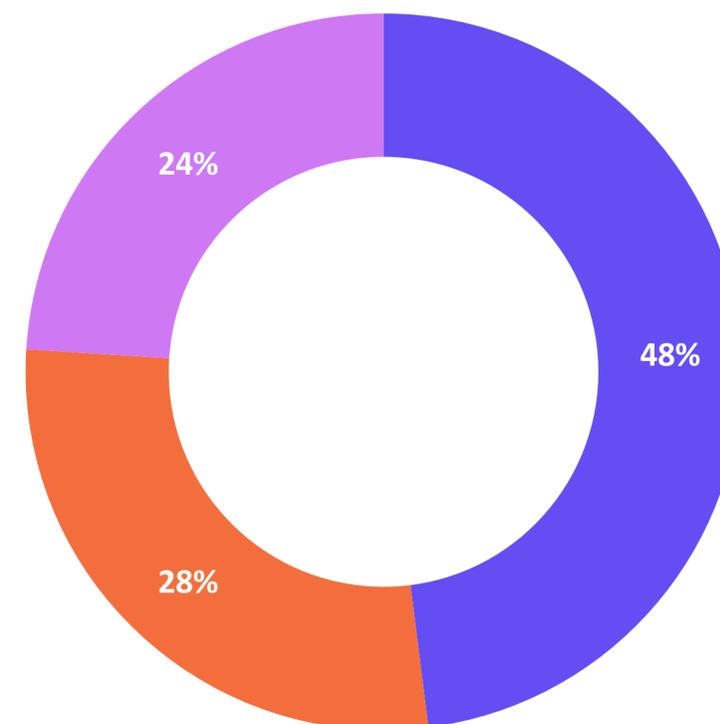
Nearly half of Hispanic holdouts are most proficient in Spanish, revealing a significant content access gap in the podcast ecosystem.

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The Spanish-Language Opportunity

Language Proficiency Among Hispanic Holdouts



■ Most proficient in Spanish ■ Equally proficient in both languages ■ Most proficient in English



Spanish-language podcasts are underserving this audience—an untapped market opportunity for the industry.

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- All percentages are weighted unless otherwise noted. Multi-select questions may sum to more than 100%.

Holdouts skew toward lower education and income

Other Demographics



46%

High School Diploma or less

- 46% have a HS diploma or less; 10% didn't finish high school
- 27% hold a bachelor's (vs. 33% nationally)



48%

Income below \$50,000

- 48% report income under \$50K; 23% under \$25K
- 8% earn \$150K+ (vs. 20% nationally)



79%

No children under 18

- 79% have no children under 18 at home
- Less exposure to podcasts via younger family members

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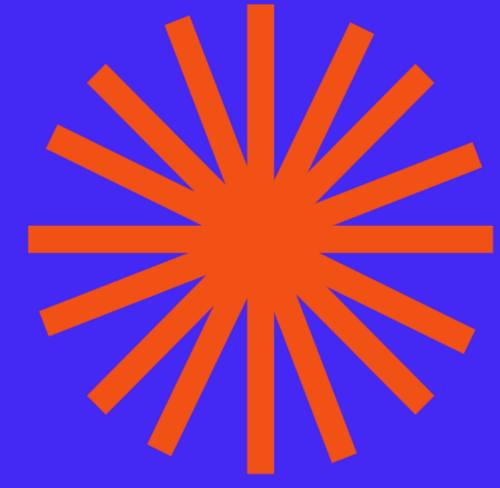


The combination of older age, lower education, lower income, and absence of children creates a demographic profile largely disconnected from the younger, more digitally native podcast audience. These factors compound to reduce both exposure and perceived relevance of podcasts.

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The Podcast Landscape 2025

Current Media Consumption

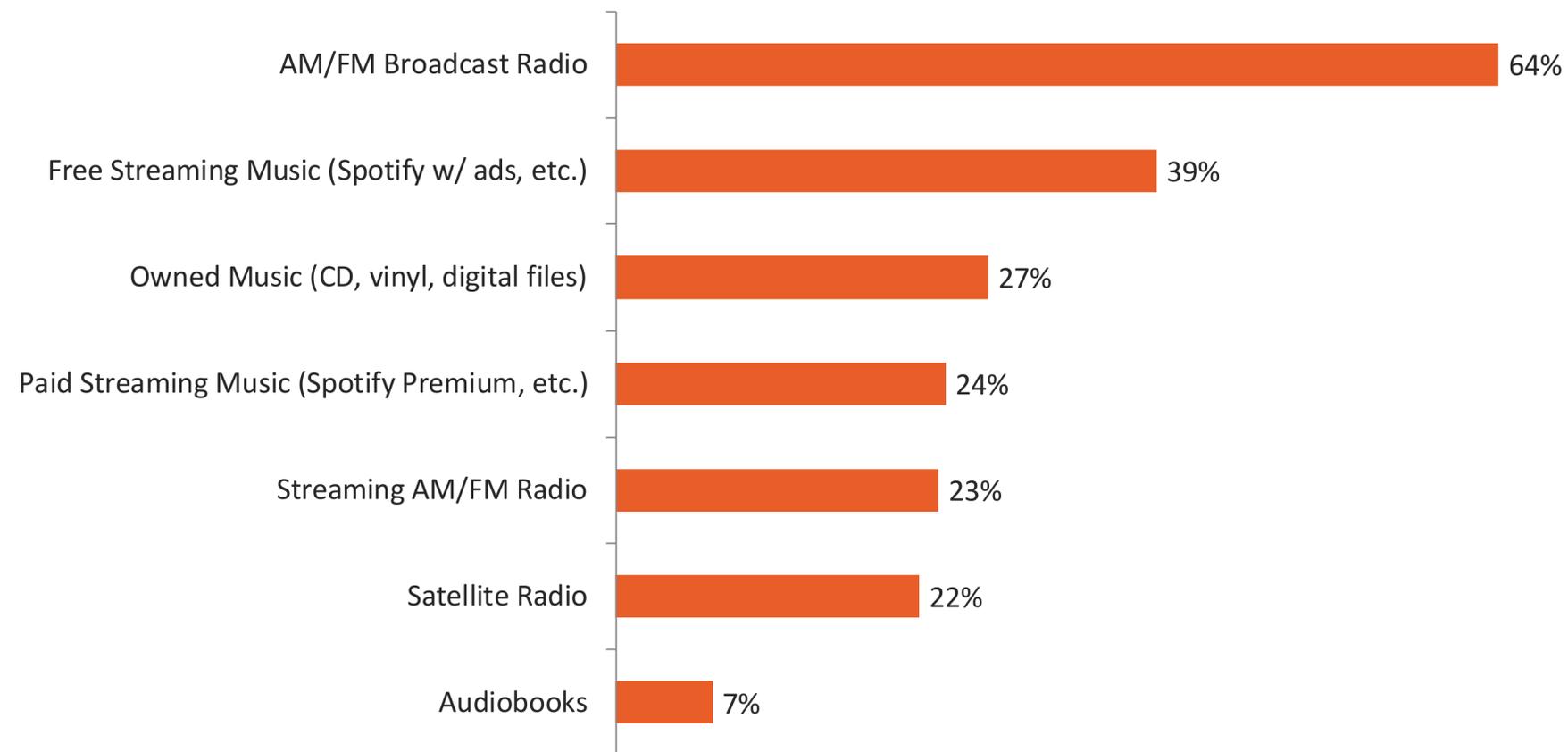


Holdouts are media-traditional, not media-averse. Broadcast radio dominates at 64%, while streaming music has a meaningful but secondary footprint.

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Audio Media



Broadcast radio leads at 64%, but streaming music reaches many — holdouts aren't disconnected from digital audio.

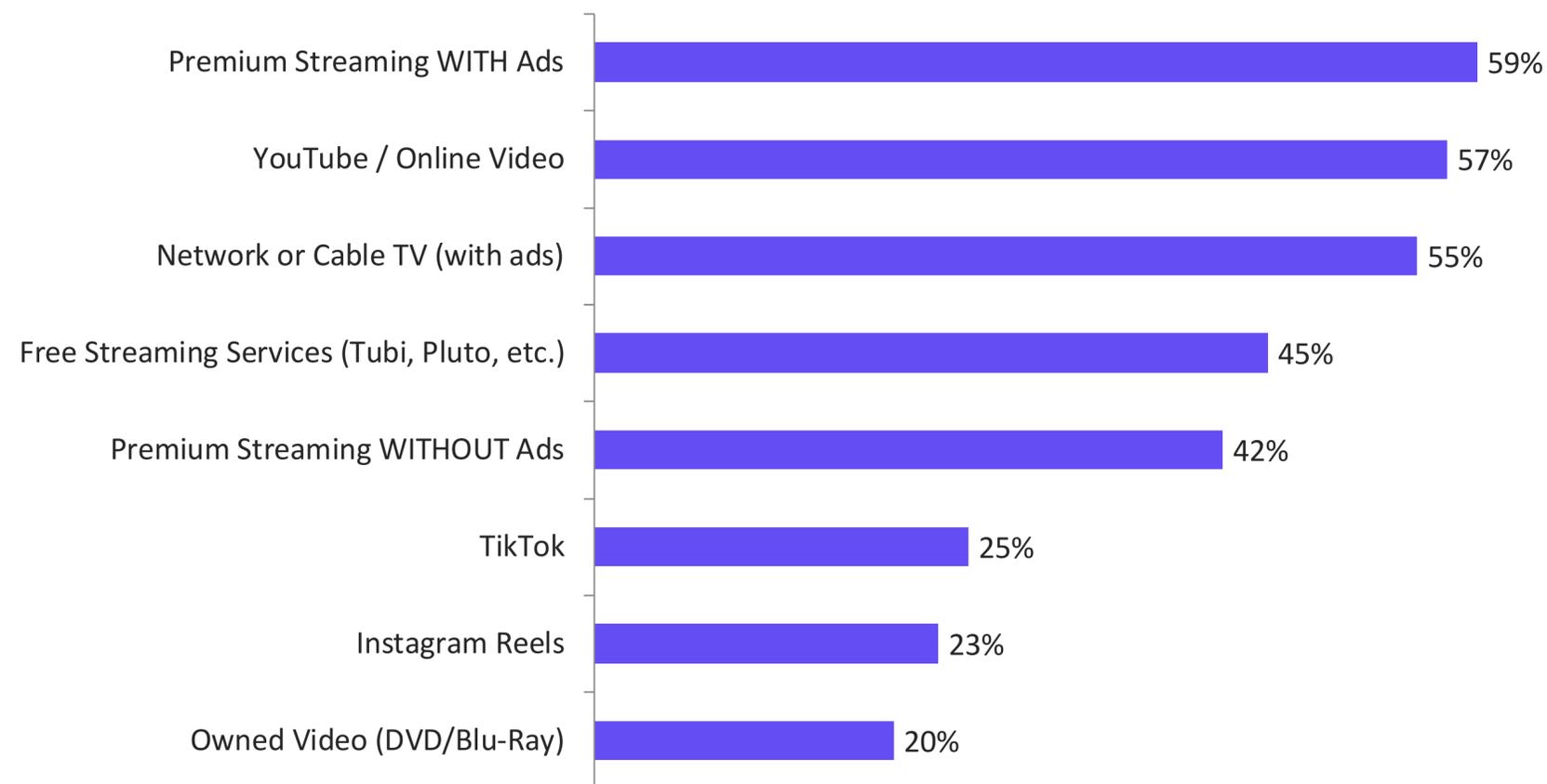
- Audio media usage based on past 30 days.
- This analysis is based on The Podcast Landscape 2025 survey conducted by Sounds Profitable (N = 5,034 American adults 18+).
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Video consumption is robust, with nearly 6 in 10 using ad-supported premium streaming and cable TV reaching over half.

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Video Media

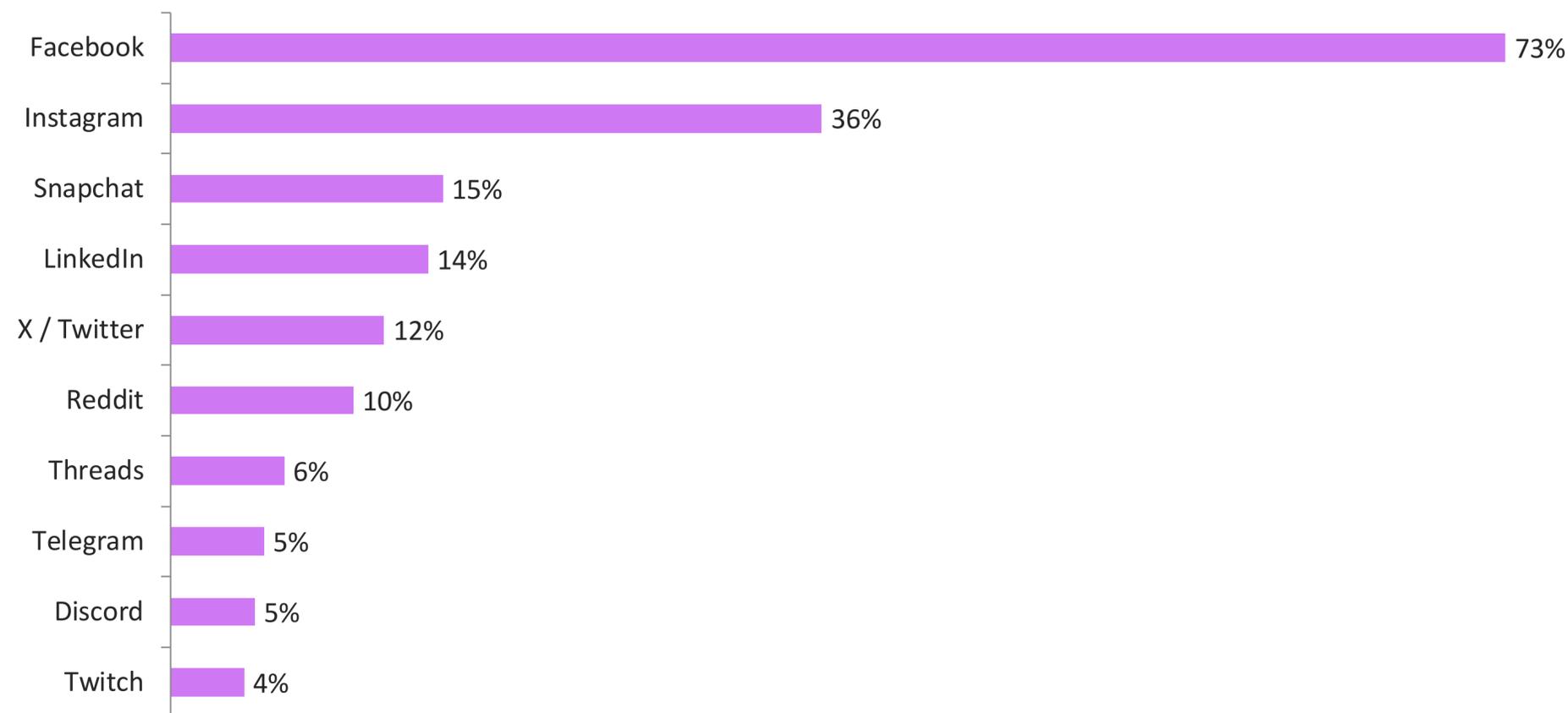


57% use YouTube but don't engage with podcasts there (or don't think of what they are consuming as podcasts). A key conversion opportunity.

- Video media usage based on past 30 days.
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Facebook dominates at 73%, nearly double the usage of Instagram (36%).

Social Media



Facebook is the dominant social platform at 73%, nearly double the next-closest platform (Instagram at 36%). The low adoption of newer, younger-skewing platforms like Discord and Twitch reflects the older age profile. Any social-media-based podcast marketing targeting this group should be Facebook-first.

- Social media usage based on past 30 days.
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Even among this traditional-media-oriented group, attention is slowly migrating toward digital video.

Year-Over-Year Media Trends

Most Notable



+34 pts

TikTok Net Growth



-16 pts

AM/FM Net Decline



+3 pts

Cable TV Net Change

- TikTok shows the strongest net growth among holdouts (+34 net), indicating rapid adoption even in this older demographic.
- YouTube follows at +23 net, reinforcing its role as a potential bridge to podcast content.
- Instagram rounds out the top three at +13 net growth.

- AM/FM Streaming Radio shows the steepest decline at -16 net.
- AM/FM Broadcast Radio is also declining at -7 net, though it remains the dominant audio format.
- Traditional radio's decline creates an opening for alternative audio content like podcasts.

- Cable TV remains relatively stable at +3 net change.
- Despite the rise of streaming, traditional TV maintains its hold on this demographic.
- This stability suggests entrenched habits that may be slow to change.



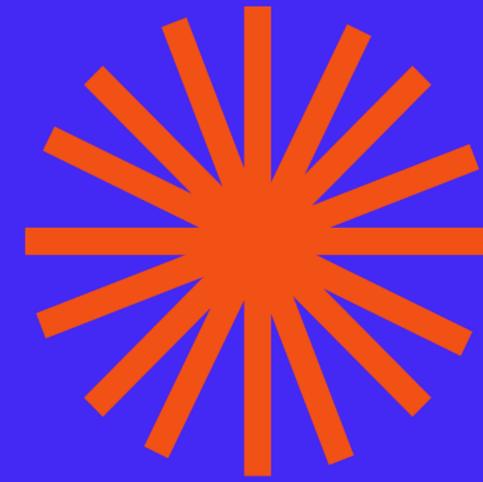
Attention is slowly migrating toward digital video platforms even within this traditional-media-oriented group. TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram are all growing, while broadcast and streaming radio are declining. This shift creates potential new pathways to reach holdouts through video-first podcast content.

- Net change shown in percentage points (pts) = % reporting more time – % reporting less time. Net growth calculated as percentage reporting more time minus percentage reporting less time year-over-year.
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The Podcast Landscape 2025



Barriers to Podcast Consumption



Despite never consuming a podcast, **88% of holdouts know the term.**

Podcast Awareness & Perceptions



88%

Know the Term "Podcast"

- 88% know the term but have never tried one
- 12% don't know the word (~3% of all U.S. adults)



36%

Audio/Video on Specific Topics

- 36% define as "audio/video on specific topics"
- 19% say "online discussion"
- 15% say "digital radio"



~60%

Expect Podcasts to Be Audio

- ~60% think podcasts are all or mostly audio
- Outdated view given video podcast growth



Awareness is high but understanding is incomplete. Highlighting video content could help bridge the gap to trial.

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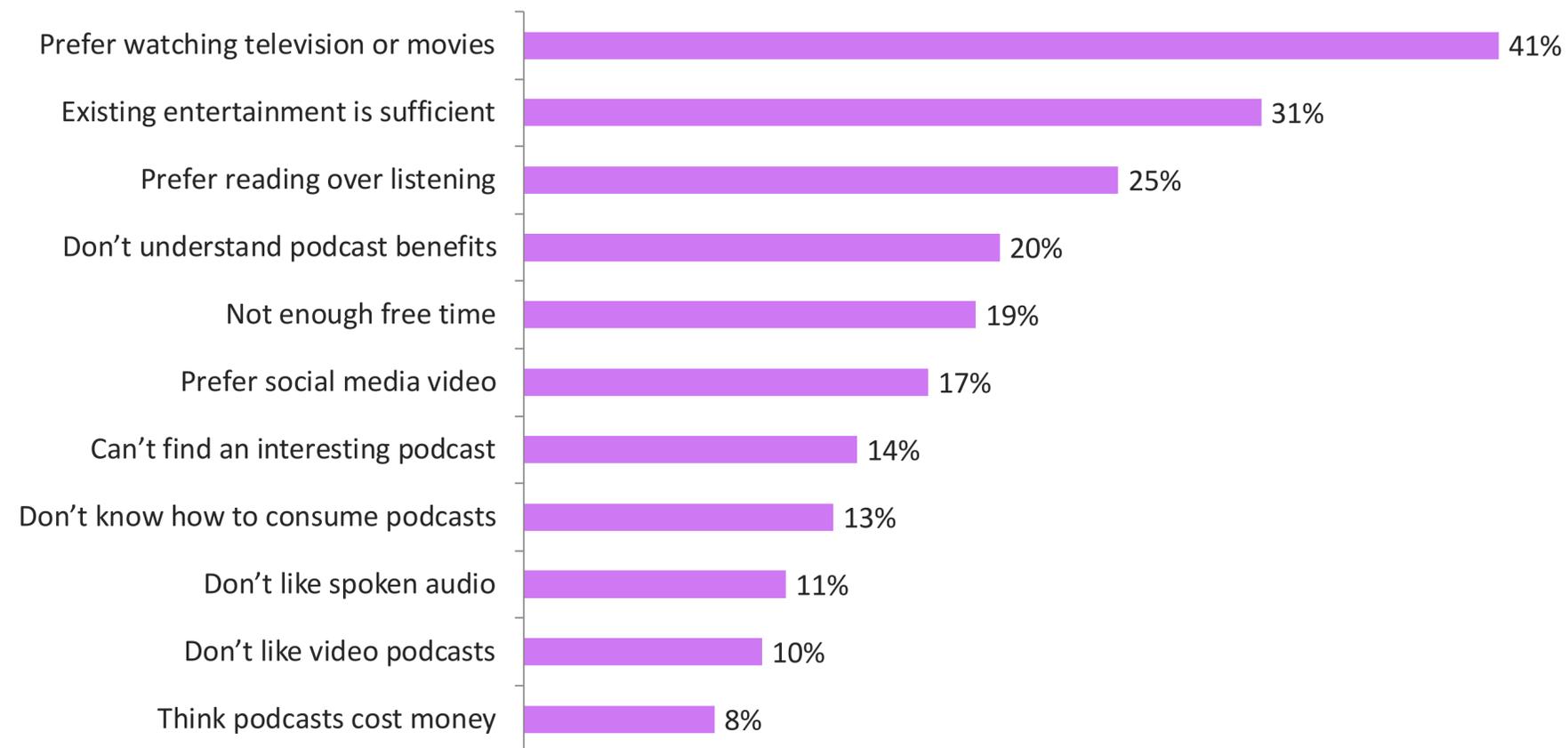


Competition for attention is the top barrier, along with inertia – satisfaction with current choices.

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Barriers to Podcast Consumption



13% don't know how to listen; 8% think podcasts cost money. Simple knowledge gaps the industry can address.

- This analysis is based on The Podcast Landscape 2025 survey conducted by Sounds Profitable (N = 5,034 American adults 18+).
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The barriers holdouts reported can be grouped into three distinct clusters

From Barriers to Clusters: How We Grouped the Data

Competition for Attention

- Prefer watching TV or movies (41%)
- Existing entertainment is sufficient (31%)
- Prefer reading over listening (25%)
- Not enough free time (19%)
- Prefer social media video (17%)

Awareness and Education Gaps

- Don't understand podcast benefits (20%)
- Can't find an interesting podcast (14%)
- Don't know how to listen (13%)
- Think podcasts cost money (8%)

Format Aversion

- Don't like spoken audio (11%)
- Don't like video podcasts (10%)

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Infrastructure barriers were excluded from the clusters: only 3% cite a lack of devices, 3% insufficient mobile data, and 3% inadequate home internet. Technology access is not the bottleneck.

- Respondents could select multiple barriers. Percentages represent share selecting each option.
- This analysis is based on The Podcast Landscape 2025 survey conducted by Sounds Profitable (N = 5,034 American adults 18+).
- All percentages are weighted unless otherwise noted.

Three barrier clusters emerge: competition for attention, awareness gaps, and format aversion.

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Barrier Clusters



41%

Prefer TV/Movies

- TV preference (41%), existing media sufficiency (31%), prefer reading (25%), and prefer social media video (17%).
- For many holdouts, podcasts simply cannot compete with media habits that are already deeply entrenched.
- This cluster represents the largest share of barriers.



13%

Don't Know How to Consume

- Don't understand benefits (20%), can't find an interesting podcast (14%), don't know how to listen (13%), believe podcasts cost money (8%).
- Over 1 in 8 holdouts literally do not know how to watch/listen to a podcast.
- These are knowledge gaps the industry can directly address with correctable misperceptions.



11%

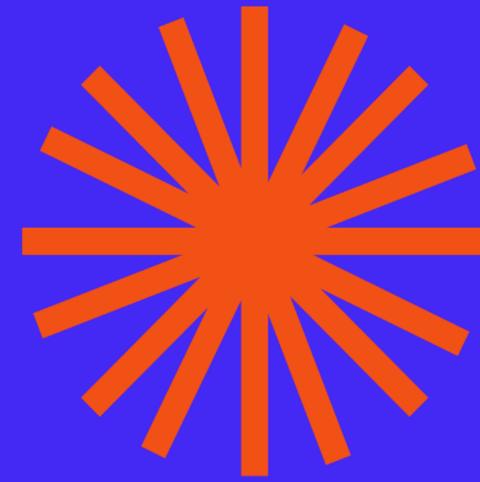
Don't Like Format

- Don't like spoken audio (11%), don't like video podcasts (10%).
- This smaller cluster represents fundamental resistance to the medium's core format.
- A harder-to-convert group that may never adopt podcasts.



Infrastructure barriers are minimal: only 3% cite a lack of devices, 3% insufficient mobile data, and 3% inadequate home internet. Technology access is not the bottleneck. The real barriers are habit, awareness, and format preference.

- Respondents could select multiple barriers. Percentages represent share selecting each option.
- This analysis is based on The Podcast Landscape 2025 survey conducted by Sounds Profitable (N = 5,034 American adults 18+).
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The Podcast Landscape 2025

Social Influence & Word of Mouth

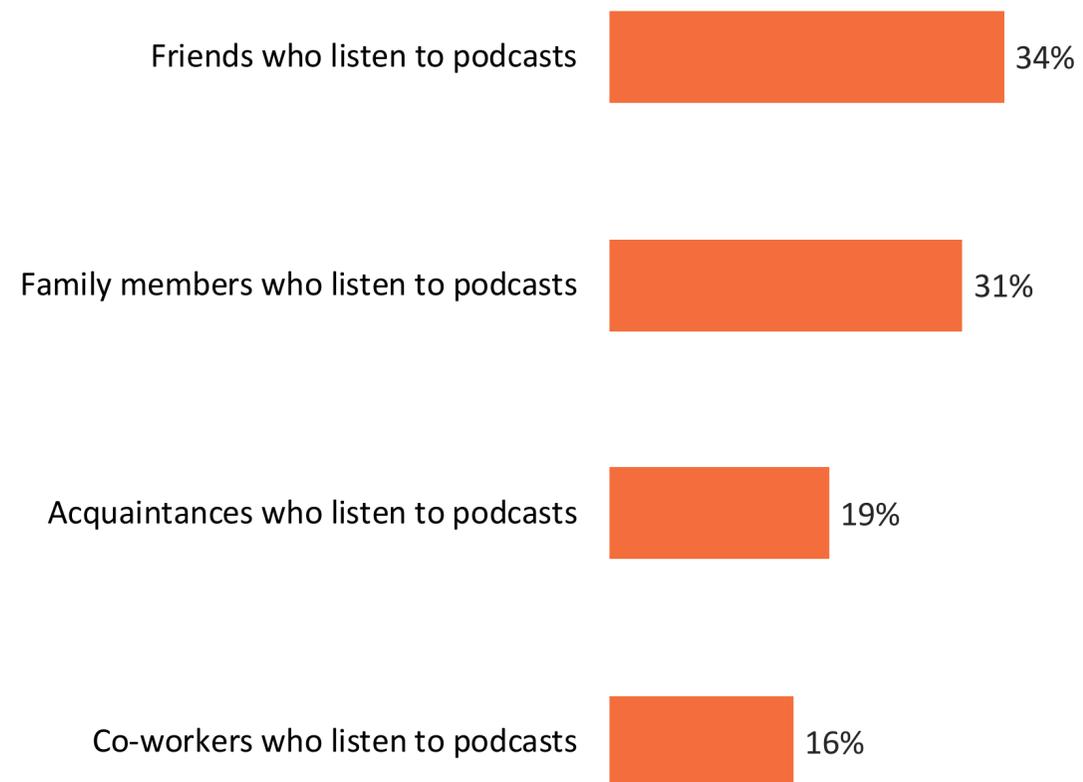


Never-listeners exist in social ecosystems where podcasts are **nearly invisible**, with only 34% having even one friend who listens.

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Social Circle Podcast Exposure



66% of holdouts receive zero podcast recommendations from friends, meaning the industry's most powerful organic growth engine never reaches this group at all

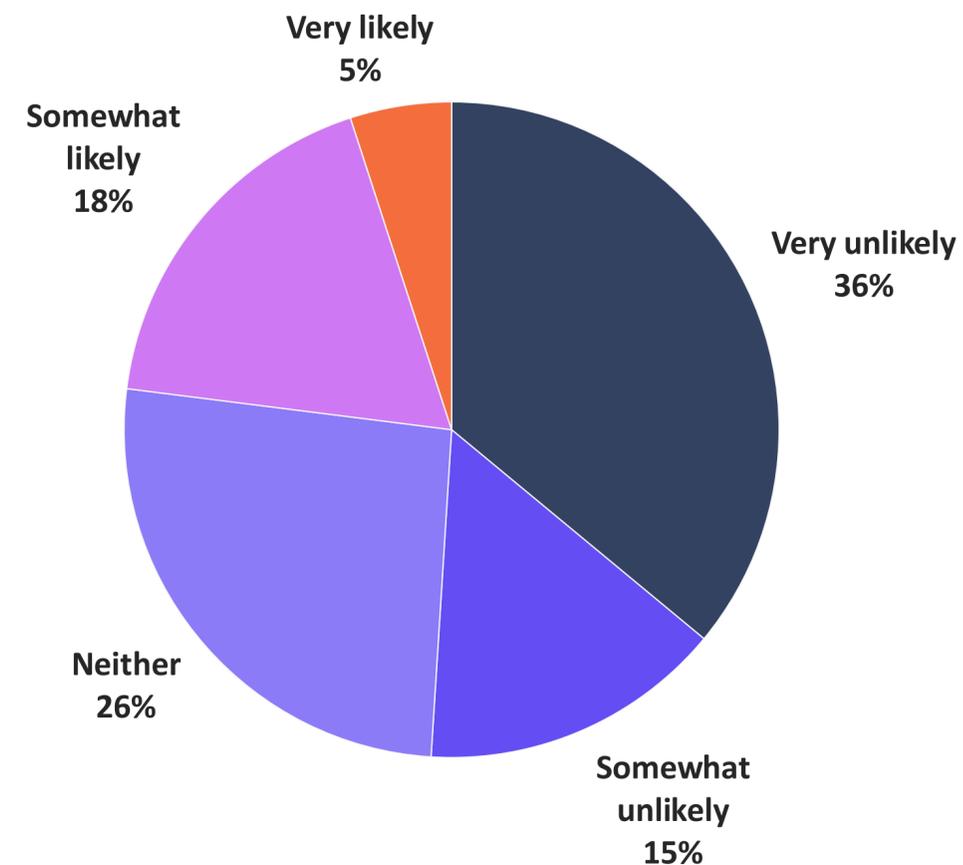
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Even when recommendations do reach them, holdouts almost never act. Only **5%** say they are very likely to follow up.

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Likelihood of Acting on a Podcast Recommendation

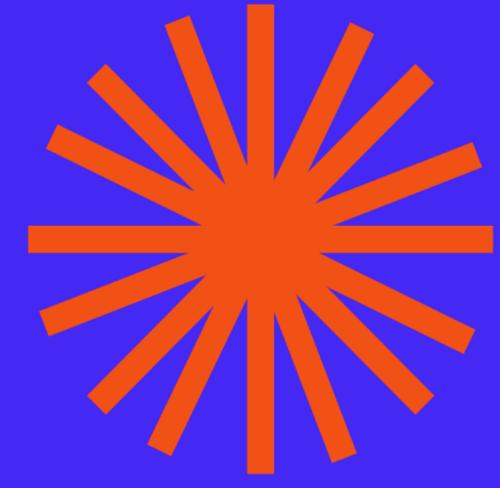


Even among the 34% who get recommendations, most resist. Word-of-mouth alone won't convert the last quarter.

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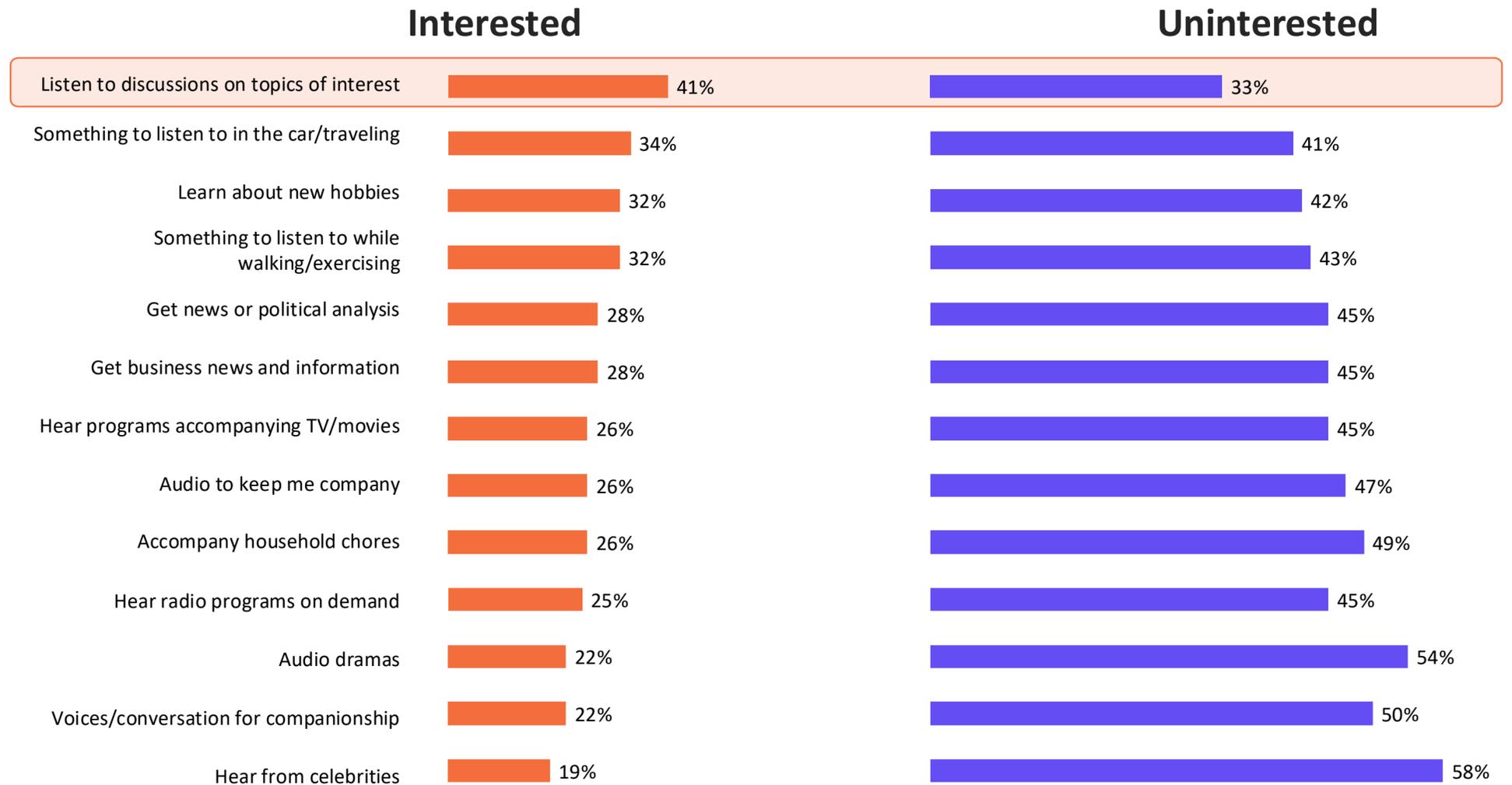
The Podcast Landscape 2025

Latent Content Interest



Only one podcast benefit resonates more than it repels. Topic-driven discussions are the single viable entry point for holdouts

Podcast Benefit Interest vs. Disinterest



 Topic-based discussion is the only benefit where interest outweighs disinterest. Celebrity content ranks last (19%).

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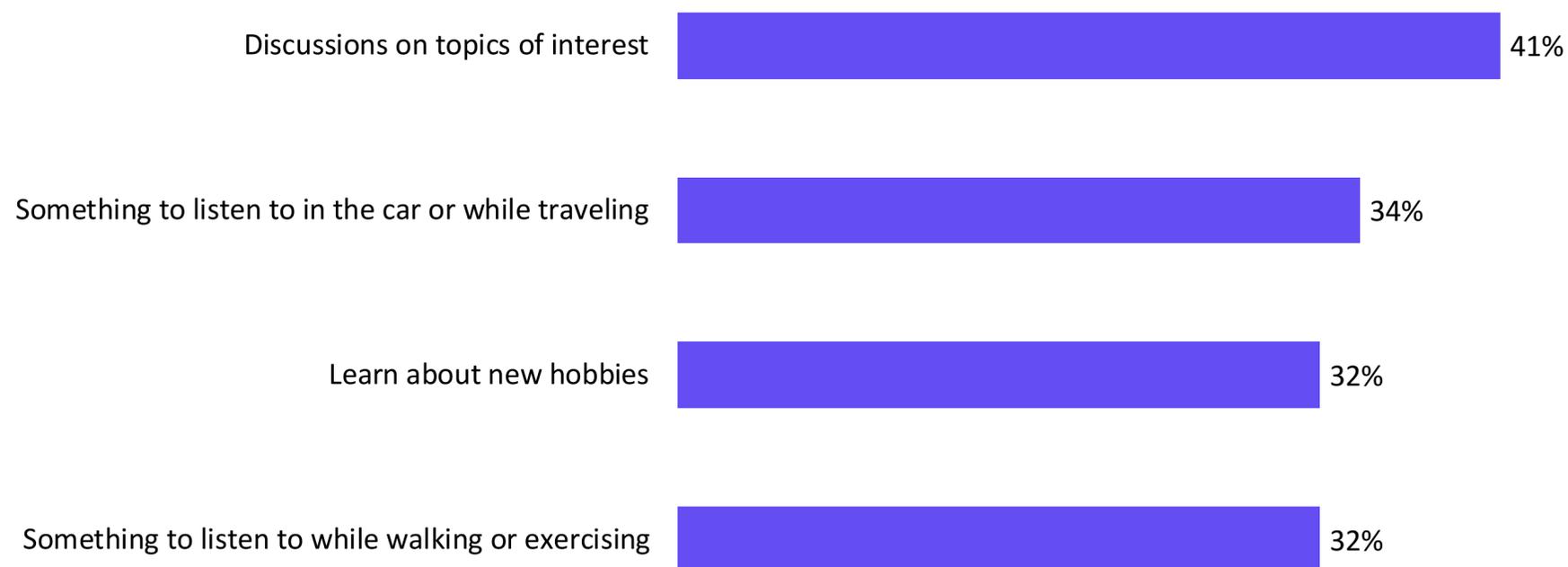
The strongest conversion hooks are **situational**, not content-driven. Holdouts are most open to podcasts as a companion for existing activities.

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Top Podcast Use Cases Among Holdouts

% of Holdouts Interested in Each Use Case

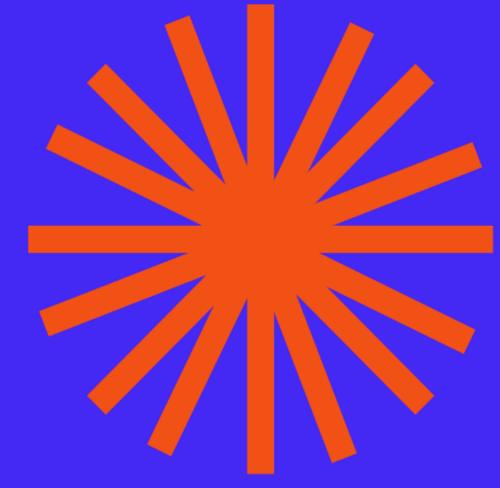


All four top-performing benefits share a common thread. They fit into moments holdouts already have, requiring no new behavior and only a new soundtrack. Discovery framed around activity rather than format is the most promising onboarding strategy for this segment.

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The Podcast Landscape 2025

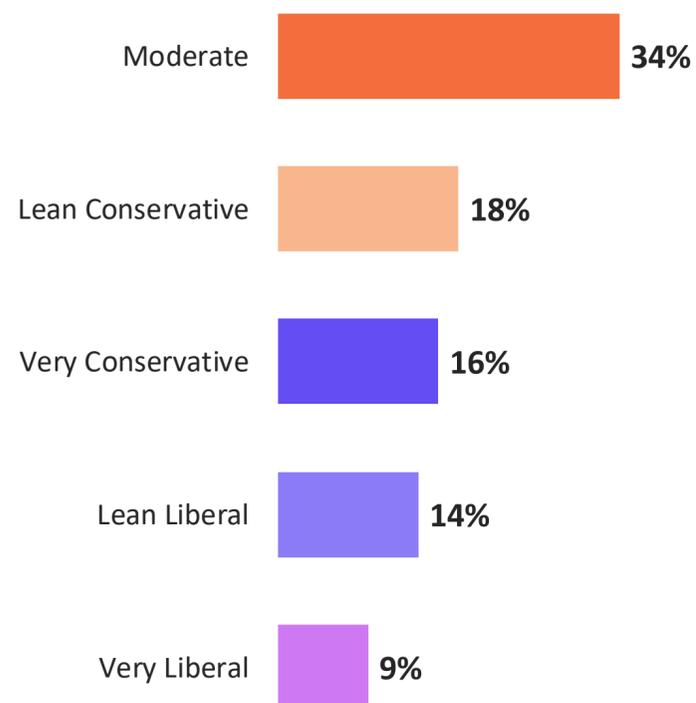
Political Profile



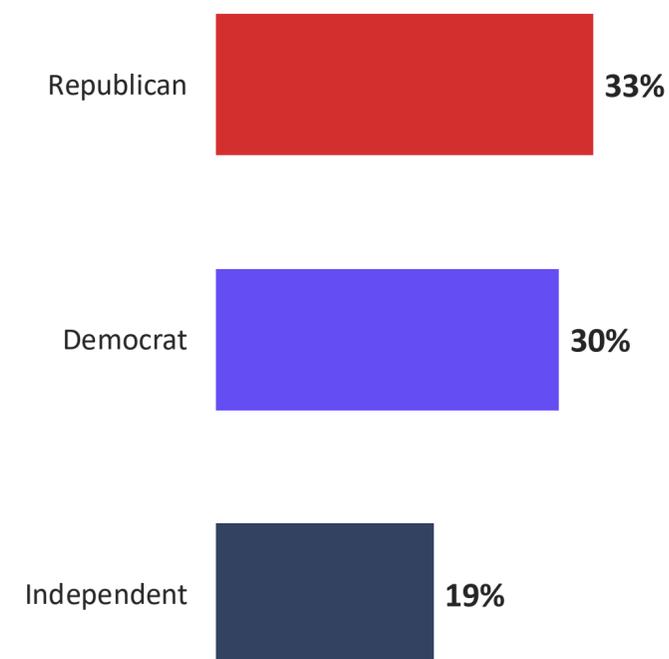
The holdout segment leans **moderate to conservative**, with strong civic engagement. Nearly 8 in 10 are registered voters.

Political Profile of Podcast Holdouts

Political Identity



Party Registration



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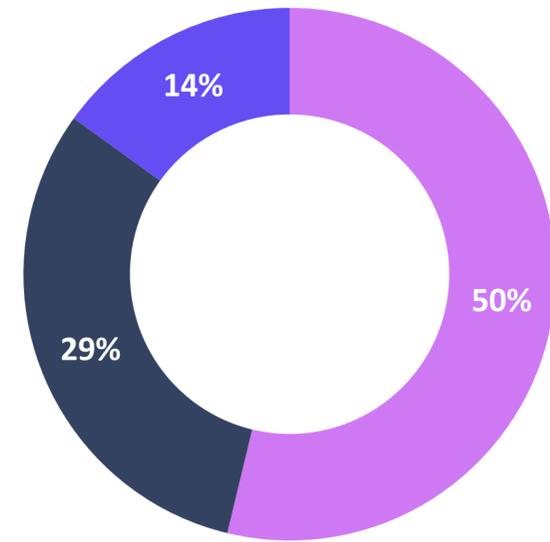
Civic engagement is high among holdouts. 79% are registered to vote and 72% cast a ballot in the 2024 presidential election, making this a politically active but podcast-disengaged segment.

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Political podcast moments had virtually no impact on this group. Only 3% say a politician's podcast appearance influenced their 2024 vote.

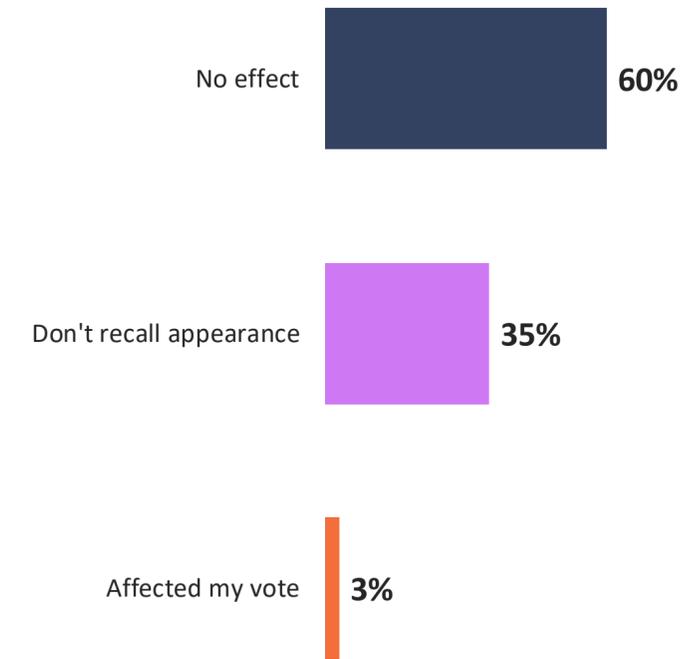
Impact of Political Podcasts on Holdouts

Views on Politicians Appearing on Podcasts



- Neither appropriate nor inappropriate
- Appropriate
- Inappropriate

Did a Politician Podcast Appearance Affect Your 2024 Vote



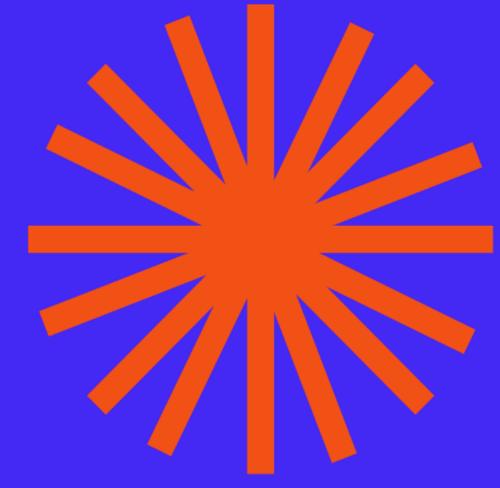
💡 The large neutral bloc signals indifference, not resistance. Political content is not a gateway into podcasts for this segment.

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The Podcast Landscape 2025



Strategic Implications



Summary Demographics



61% age 55+

Older Americans dominate the non-listener segment, skewing significantly above the general population



48% income under \$50K

Lower household income correlates with podcast avoidance



46% HS grad or less

Education level skews lower among non-listeners



58% female

Women make up the majority of podcast holdouts



79% no children under 18

Non-listeners are far less likely to have children at home



88% know the term 'Podcast'

Awareness is high despite non-consumption, suggesting barriers beyond awareness

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Key insights



- **YouTube is the Hidden Bridge** **57%** of holdouts are already on YouTube, the largest podcast platform in the U.S. Video podcast content on YouTube reaches this group without requiring any new app or behavior. **1**
- **Close the Spanish-Language Gap** **48%** of Hispanic holdouts are most proficient in Spanish. The Spanish-language podcast ecosystem is not serving this audience and represents both a market opportunity and an equity issue. **2**
- **Lead With Topics Not Format** **41%** of holdouts are interested in topic-driven discussions. Content discovery framed around subject matter rather than the word podcast lowers the psychological barrier to entry. **3**
- **Education Over Promotion** **1 in 5 holdouts** do not understand podcast benefits. **1 in 8** do not know how to listen. The industry must invest in basic literacy campaigns before content marketing. **4**
- **Meet Them on Their Platforms** **Facebook 73%, broadcast radio 64%, YouTube 57%, and cable TV 55%** are the dominant channels. Outreach relying on podcast apps or Instagram will miss the majority. **5**
- **Correct the Cost Misperception** **8%** of holdouts believe podcasts cost money. This simple factual correction can be integrated into any awareness campaign at minimal cost. **6**

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The Addressable Opportunity



Potential Converts

20-25% of holdouts. These individuals do not understand podcast benefits, do not know how to listen, or think podcasts cost money. These are knowledge problems with knowledge solutions. Targeted education through Facebook and broadcast radio could move this group.

Latent Interest

30-40% of holdouts. These individuals express interest in at least one podcast benefit such as topical discussions, car or travel listening, or hobby learning, but have not acted on it. Discovery and onboarding friction are the primary barriers. YouTube is the most promising conversion channel.

Unlikely to Convert

40-50% of holdouts. These individuals fundamentally prefer other media formats, show no interest in any tested podcast benefit, or express format aversion. The most productive strategy is meeting them in adjacent formats on platforms they already use.

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The Last Quarter: Overview of Key Statistics

Demographic Profile

Skew older, more female, lower education and income.

Current Media Consumption

Media-traditional, not media-averse. Facebook and broadcast radio dominate.

Podcast Awareness & Perceptions

88% know the term but have never tried one. Most still see podcasts as audio-only.

Barriers to Podcast Consumption

Competition for attention dominates. Some think podcasts cost money.

Social Influence & Word of Mouth

Most receive no recommendations. Even when they do, few act on them.

Latent Content Interest

Topic-based discussions are the only benefit where interest exceeds disinterest.

Political Profile & Language

Moderate-to-conservative. Overwhelmingly English-only media consumers.

- 61% age 55+, only 14% age 18-34
- 58% female vs. 41% male
- 46% have HS diploma or less

- Facebook: 73% (dominant platform)
- AM/FM Broadcast Radio: 64%
- Cable TV: 55%

- 88% know the term "podcast"
- 12% do not know what it means
- 60% think podcasts are audio-only

- 41% prefer watching TV or movies
- 31% say existing media is sufficient
- 8% think podcasts cost money

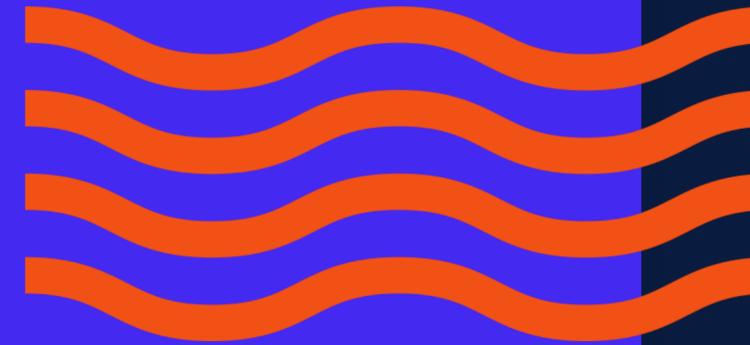
- 66% get no recs
- 34% have friends who listen
- 51% won't try if asked

- 41% interested in topic discussions
- 34% interested in car/travel
- 32% interested in new hobbies

- 34% identify as moderate
- 33% Rep, 30% Dem
- 85% English-only media



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