

Walrus Research

Turning Listeners into Givers

The Public Radio Tracking Study

Special Report

Summer 2003

Reality has a way of eventually getting your attention

Turning Listeners into Givers

The Public Radio Tracking Study

Introduction

Following in the tradition of *Audience 98*, the Public Radio Tracking Study is the largest recontact study ever conducted for public radio.

From Winter 1999 through Fall 2001, over 30,000 public radio listeners who had kept Arbitron diaries of their listening were recontacted so we could determine their attitudes and behavior with reference to listener support.

This is the first in a series of Special Reports from the Public Radio Tracking Study. Each report will focus on a single component of the critical relationship between public service and public support.

In this report we show how public radio listeners become givers.

Credits

The Public Radio Tracking Study was funded by 21 leading public radio stations, along with a first year challenge grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The funding stations were:

KCFR-FM	KUT -FM	WKSU-FM
KJZZ-FM	WAMU-FM	WNYC-AM
KOPB-FM	WBEZ-FM	WNYC-FM
KPLU-FM	WBUR-FM	WPKT-FM
KQED-FM	WCPN-FM	WUNC-FM
KUHF-FM	WETA-FM	WUSF-FM
KUSC-FM	WGUC-FM	WXPB-FM

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting provided additional funding for a series of Special Reports from the Public Radio Tracking Study. Accordingly, this report is freely available for any publication. Download electronic copies of this and other national research studies from WalrusResearch.Com.

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Executive Summary

In the tradition of *Audience 98*, we developed a statistical model that predicts which public radio listeners will become givers. The model is grounded in the Public Radio Tracking Study, the largest ever recontact study of public radio listeners.

- We confirmed that public radio givers can be predicted primarily from patterns of listening. Reliance may be measured by purely behavioral variables like loyalty to a public station and becoming a core listener.
- Personal importance is an internal realization. Individuals who not only listen but also sense that public radio has become important in their lives are more likely to become givers.
- Education adds predictive power to our model. Half of public radio givers have earned an advanced degree, an indicator of their socially responsible values and upscale lifestyles.
- Belief that public radio depends on listener support adds some predictive power to our model, but the strong predictors are behavioral reliance upon public radio along with a sense of personal importance.
- Public service causes public support. Producers and program directors, by designing valuable programming that encourages loyal listening, establish the potential for givers among public radio listeners.
- As public radio continues to expand its audience, stations and networks must reinforce the critical message that public radio depends on listener support. Listeners who do not believe that are unlikely to give.

Our findings reaffirm the principles of public service and public support, as explicated in *Audience 98*. Station managers, network executives and national policy makers may be more certain that these principles are truly actionable.

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The Tracking Study and Audience 98

The Public Radio Tracking Study follows directly from *Audience 98*, which itself descended from *Audience 88*. David Giovannoni originally designed the recontact methodology, linking respondent-level Arbitron diary data with follow-up telephone or mail questionnaires about giving to public radio.

The essential findings of *Audience 98* distilled into two ideas:

Public service begets public support.
Public support focuses public service.

One research question addressed in particular by *Audience 98* was “What turns a listener into a giver?” The answer was presented as a figurative model of the Stairway to Given. The first and tallest step was reliance on public radio.

The statistical basis for the Stairway to Given was regression analysis, a complex procedure that yields the best equation that predicts a dependent variable given several independent variables.

Audience 98 was based on Arbitron data collected in Fall 1996. After its publication, managers of leading public radio stations gathered in a series of seminars and agreed that the research should be carried forward.

We designed the Public Radio Tracking Study to trend critical measures across quarterly samples of public radio listeners from Winter 1999 through Fall 2001.

This Special Report from the Public Radio Tracking Study is based on 8,137 completed interviews with public radio listeners who kept Arbitron diaries from Winter through Fall 2001. Our year 2001 sample is about the same size as the 8,000 respondents reinterviewed for *Audience 98*, but our respondents represent 13 major market stations, not a projectable national sample.

In this report, using data collected five years after *Audience 98*, we revisit the critical question: “What turns a listener into a giver?”

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A Familiar Example of Statistical Modeling

To build a model that predicts givers among public radio listeners, we used logistic regression. Even if you are not statistically inclined, you are familiar with one popular example of regression—the predictors of heart attack.

According to the American Heart Association, smokers double their risk of heart attack. Other predictors include obesity, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and lack of exercise.

In statistical terms, heart attack is the dependent variable. The independent variables like obesity and smoking are the predictors. Medical researchers use logistic regression to develop an equation that calculates the odds.

For this study we used regression to develop an equation that predicts which public radio listeners become givers.

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Reliance upon Public Radio

Programming causes audience, and listeners are potential givers. Program directors set the potential for development when listeners come to rely upon public radio.

PD's are responsible for designing a format that gets listeners hooked on public radio. Once they are hooked, the development director can reel them in.

We confirmed that reliance upon public radio is the primary predictor of which listeners become givers. We defined reliance in terms of measurable listening behavior. Reliance is manifested in patterns of radio use.

Utiligraphic Variables

We analyzed Arbitron diaries kept by givers and non-givers, and coded each respondent on several utiligraphic variables like loyalty to the station, time spent listening, number of occasions and core vs. fringe.

We were not surprised to see that core listeners are more likely to become givers, or that givers report greater time spent listening to public radio. But any one of those utiligraphic variables by itself has limited power to predict which listener will give.

We found that radio use variables are better predictors when they operate in combination with each other. Reliance is the combined effect of behavioral variables like loyalty, TSL, occasions and core vs. fringe.

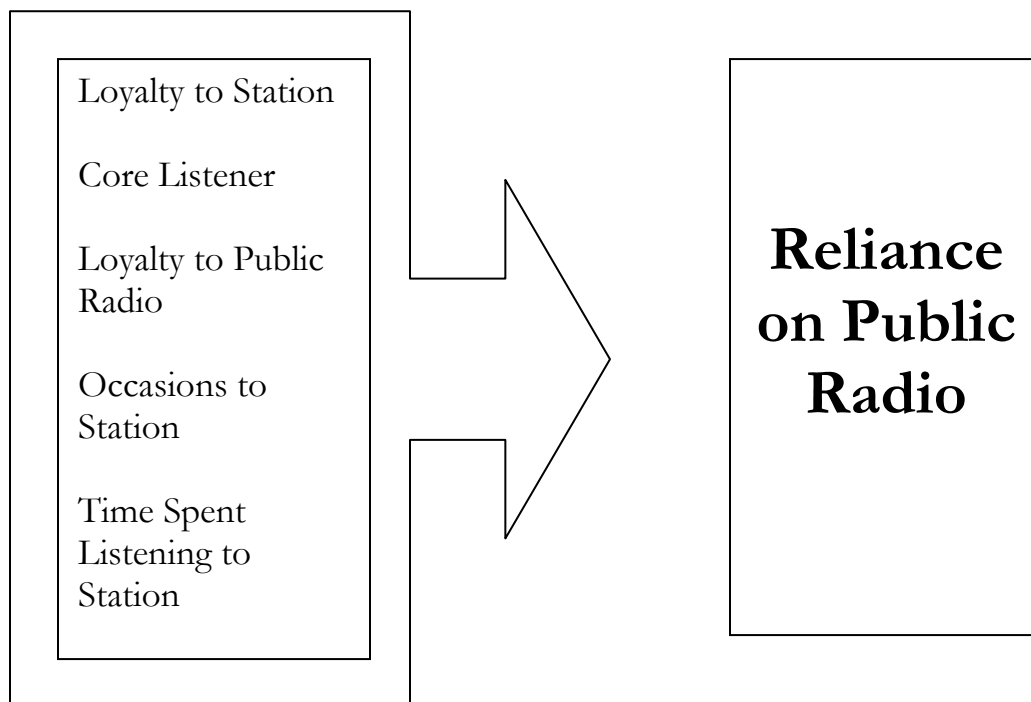
Statistically, we found that five utiligraphic variables can be reduced to one underlying factor that constitutes reliance on public radio. Take a look at the following diagram.

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Variables that Factor into Reliance on Public Radio

The diagram below shows the five individual measures of listening that come together into a factor—reliance on public radio.



Each of the five listening variables is calculated from Arbitron diary data.

Program directors can build reliance by designing formats that increase loyalty, occasions, TSL and core composition among public radio listeners.

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Personal Importance

Conceptually, personal importance is the internal realization that public radio has become important in your own life. Personal importance has nothing to do with altruism. *Audience 88* demonstrated that givers are motivated by their own needs rather than the needs of others.

Here is how we measured personal importance in our recontact questionnaire:

“The programming on [STATION] is an important part of my life. If it went away I would miss it.”

The response format was a six-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

We confirmed that personal importance by itself had predictive value, but when personal importance and reliance are both plugged into a regression model, the chances of predicting a giver improve.

Program directors must design formats that not only build reliance in terms of listening behavior but also stimulate a realization of personal importance in the lives of public radio listeners.

Listeners send money when they rely upon public radio’s service and realize that the programming has become important in their lives.

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Education

The third predictor variable in our model is education. Among public radio listeners—who over represent college graduates to begin with—those with advanced degrees are more likely to become givers.

Why is education a predictor?

There are two reasons why listeners with advanced degrees are more likely to give. First, highly educated listeners are concentrated in certain psychographic segments of the population. *Audience 98* found that public radio's signature programming has powerful appeal to Actualizers and Fulfilleds.

In the VALS psychographic typology, Actualizers and Fulfilleds are the elite segments. Their values are socially responsible and their lifestyles are upscale.

The VALS system has been refined a bit since *Audience 98*. Actualizers are now called Innovators. Fulfilleds are now called Thinkers. Those identifiers, Innovators and Thinkers, sure do resonate with public radio's mission.

The second reason why listeners with advanced degrees are more likely to give is because they generally have more money.

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Belief in Listener Support

Finally, we confirmed that it helps if listeners hold certain beliefs about the funding structure of public radio. Givers are more likely to hold the “right” beliefs.

Here are two items from our recontact survey:

“I generally think of public radio as being financially supported by contributing listeners.”

“I generally think of public radio as being financially supported by universities or government tax dollars.”

The response format was a six-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

We found that the right beliefs, when added to a regression model after reliance, personal importance and education, help to further improve the prediction. By right beliefs we obviously mean that listener support is high while government support is low.

But right beliefs about funding are weak predictors relative to the much stronger prerequisites, reliance and personal importance.

A Note about Belief

In 1999 we designed a series of focus groups for John Sutton, who was working on development tactics. In each group we asked respondents to estimate the percentage of their local station’s budget that came from listeners.

Their estimates varied widely, even for stations that had publicized the structure of their budget. The belief that public radio is listener supported may be more of a fuzzy notion than accurate knowledge.

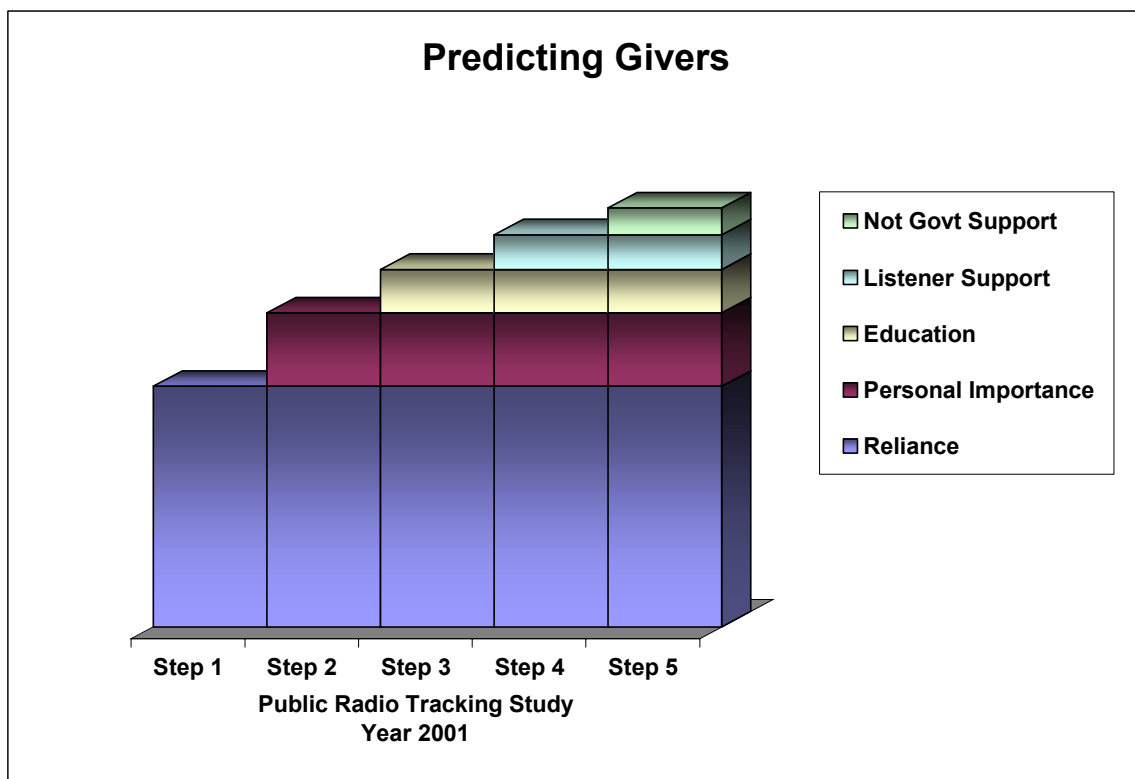
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The Model

This diagram is designed to show the relative power of each predictor.

The height of each column corresponds to its added impact on the prediction.



Reliance is the base. The power of the model improves when the next step is added, personal importance. Education and funding beliefs boost the odds of correctly predicting givers among public radio listeners.

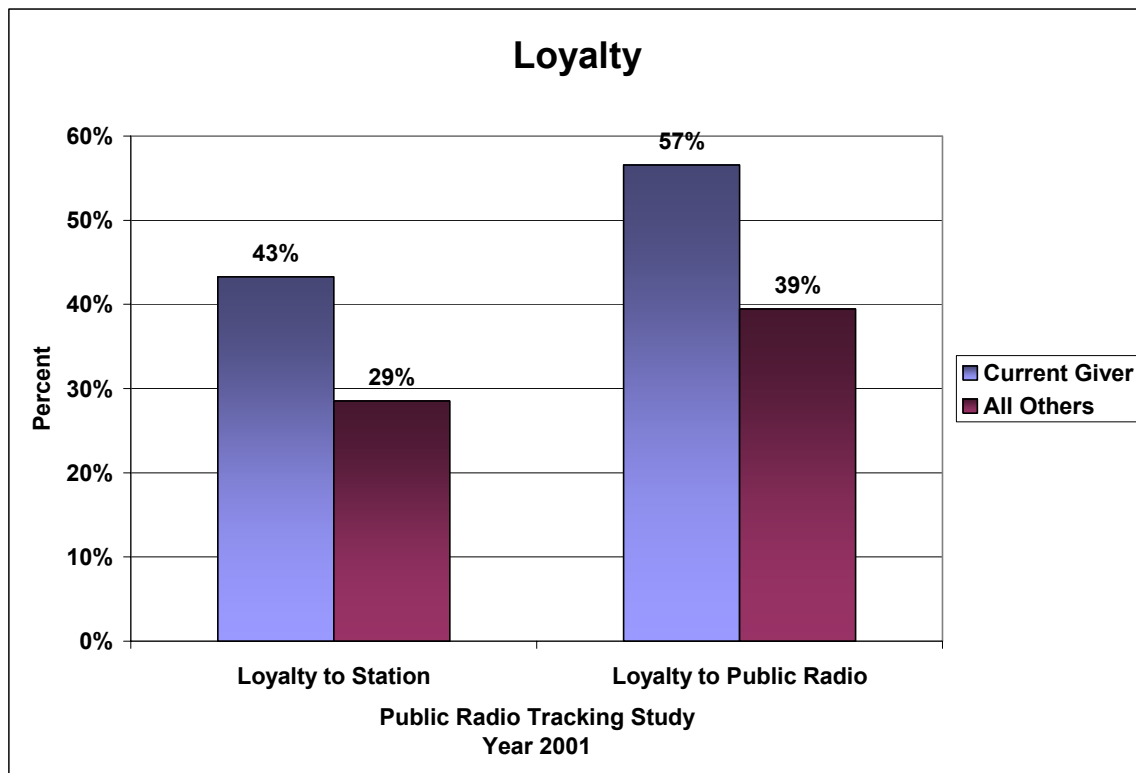
The predictive model is an equation involving four variables and a factor derived from five other variables. The statistics are printed in an appendix.

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Illustrations of Reliance

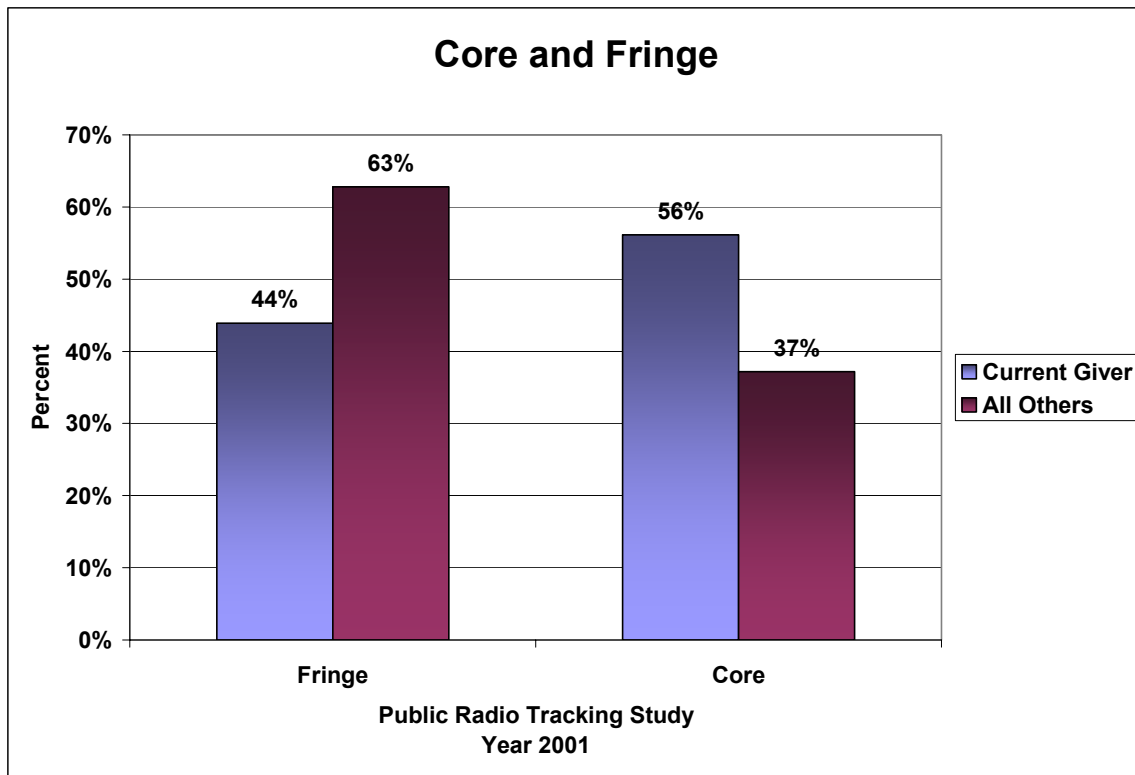
To illustrate our findings, we thought it might be helpful to show a few charts that show how givers differ from other listeners. Let's start with measures of listening behavior:



In aggregate, 43 percent of radio listening by current givers goes to their public radio station. When listening to a second or third public radio station is added, givers are 57 percent loyal to public radio.

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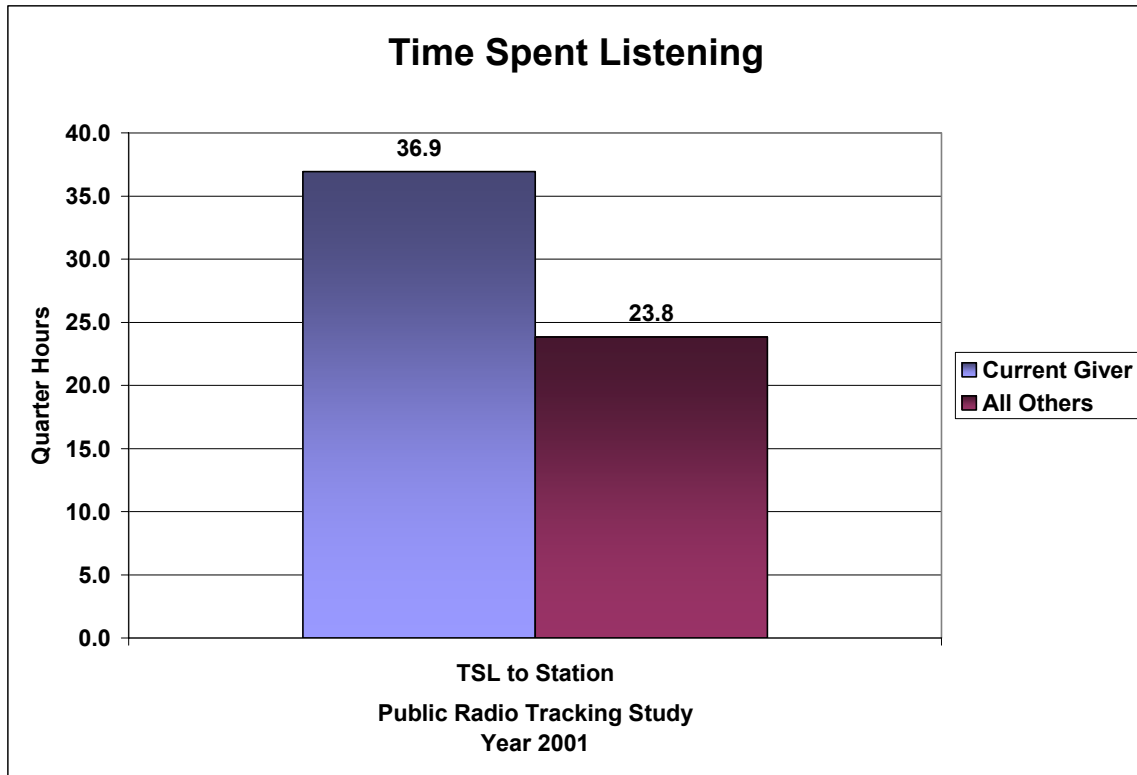
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56 percent of current givers are core to their public radio station. Core means that they listen to that station more than any other station, by count of quarter hours per week. In contrast, 63 percent of non-givers are fringe listeners.

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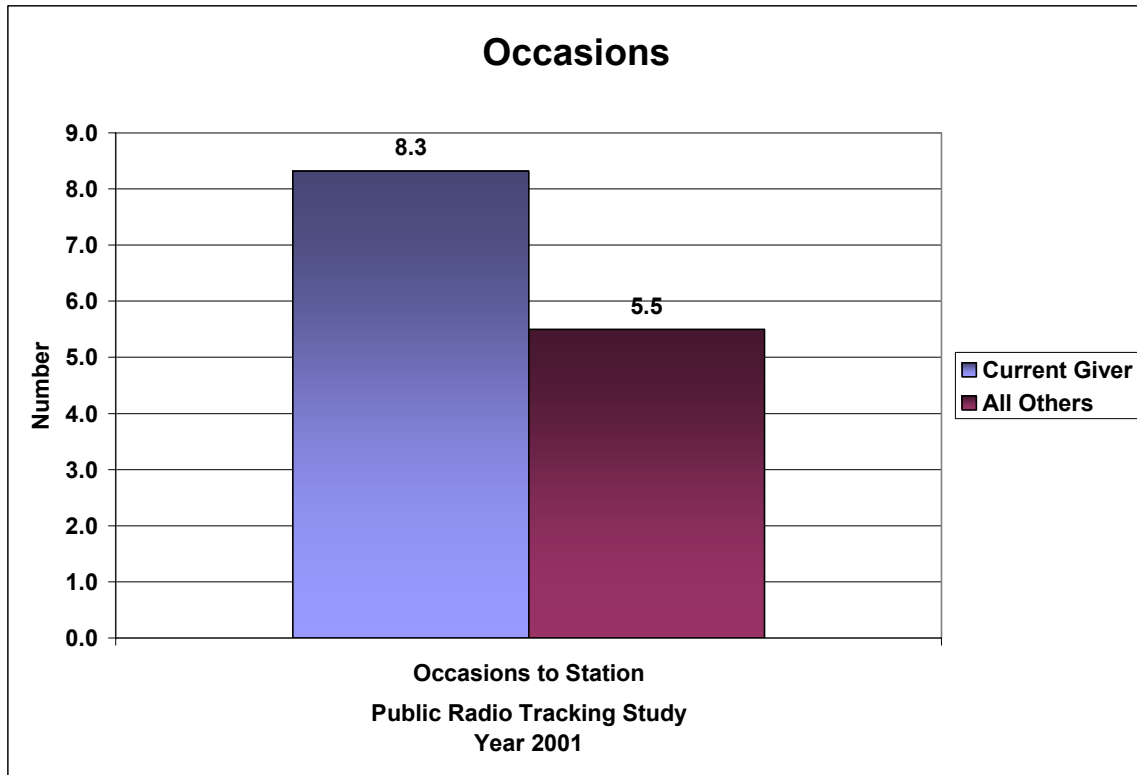
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Current givers average 37 quarter hours of listening to their public radio station per week. The non-givers are lighter users, about 24 quarter hours.

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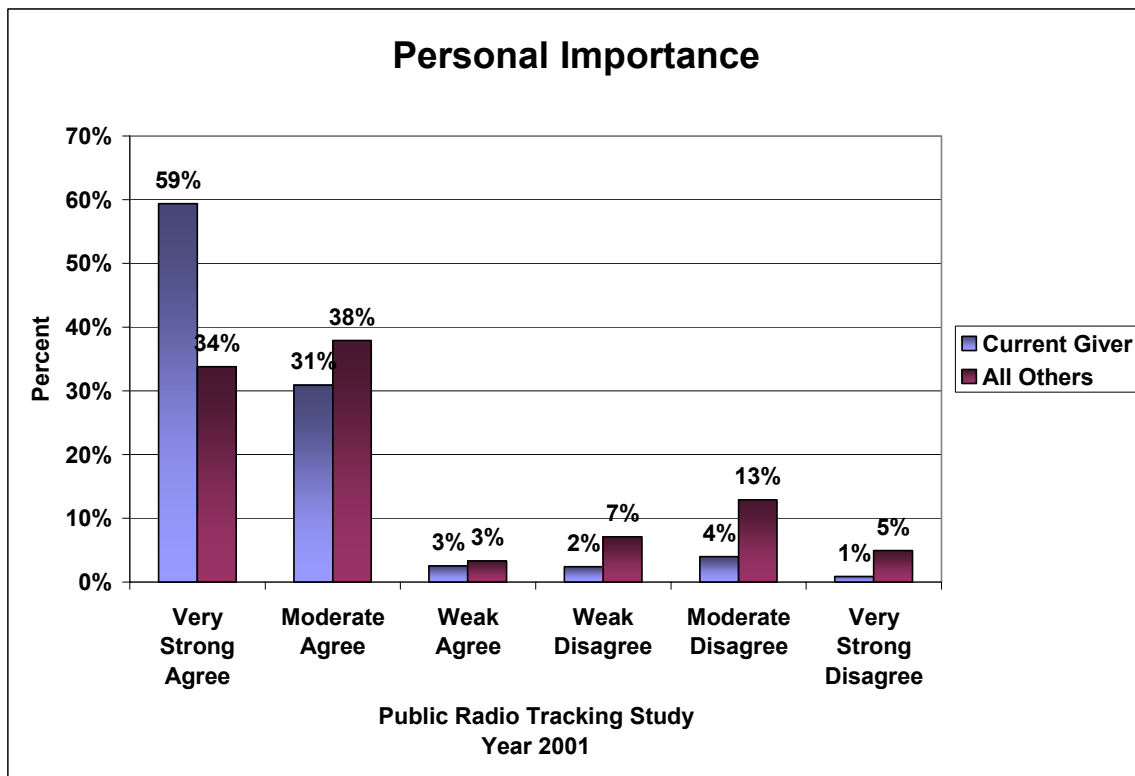
Current givers average over 8 occasions of tune in to their public radio station, compared to 5.5 occasions for non-givers.

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Illustration of Personal Importance

The chart below shows how givers and non-givers rate the importance of public radio programming in their lives.



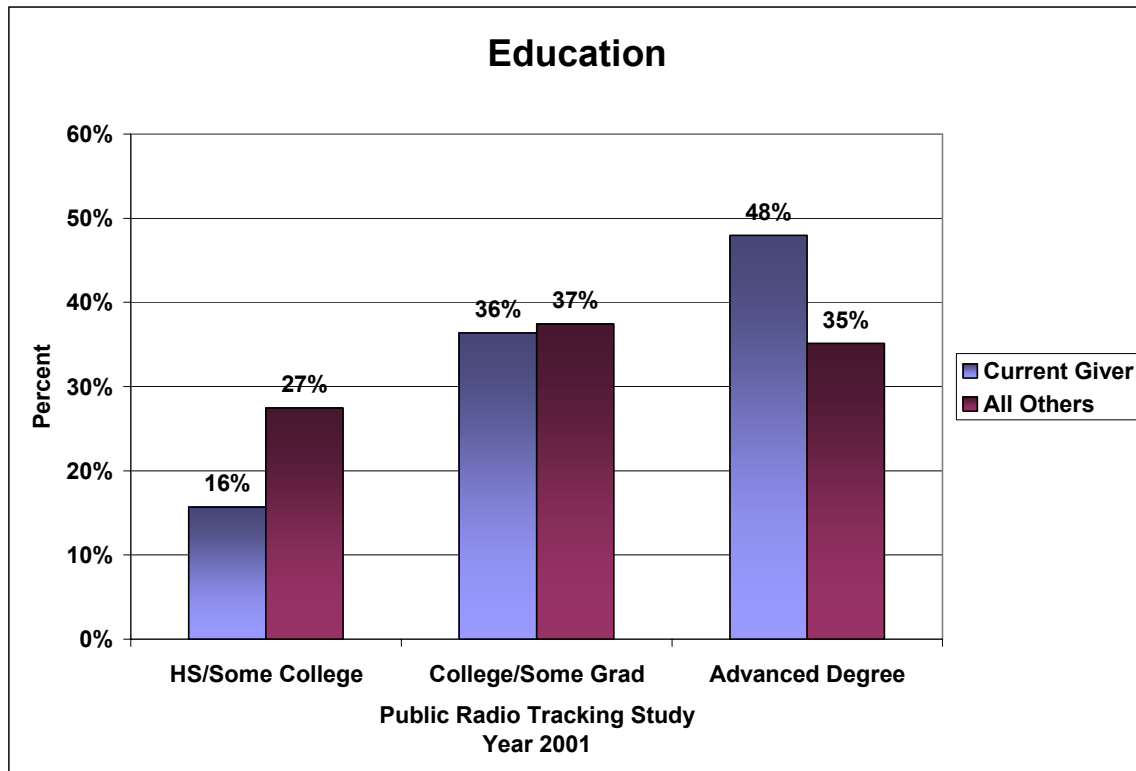
59 percent of givers very strongly agree that public radio is personally important. The feeling is weaker among non-givers.

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Illustration of Education

The chart below shows how givers differ from non-givers by academic degree.



48 percent of givers hold an advanced degree like an MA, PhD or MD.

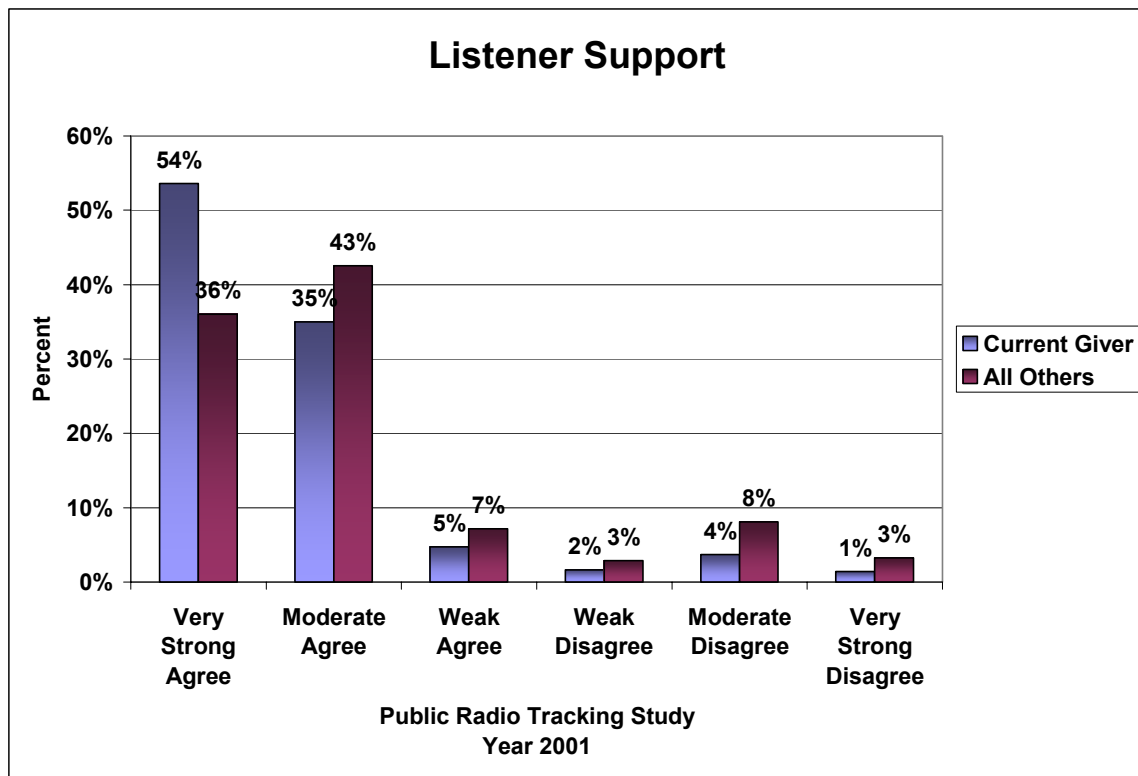
Only 16 percent of givers never graduated from college.

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Illustrations of Funding Belief

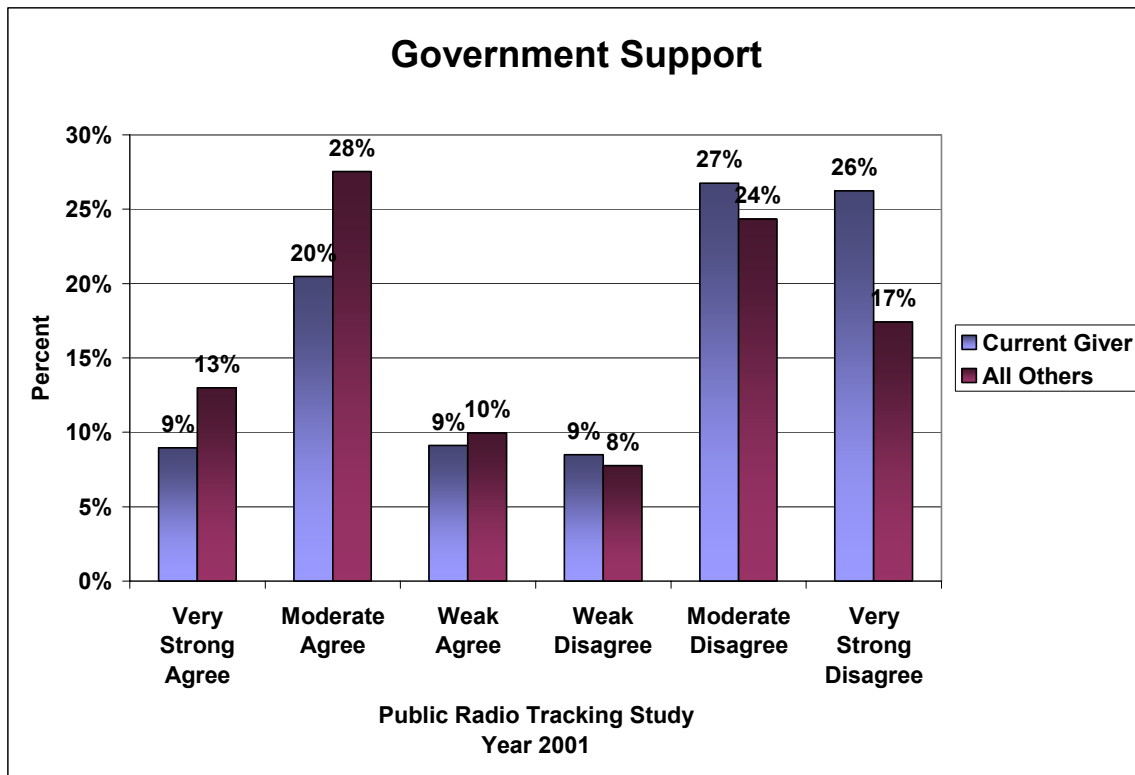
Whatever the reality, givers tend to hold certain beliefs about how public radio is funded.



54 percent of current givers very strongly agree that public radio depends on listener support. That belief is softer among non-givers.

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The pattern of belief about government funding is bi-modal. Listeners are not clear about how much funding really does come from government sources, including universities.

But 53 percent of current givers moderately or very strongly disagree that public radio depends on government funding.

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About Development

Five years after *Audience 98*, our independent analysis confirmed that listener support is a function of reliance on public radio in terms of listening, along with personal importance—the realization that quality programming has value.

Nevertheless, there are public radio stations whose development departments over perform or under perform on critical measures like frequency of giving, renewal rate, upgrading of gift amount, converting givers into major donors and maximizing net income after development expenses.

That's what *Audience 98* called the D-Factor. Programming is the P-Factor.

We are confident that our model identifies the necessary prerequisites for becoming a giver. That is, a listener who does not rely upon public radio and does not perceive value in its programming is definitely not a good prospect for any development department.

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Statistical Appendix

We used factor analysis and logistic regression to construct a model that predicts givers and non-givers among public radio listeners.

Factor Analysis

Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component	
	1	2
Loyalty to Station	.956	3.195E-04
Core Listener	.887	-1.70E-02
Loyalty to Public Radio	.722	.398
Occasions to Station	.709	.465
TSL to Station	.649	.499
Occasions to Public Radio	.399	.826
TSL to Public Radio	.399	.791
Number of Public Radio Stations	-.310	.759

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

We found that five listening variables load on a first factor, while three other listening variables load on a second factor.

Factor 1 reflects high loyalty and core listening to a public radio station. We called it Reliance. The factor includes station loyalty, core listening, loyalty to public radio, occasions to the station and TSL to the station.

Factor 2 is a reflection of heavy radio use in general. It did not add predictive power to our model.

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Logistic Regression

Classification Table^a

Observed			Predicted		
			RG12MNT		Percentage Correct
			All Others	Current Giver	
Step 1	RG12MNT	All Others	3298	1020	76.4
		Current Giver	1413	1672	54.2
		Overall Percentage			67.1

a. The cut value is .500

This table shows how accurately the regression equation predicts known givers within our sample. The combined effect of reliance, personal importance, education and right beliefs about funding yields a correct prediction in 67 percent or two-thirds of cases.

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1	FAC1_1	.307	.026	137.998	1	.000	1.359
	RIMPTA	.302	.018	296.036	1	.000	1.353
	RSUPLIS	.164	.019	78.467	1	.000	1.178
	SUPGOV	.128	.015	78.114	1	.000	1.137
	EDUCA	.213	.019	119.282	1	.000	1.237
	Constant	-2.487	.105	560.630	1	.000	.083

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: FAC1_1, RIMPTA, RSUPLIS, SUPGOV, EDUCA.

Factor 1 is Reliance. In the data file it is each respondent's factor loading score with mean of 0, standard deviation of 1, ranging from minus 3.3 to plus 3.3.

RIMPTA is Personal Importance. It is measured on a six-point interval scale.

RSUPLIS and SUPGOV are two Beliefs about public radio funding measured on six-point interval scales. Their directions are opposite.

Education was measured as a five-point categorical variable. Its contribution to the regression equation did not change when treated as an interval scale.