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Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era

Partisan dynamics overshadow other factors in Americans' evaluations of the news media

BY Jeffrey Gottfried, Galen Stocking, Elizabeth Grieco, Mason Walker, Maya Khuzam, and Amy Mitchell

FOR MEDIA OR OTHER INQUIRIES:

Jeffrey Gottfried, Senior Researcher
Amy Mitchell, Director, Journalism Research
Hannah Klein, Communications Manager

202.419.4372

www.pewresearch.org

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Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era

Partisan dynamics overshadow other factors in Americans' evaluations of the news media

It is no secret that, in an information environment characterized by [deep tensions](#) between President Donald Trump and national news organizations, Americans are divided in their trust of the news media. A new Pew Research Center exploration of more than 50 different surveys conducted by the Center – combined with an analysis of well over 100 questions measuring possible factors that could drive trust in the news media – confirms that in the Trump era nothing comes close to matching the impact of political party identification. On item after item, Republicans consistently express far greater skepticism of the news media and their motives than Democrats, according to this analysis that focuses on trust in the news media during 2018 and 2019.

Even more telling, the analysis reveals that divides emerge *within* party – particularly the Republican Party – based on how strongly people approve of Trump's performance as president. Trump has publicly and repeatedly criticized both news organizations and the journalists who work for them, criticisms that, according to this study, resonate with his most fervent supporters.

The link between the public's approval of Trump and views of the news media is clear in evaluations of journalists' ethics. About three-in-ten Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (31%) say journalists have *very low* ethical standards, roughly six times the 5% of Democrats and Democratic leaners who say this. Trump's strongest approvers, though, express even greater suspicion: 40% of Republicans who strongly approve of Trump's

Republicans far more likely than Democrats to say journalists lack ethics

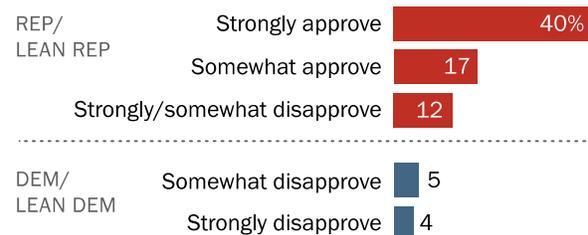
% of U.S. adults who say journalists have *very low* ethical standards



... but Republicans who strongly approve of Trump stand out even more

% of U.S. adults who say journalists have *very low* ethical standards

Among those who approve/disapprove of the way Trump is handling his job as president



Note: The 6% of Democrats who approve of how Trump is handling his job as president is not a large enough sample to reliably include in the analysis. Somewhat approve/disapprove indicates those respondents who said they "not so strongly" approve/disapprove in the survey.

Source: Surveys conducted March 18-April 1 and April 29-May 13, 2019.

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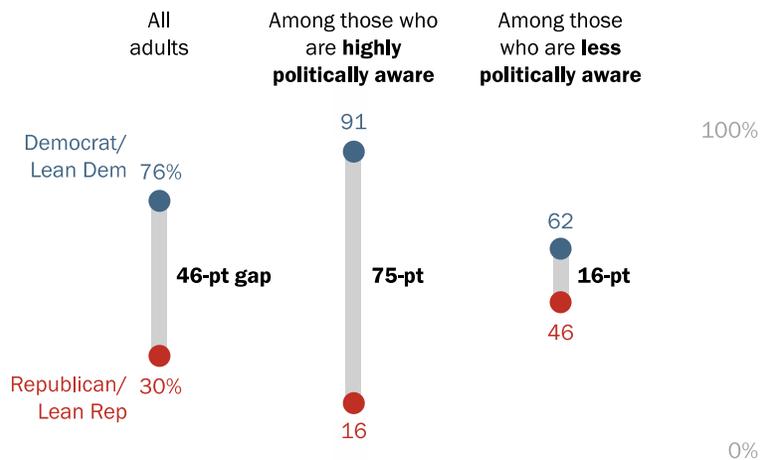
job performance say journalists' ethics are that low. That is true of far fewer Republicans who only somewhat approve of Trump or disapprove of him: 17% and 12%, respectively.¹

Overall, this relationship between support for Trump and depressed trust in the news media persists over a range of attitudes. And, taken together, Republicans who are most approving of Trump and Democrats who are least approving of him stand far apart from each other.

The extent to which a person is engaged with national politics and the news surrounding it also plays into their evaluation of the news media. Highly engaged partisans are even more polarized in their views than the two parties overall. For example, there is a 46 percentage point gap between all Democrats and Republicans (including those who lean to each party) in whether they have a great deal or fair amount of confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public. This jumps to a 75-point gap between the highly politically aware who associate with the two parties (91% of highly politically aware Democrats vs. 16% of highly aware Republicans).

Highly engaged partisans are extremely polarized in their confidence in journalists

% of U.S. adults who have **a great deal/fair amount of confidence** that journalists will act in the best interests of the public



Note: The somewhat politically aware are not shown.

Source: Surveys conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018, and Feb. 19-March 4, 2019. "Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era"

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No other factors in this study come close to these partisan dynamics in their relationship to Americans' views. There are a few that show some connection, however. One of these factors is trust in others more generally, or interpersonal trust: Americans who express greater trust in others tend to give the news media higher marks than those who are less trusting. Additionally, there are some interesting differences across demographic groups, such as those based on age,

¹ There is a strong overlap between approval of the way Trump is handling his job as president and political party identification, but not a complete overlap. For instance, while most Republicans and Republican leaners strongly approve of Trump, the remaining Republicans are almost evenly split between somewhat approving of Trump or disapproving.

race and ethnicity, religion, and education. For example, black Americans often exhibit greater support of news organizations and journalists than Hispanic or white Americans. And older Americans are more loyal to their preferred news sources than younger Americans. Other concepts such as life cycle milestones and life satisfaction measures show limited, inconsistent or no relationship with evaluations of the news media.

The overall goal of this study was to integrate a wide range of concepts to develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors that link to the public's trust in the news media today. Researchers pulled together years of Pew Research Center surveys conducted on the [American Trends Panel](#) and examined responses from the panel members across these surveys. Using advanced statistical weighting and multivariate analyses, attitudes toward the news media – including direct measures of trust as well as closely related measures – were set alongside a wide range of other measures to examine what connects to trust in the news media. For more information on the methodology of the study, see the box below and the [methodology](#) section.

Summary of methodology

The purpose of this study was to leverage data from multiple surveys to develop a comprehensive understanding of what factors connect to the public's trust in the news media. For years, Pew Research Center has surveyed Americans' views of the news media across multiple dimensions – from trust in the information they get from news organizations, to their confidence in journalists' ability to do their job, to support for the news media's watchdog role, among others. This study analyzed a range of measures that are related to trust in the news media – including those that directly measure trust as well as closely related topics – pulled from multiple surveys conducted on the Center's American Trends Panel (ATP), a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults.

Researchers combed through more than 50 ATP surveys conducted between 2014-2019, looking for measures that assess the public's trust in the news media as well as potential factors that are related to these evaluations, with the focus of the final analysis on measures collected since 2018. Well over 100 questions were included in the initial analysis, which were then limited to the final measures discussed in this report. There were a number of reasons why certain variables did not make the final cut, including sample sizes and conceptual duplication. The selection of trust measures and explanatory factors in this study were largely based on previous Pew Research Center data as well as existing literature around trust in the news media.

Since the ATP is a panel, researchers can combine respondents' answers to questions across many surveys, crossing variables from different points in time in unique ways. For example, researchers analyzed a question on President Donald Trump's job performance collected April 29-May 13, 2019, with a question on trust in information from national news organizations collected July 8-21, 2019. This study analyzes variables both within a single survey and across survey waves. For each combination of surveys, special weights were created for the sample of respondents that answered both surveys to maintain national representation.

For this study, the measures of trust in the news media and closely related concepts focus on the news media, journalists and national news organization generally. Other research has shown that Americans' views and habits around individual news outlets vary dramatically from outlet to outlet. And again, partisanship plays a substantial role in [outlets that Americans trust](#) and [get news from](#).

For additional information, read the [methodology](#).

1. Within both parties, approval of Trump is closely linked to trust in the news media

Through an exploration of more than 50 different surveys and an analysis of well over 100 questions, Pew Research Center finds that Americans' political party identification is overwhelmingly linked to how the public evaluates the news media. Overall, Republicans give the news media far lower ratings than Democrats. These findings are [in line with previous studies](#) which show stark partisan divides, particularly after the 2016 presidential election.

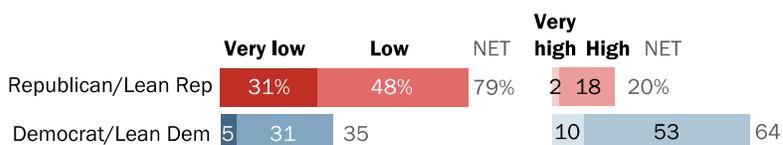
One of the most striking differences between the two parties is on their views of journalists' ethical standards.

About two-thirds of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents (64%) say that journalists have very high or high ethical standards, compared with two-in-ten Republicans and Republican leaners – a 44 percentage point

difference. The vast majority of Republicans say journalists have low or very low ethical standards, including nearly a third (31%) who think they have *very low* standards.

Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to say that journalists lack ethical standards

% of U.S. adults who say journalists have ___ ethical standards



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019.

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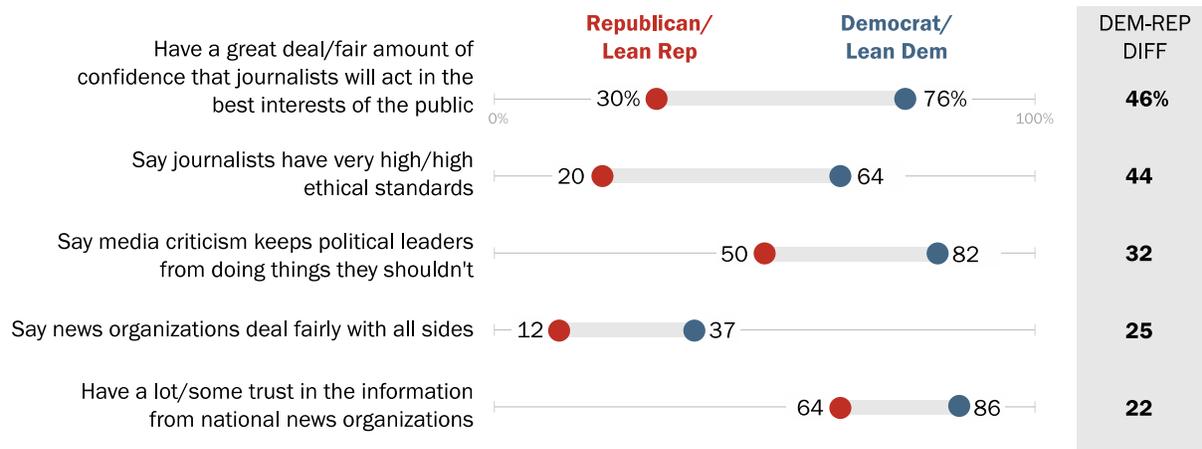
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Similarly, Republicans are far more cynical about journalists' ability to act in the best interests of the public. Three-in-ten have a great deal or fair amount of confidence that journalists do this, compared with about three-quarters of Democrats (76%) – a 46-point gap. Republicans and Republican leaners also express less support for the media's "watchdog" role. They are 32 points less likely than Democrats and Democratic leaners to say media criticism of political leaders keeps them from doing things they shouldn't do (50% vs. 82%, respectively). There is a 25-point gap in the share of Republicans and Democrats who say that news organizations treat all sides fairly when covering social and political issues (12% vs. 37%).

And Republicans are 22 percentage points less likely than Democrats (64% vs. 86%) to say they have a lot of or some trust in the information they get from national news organizations, though majorities of both parties say this. That said, minorities of both parties have *a lot* of trust in the information from national news organizations, though again Republicans are less likely to say this (12% vs. 30%).

Republicans express much greater skepticism of the news media than Democrats

% of U.S. adults who ...



Note: Statistically significant differences are in **bold**.

Source: Surveys conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018, Feb. 19-March 4, 2019, March 18-April 1, 2019, and July 8-July 21, 2019. "Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era"

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But there are differences within each party as well. Particularly among Republicans, approval of Donald Trump aligns with much greater animosity toward news organizations and journalists. Overall, about two-thirds of Republicans and Republican leaners (64%) strongly approve of how

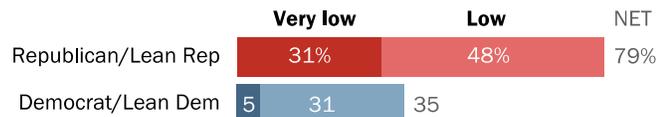
Trump is handling his job as president, according to a survey conducted between April 29-May 13, 2019. The remaining Republicans are almost evenly split between somewhat approving of Trump (18%) or disapproving (either strongly or somewhat – 17%). Nearly all Democrats fall in the disapproving camp, with 81% who strongly disapprove.

Republicans who strongly approve of the job Trump is doing are far more pessimistic in their evaluations of the news media than other Republicans. And Democrats who are most disapproving of Trump’s job performance are often more supportive of the news media than Democrats who disapprove less strongly. These within-party divides persist even when accounting for the respondents’ age, education and whether they identify as conservative, moderate or liberal.² Taken together, the most approving Republicans and the least approving Democrats are further divided than the parties are as a whole.³

This point comes through clearly in views of journalists’ ethics. Trump’s strongest approvers outpace other Republicans – and Democrats – in their negative evaluation.

Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to think that journalists lack ethical standards ...

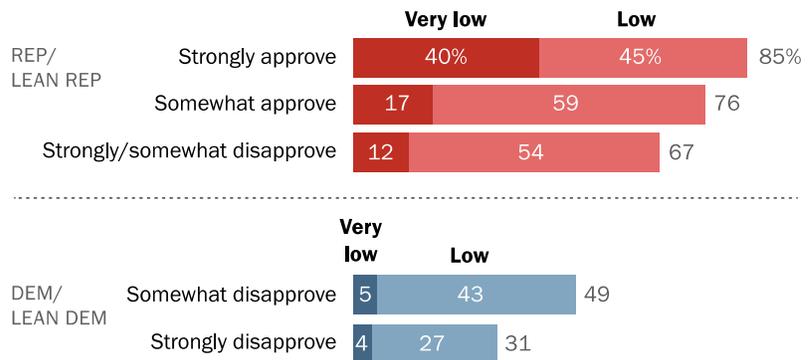
% of U.S. adults who say journalists have ___ ethical standards



... but Republicans who strongly approve of Trump are most likely to think this

% of U.S adults who say journalists have ___ ethical standards

Among those who approve/disapprove of the way Trump is handling his job as president



Note: The 6% of Democrats who approve of how Trump is handling his job as president is not a large enough sample to reliably include in the analysis. Somewhat approve/disapprove indicates those respondents who said they “not so strongly” approve/disapprove in the survey.

Source: Surveys conducted March 18-April 1 and April 29-May 13, 2019.

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² A series of multivariate regression models were conducted that control for respondents’ age, education and self-reported political ideology. What these models show is that the connection between approval of Trump and evaluations of the news media across measures in this study persists even when accounting for these characteristics. In other words, approval for Trump has a connection with evaluations of the news media above and beyond whether people identify as conservative, moderate or liberal.

³ Throughout this report, only indicators with a sample size large enough to produce statistically reliable estimates are shown. When support for Trump is crossed with party identification, there are not enough Democrats who approve of how Trump is handling his job as president to reliably measure their trust in the news media across all of the measures, and therefore they are not shown.

As noted above, Republicans overall are 44 percentage points more likely to say journalists have very low or low ethical standards. And there is a 26-point difference for just *very low* (31% vs. 5%).

But within the parties, Republicans who are most approving of Trump express the most negative assessment. Four-in-ten Republicans who strongly approve of how Trump is handling his job as president say that journalists have *very low* ethical standards, 23 percentage points higher than the share of somewhat approving Republicans saying this (17%) and 28 points higher than disapproving Republicans (12%).

There is a divide within the Democratic Party as well, though not as stark. While very few Democrats think journalists have *very low* ethical standards, Democrats who strongly disapprove of Trump are less likely to say these standards are low or very low than somewhat disapproving Democrats (31% vs. 49%).

When comparing Republicans who strongly approve of Trump and Democrats who strongly disapprove, the gap in their view that journalists have very low ethics increases to 36 percentage points (4% vs. 40%). This is 10 points higher than the difference between Republicans and Democrats overall, an increase that is largely driven by the heightened negativity among strongly approving Republicans.

A similar pattern exists in the [public's views of the news media's "watchdog" role](#).

Republicans overall are 32 percentage points less likely than Democrats to say news media criticism keeps political leaders from doing things they shouldn't (50% vs. 82%, respectively).

But just as with media ethics, differences within the parties emerge based on approval of Trump. There is a 29 percentage point split between the most approving Republicans (42%) and Republicans who disapprove of Trump (71%) in their views of the watchdog role, with those who somewhat approve falling in between (53%). And among Democrats, those who strongly disapprove of Trump are 15 points more likely to think news media criticism keeps political leaders in check than those who somewhat disapprove (88% vs. 73%).

Overall, strongly approving Republicans are 46 percentage points less likely than strongly disapproving Democrats to say that news media criticism keeps politicians from doing things they shouldn't (42% vs. 88%, respectively).

Republicans are less likely to think news media criticism keeps political leaders in check ...

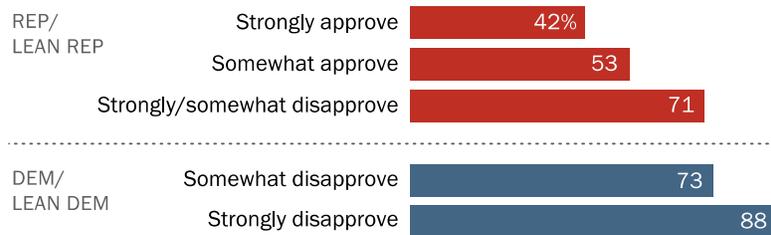
% of U.S. adults who say that criticism from news organizations keeps political leaders from doing things that shouldn't be done



... but it is the Republicans who strongly approve of Trump that are the least likely to think this

% of U.S. adults who say that criticism from news organizations keeps political leaders from doing things that shouldn't be done

Among those who approve/disapprove of the way Trump is handling his job as president



Note: The 6% of Democrats who approve of how Trump is handling his job as president is not a large enough sample to reliably include in the analysis. Somewhat approve/disapprove indicates those respondents who said they "not so strongly" approve/disapprove in the survey.

Source: Surveys conducted Feb. 19-March 4 and April 29-May 13, 2019. "Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era"

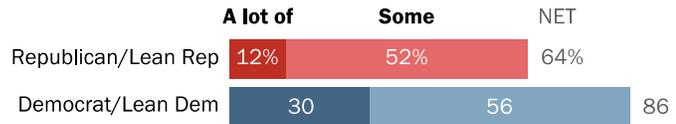
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Trump’s strongest Republican approvers again stand out as the most skeptical when it comes to trust of national news organizations – the broadest and most direct measure of media trust in this study. About six-in-ten Republicans who strongly approve of Trump (58%) have at least some trust in national news organizations, 14 percentage points less than Republicans who somewhat approve (72%) and 19 points less than those who disapprove (77%). Overall, there is a 29-point difference between the strongly approving Republicans and the strongly disapproving Democrats (58% vs. 87%).

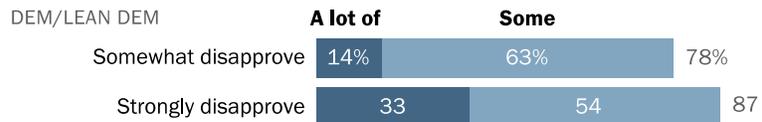
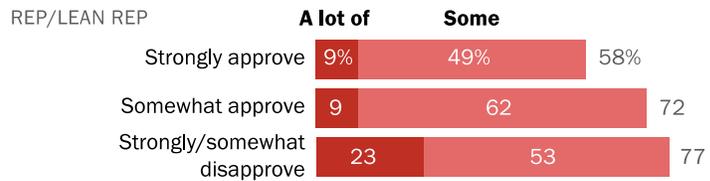
On one final measure of media trust – perceived fairness in coverage – Republicans are 25 percentage points less likely than Democrats to say news organizations treat all sides fairly when covering social and political issues (12% vs. 37%, respectively). However, within each party differences are less consistent.⁴

Trump’s strongest Republican supporters are the least trusting of national news organizations

% of U.S. adults who say they have ___ trust in the information from national news organizations



Among those who approve/disapprove of the way Trump is handling his job as president



Note: The 6% of Democrats who approve of how Trump is handling his job as president is not a large enough sample to reliably include in the analysis. Somewhat approve/disapprove indicates those respondents who said they “not so strongly” approve/disapprove in the survey.

Source: Surveys conducted April 29-May 13 and July 8-21, 2019. “Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era”

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⁴ The measure of confidence that journalists act in the best interests of the public is not discussed in this section due to sample size limitations.

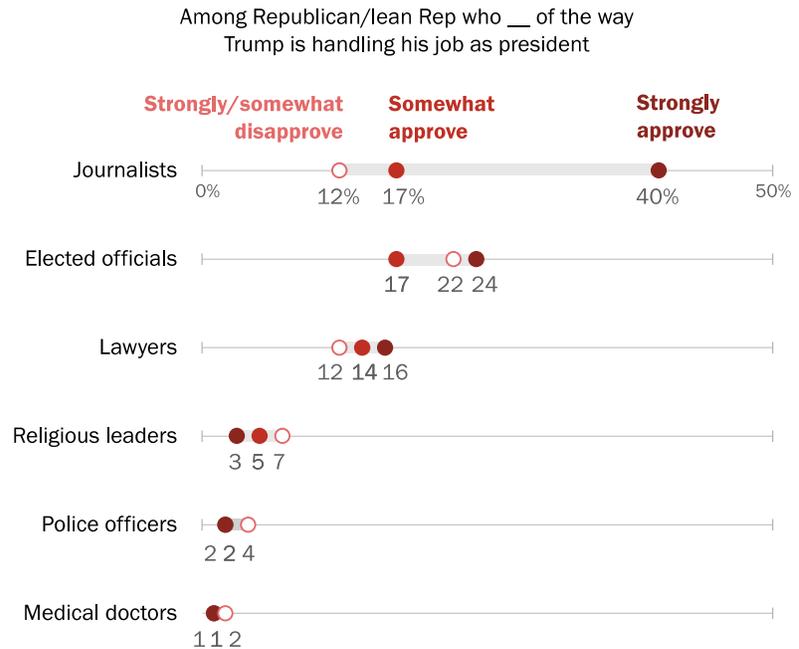
Approval of Trump seems to be more strongly tied to how the public evaluates the news media than to evaluations of other institutions, particularly among Republicans. The question about ethical standards was also asked about other groups of individuals – from elected officials to religious leaders to doctors – but the only area where substantial differences emerge based on Trump approval is journalists. Among Republicans of differing approval levels, the divide for any of the other groups asked about does not exceed 7 percentage points.

As noted earlier, very few Democrats think journalists have *very low* ethical standards. When combining those who said low or very

low, though, the gaps between the strongly and somewhat disapproving Democrats similarly are greater for the ethical standards of journalists than they are for the other groups of individuals.

Republicans are far more divided about the ethical standards of journalists than of any other group

% of U.S. adult Republicans and Republican leaners who say each group has very low ethical standards



Note: Somewhat approve/disapprove indicates those respondents who said they “not so strongly” approve/disapprove in the survey.

Source: Surveys conducted March 18-April 1 and April 29-May 13, 2019.

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2. Highly engaged partisans have starkly different views of the news media

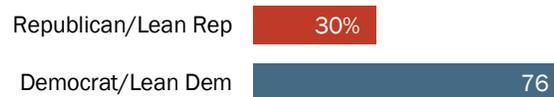
The public's level of engagement – both politically and with the news – adds another dimension to partisans' evaluations of the news media. Divides within the parties once again emerge, and partisans who are highly engaged are the most polarized in a range of views of the news media.

In general, Republicans and Republican leaners who are highly engaged with politics or with the news tend to be more negative toward the news media than less engaged Republicans, and highly engaged Democrats and Democratic leaners are typically more supportive of the news media than their less engaged counterparts. Taken together, stark divides emerge between the highly engaged Republicans and Democrats – divides that are often more pronounced than among partisans overall.⁵ (For more information on the two measures of engagement – political awareness and news engagement – see [the box below](#).)

For example, Americans' level of confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public clearly shows how partisan divides are even starker among the highly engaged. In this case, the two parties begin with quite different levels of confidence – 30% of Republicans versus 76% of Democrats overall have a great deal or fair amount of confidence. But then looking within party, highly politically

Republicans and Democrats stand far apart in their confidence in journalists ...

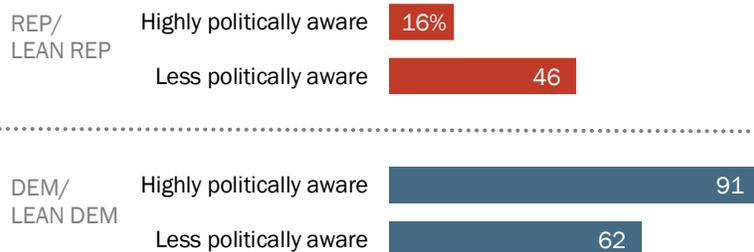
% of U.S. adults who have a great deal/fair amount of confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public



... but highly politically aware partisans are even further polarized

% of U.S. adults who have a great deal/fair amount of confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public

Among those who are ...



Note: The somewhat politically aware are not shown.

Source: Surveys conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018, and Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.

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⁵ Like the analysis of within-party differences based on approval for Trump, a series of multivariate regression models were conducted here controlling for respondents' age and education. The results presented in this section persist even when accounting for these demographic characteristics.

aware Republicans are 30 percentage points *less* likely than less aware Republicans to say this (16% vs. 46%). And highly aware Democrats are 29 points *more* likely than their less aware counterparts to express this level of confidence (91% vs. 62%).

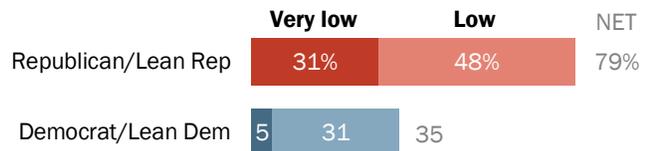
Across parties, though, the divide between highly engaged Republicans and Democrats is far larger. The 46 percentage point gap between Republicans and Democrats overall increases to 75 points. A similar pattern emerges when looking at news engagement: There is a 66 percentage point difference between Republicans and Democrats who are highly engaged with news (23% vs. 89%, respectively).

The highly and less engaged in each party are similarly divided in their views of journalists' ethics. Highly politically aware Republicans are 14 percentage points more likely than those who are less engaged to think that journalists have low or very low ethics (87% vs. 73%) – a gap that is 33 points when considering only those who say very low (49% vs. 16%). And among Democrats, there is a 36-point difference between the highly and less politically aware who say journalists have low or very low ethics (17% vs. 53%).

As with confidence, there is again a substantial divide between highly engaged partisans. The 44-point gap between Republicans and Democrats overall in their view of whether journalists have low or very low ethical standards grows to 70 points between the highly politically aware

Republicans far more likely than Democrats to think journalists lack ethical standards ...

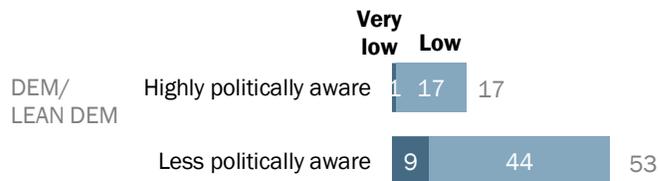
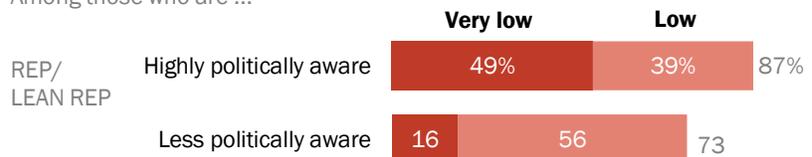
% of U.S. adults who say journalists have ___ ethical standards



... and the divide is even larger among highly politically aware partisans

% of U.S. adults who say journalists have ___ ethical standards

Among those who are ...



Note: The somewhat politically aware are not shown.
 Source: Surveys conducted Feb. 19-March 4 and March 18-April 1, 2019.
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Republicans and Democrats. And again, a similar pattern emerges among Republicans and Democrats who are highly engaged with news.

On the other measures of trust analyzed in this study, there are also large divides between highly engaged Republicans and Democrats on their trust in the information from national news organizations, views of the media's watchdog role, and perceived fairness in coverage.⁶ These stark divides between highly engaged Republicans and Democrats are in line with previous studies that show large divides [in political attitudes](#) between the most engaged partisans.

⁶ While those who have strong opinions of Trump's job performance are more likely to be engaged, there are substantial portions who are not highly engaged. For example, with the measure of political awareness, roughly four-in-ten of strongly approving Republicans (37%) and strongly disapproving Democrats (39%) are highly politically aware.

How we measure engagement

In this study, we examined two different measures of engagement – political awareness and news engagement. Below is a description of how each of the two measures was constructed.

Political awareness is based on answers to three political knowledge questions and one question about how closely respondents say they follow what’s going on in government and public affairs. The “highly politically aware” are those who correctly answered all three knowledge items and say they follow politics most of the time – 31% of respondents. The “less politically aware” are the 41% who did not answer all three correctly (i.e., got at least one wrong) and say they follow politics less often. The remaining 27% fall in between and are termed the “somewhat politically aware.” Individuals in this group either follow politics most of the time or answered all three correctly, but not both.

News engagement is based on answers to two questions – how closely respondents follow news generally and whether they tend to seek out their news or happen upon it. The “highly engaged with news” are those who follow the news all or most of the time and tend to seek out their news – 42% of respondents. The “less engaged with news” follow the news less often and tend to happen upon their news – 28% of respondents. The remaining 29% of respondents are “somewhat engaged with news” – they either follow news all or most of the time, or tend to seek out their news, but not both.

The knowledge questions for the political awareness measure and the seeking question for the news engagement measure were asked on a survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019. The questions about following government and public affairs and following news were asked Aug. 20-Oct. 28, 2018.

Engagement with politics and the news is not substantially connected to political party identification. For instance, highly politically aware adults make up about equal portions of both major parties – 33% of Republicans and Republican leaners and 32% of Democrats and Democratic leaners.

Across the measures in the analysis presented here, the middle groups mostly fall somewhere in between the highly engaged and the less engaged, though they occasionally fall closer to one group or the other. The findings in this section show the results comparing the “highly” and “less” engaged for each. For a look at the findings that include the “somewhat” engaged for both measures as well as a look the overall relationship between the two measures of engagement and trust, see the [Appendix](#).

Partisans have similar levels of loyalty to their sources of news

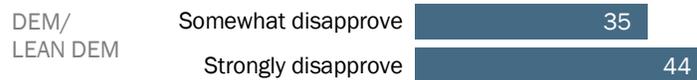
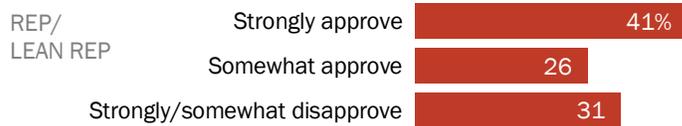
While there are profound political divides in Americans' views of the news media and journalists generally, partisanship is less connected to the public's sense of loyalty to their own individually preferred sources of information – that is, those sources they tend to rely on most. Instead of stark divides, the most fervent partisans – Trump's strongest approvers and detractors as well as those who are highly engaged with politics or with the news – are much more on par in their sense of loyalty and tend to be more loyal than their less fervent counterparts.

Republicans and Republican leaners who strongly approve of how Trump is handling his job as president feel more loyal to their news sources than those who somewhat approve or disapprove (41%, vs. 26% and 31% respectively). Likewise, strongly *disapproving* Democrats and Democratic leaners also feel more loyal than somewhat disapproving Democrats (44% vs. 35%). Taken together, the most approving Republicans and the least approving Democrats are about on par in their loyalty to their own news sources.

Strong Trump approvers, strong disapprovers most loyal to their own news sources

% of U.S. adults who say they are loyal to their news sources

Among those who approve/disapprove of the way Trump is handling his job as president



Note: The 6% of Democrats who approve of how Trump is handling his job as president is not a large enough sample to reliably include in the analysis. Somewhat approve/disapprove indicates those respondents who said they "not so strongly" approve/disapprove in the survey.

Source: Surveys conducted Feb. 19-March 4 and April 29-May 13, 2019.

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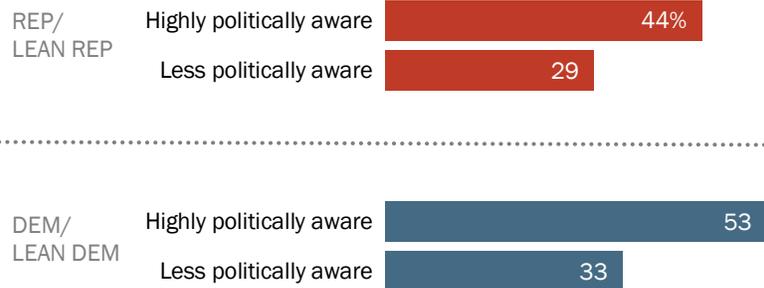
The highly engaged in each party – whether with politics or with the news – feel more loyal to their news sources than their less engaged counterparts. For instance, about half of the highly politically aware (49%), say they are loyal to their sources of news, 18 percentage points higher than the less aware (31%) – a pattern that is evident within both parties. Highly politically aware

Republicans are 15 points more likely than less aware Republicans to feel loyal to their news sources, and highly aware Democrats are 20 points more likely than less aware Democrats. Again, the same pattern exists with the other measure of engagement – engagement with the news.

Highly politically aware partisans more loyal to their news sources than the less aware

% of U.S. adults who say they are loyal to their news sources

Among those who are ...



Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
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3. Factors beyond party affiliation also connect with trust in the news media

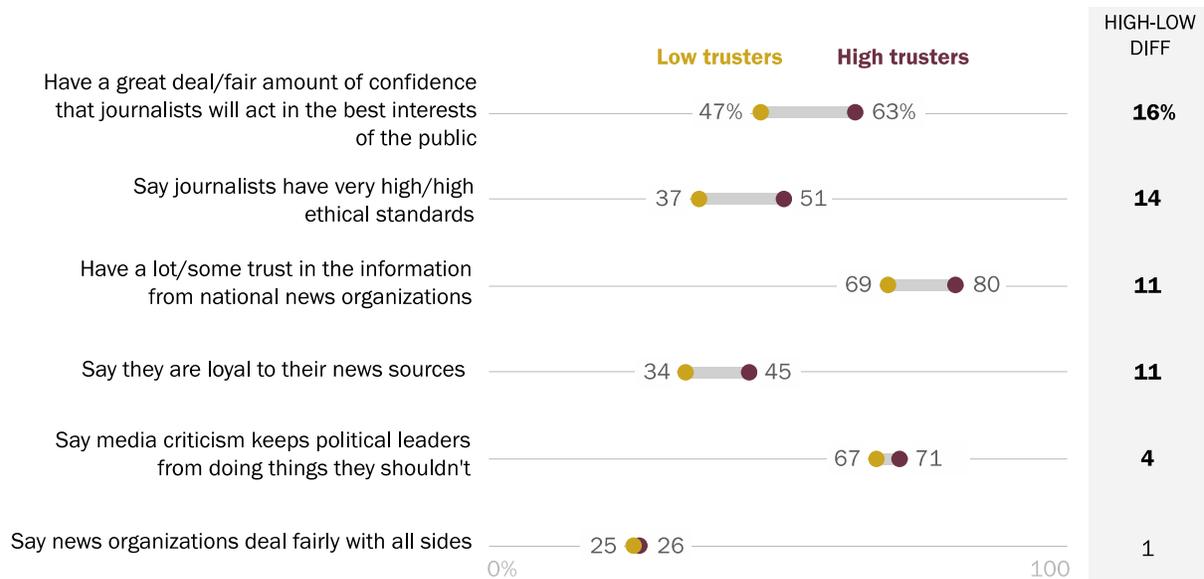
Other factors beyond partisan dynamics are linked with Americans' assessments of the news media – though perhaps not as dramatically. Two additional areas stand out in this analysis: trust of others overall and demographic characteristics.

Americans who are more trusting of others overall extend that trust to the news media

High trusters – those with high levels of trust in others overall – are more likely than low trusters – those with lower levels of trust in others – to trust the information they get from national news organizations, think that journalists are ethical, have confidence in journalists to serve the public good, and feel loyal to their own sources of news. (For more information on the measures of personal trust, see [the box below](#).)

Americans who are more trusting of others overall express greater support of the news media and journalists

% of U.S. adults in each group who ...



Note: Statistically significant differences are in **bold**.

Surveys conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018, Feb. 19-March 4, 2019, March 18-April 1, 2019, and July 8-July 21, 2019.

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For example, high trusters are 16 percentage points more likely to have a great deal or fair amount of confidence in journalists to act in the best interests of the public (63% vs. 47%, respectively). Similarly, high trusters are 14 points more likely than low trusters to say that journalists have very high or high ethical standards (51% vs. 37%). These findings are in line with previous Pew Research Center studies showing that high trusting individuals tend to be [more supportive and confident in a range of institutions](#).

How we measure personal trust

To capture a measure of trust in others, researchers built a scale based off three separate survey questions. These questions include:

- Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or most people can't be trusted?
- Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance or would try to be fair no matter what?
- Would you say that most of the time people try to help others or just look out for themselves?

Peoples' answers were organized into a spectrum of personal trust in the following way:

- **High trusters** comprise 22% of the population. They are those who gave the pro-trust response to each question. They say, "people can be trusted," that people "would try to be fair no matter what" and that people "try to help others."
- **Medium trusters** are those who gave mixed answers, with at least one trusting answer and one non-trusting answer to the three items. That comes to 41% of the public.
- **Low trusters** make up 35% of the populace and are those who gave non-trust answers to each question. They say, "people can't be trusted," that others "would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance" and that people "just look out for themselves."

The three items were asked on a survey conducted between Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018. The findings in this section show the results comparing the "high trusters" and the "low trusters." For a look at the findings that include the "medium trusters," see the Appendix. For more information, see the following report: [Trust and Distrust in America](#).

Americans' level of personal trust has less connection with their view of the news media's watchdog role or their likelihood to say news organizations are fair in their coverage of political and social issues, however.

Demographics and trust in the news media

The survey data used in this analysis highlights several interesting differences by race and ethnicity, age, educational attainment, urban-rural residency and religion. Below is a summary of some of the demographic findings. For more details, see the [Appendix](#).

- Black Americans generally have higher support for and trust in the news media than Hispanic Americans and especially white Americans. For example, 57% of blacks say journalists have high or very high ethical standards compared with 49% of Hispanics and 41% of whites. Also, 41% of black adults say news organizations are fair to all sides when covering political and social issues, 10 points higher than Hispanics (31%) and 19 points higher than whites (22%).
- Older Americans tend to feel more connected to their preferred news sources than younger Americans. About half of those ages 65 and older (49%) feel loyal to their news sources, compared with about a quarter of 18- to 29-year-olds (27%), a difference of 22 percentage points. Those ages 30 to 49 and 50 to 64 fall somewhere in between (36% and 44%, respectively).
- U.S. adults with higher levels of education express greater trust in information from national news organizations than those with less education. For instance, those with a college degree or higher are somewhat more likely than those with a high school degree or less and those with some college to say they have a lot or some trust in the information they get from national news organizations. And they are about twice as likely to say they have *a lot* of trust (33% of those with at least a college degree, vs. 17% of those with some college and 15% of those with a high school degree or less).
- Rural residents tend to be more skeptical of news organizations and journalists than urban residents, with suburban residents typically falling somewhere in between. For example, about half of those who live in rural areas (48%) have a great deal or fair amount of confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public, 15 percentage points lower than those who live in urban areas (63%). Those in suburban areas are in the middle (55%).
- White evangelical Protestants tend to be less supportive of the news media than Protestants overall, Catholics and religiously unaffiliated Americans. For example, about a quarter of white evangelicals (26%) say journalists have high or very high ethical standards, between 13 and 26 percentage points lower than Protestants overall, Catholics and the unaffiliated.

Factors with limited association with trust in the news media

The overall goal of this study was to integrate a wide range of concepts to develop a comprehensive understanding of what factors connect to the public's trust in the news media today. The analysis shows how partisanship – including party identification, approval of Trump and engagement with politics and the news – are strongly linked with Americans' evaluations of the news media. Other factors such as trust in others and demographic characteristics are also connected, but not as dramatically.

Additional measures analyzed, however, had a more limited, inconsistent or no connection to the public's trust in the news media. These include:

- Life cycle milestones, such as having children, owning a house and moving away from the community where you grew up.
- Life satisfaction, such as being happy with how things are going, having enough income to live comfortably now and having enough income to live the life you want in the future.
- Preferred pathways to get news, that is, whether they prefer the TV, radio, print newspapers, social media, or websites and apps for news.
- Some additional demographic variables such as sex.

Appendix: Detailed tables

Political party

Confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public, by party

% of U.S. adults who have ___ confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public

	A great deal of	A fair amount of	Not too much	No confidence at all
	%	%	%	%
Republican/Lean Rep	3	27	39	31
Democrat/Lean Dem	24	51	20	5

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018.
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Views of journalists' ethical standards, by party

% of U.S. adults who say journalists have ___ ethical standards

	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	%	%	%	%
Republican/Lean Rep	2	18	48	31
Democrat/Lean Dem	10	53	31	5

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019.
"Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era"

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Views of the watchdog role of the news media, by party

% of U.S. adults who say that criticism from news organizations keeps political leaders from doing ...

	Their job	Things that shouldn't be done
	%	%
Republican/Lean Rep	47	50
Democrat/Lean Dem	16	82

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
"Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era"

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Perceptions of fairness in news coverage, by party

% of U.S. adults who say news organizations ___ when presenting the news on political and social issues

	Deal fairly with all sides	Tend to favor one side
	%	%
Republican/Lean Rep	12	87
Democrat/Lean Dem	37	61

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
"Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era"

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Trust in information from national news organizations, by party

% of U.S. adults who say they have ___ trust in the information from national news organizations

	A lot of	Some	Not too much	No trust
	%	%	%	%
Republican/Lean Rep	12	52	27	8
Democrat/Lean Dem	30	56	12	2

Source: Survey conducted July 8-21, 2019.
"Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era"

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Loyalty to news sources, by party

% of U.S. adults who say they are ___ to their news sources

	Loyal	Not particularly loyal
	%	%
Republican/Lean Rep	36	64
Democrat/Lean Dem	43	56

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
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Approval of Trump within each political party

Views of journalists' ethical standards, by approval of Trump's job performance within each political party

% of U.S. adults who say journalists have ___ ethical standards

	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	%	%	%	%
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who ___ of the way Trump is handling his job as president</i>				
Strongly approve	2	13	45	40
Somewhat approve	2	21	59	17
Strongly/somewhat disapprove	3	30	54	12
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who ___ of the way Trump is handling his job as president</i>				
Somewhat disapprove	5	45	43	5
Strongly disapprove	11	57	27	4

Note: The 6% of Democrats who approve of how Trump is handling his job as president is not a large enough sample to reliably include in the analysis. Somewhat approve/disapprove indicates those respondents who said they "not so strongly" approve/disapprove in the survey.

Source: Surveys conducted March 18-April 1 and April 29-May 13, 2019.

"Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era"

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Views of the watchdog role of the news media, by approval of Trump's job performance within each political party

% of U.S. adults who say that criticism from news organizations keeps political leaders from doing ...

	Their job	Things that shouldn't be done
	%	%
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who ___ of the way Trump is handling his job as president</i>		
Strongly approve	55	42
Somewhat approve	42	53
Strongly/somewhat disapprove	27	71
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who ___ of the way Trump is handling his job as president</i>		
Somewhat disapprove	26	73
Strongly disapprove	11	88

Note: The 6% of Democrats who approve of how Trump is handling his job as president is not a large enough sample to reliably include in the analysis. Somewhat approve/disapprove indicates those respondents who said they "not so strongly" approve/disapprove in the survey.

Source: Surveys conducted Feb. 19-March 4 and April 29-May 13, 2019.

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Perceptions of fairness in news coverage, by approval of Trump's job performance within each political party

% of U.S. adults who say news organizations ___ when presenting the news on political and social issues

	Deal fairly with all sides	Tend to favor one side
	%	%
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who ___ of the way Trump is handling his job as president</i>		
Strongly approve	9	90
Somewhat approve	11	88
Strongly/somewhat disapprove	25	74
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who ___ of the way Trump is handling his job as president</i>		
Somewhat disapprove	45	53
Strongly disapprove	36	62

Note: The 6% of Democrats who approve of how Trump is handling his job as president is not a large enough sample to reliably include in the analysis. Somewhat approve/disapprove indicates those respondents who said they "not so strongly" approve/disapprove in the survey.

Source: Surveys conducted Feb. 19-March 4 and April 29-May 13, 2019.

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Trust in information from national news organizations, by approval of Trump's job performance within each political party

% of U.S. adults who say they have ___ trust in the information from national news organizations

	A lot of %	Some %	Not too much %	No trust %
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who ___ of the way Trump is handling his job as president</i>				
Strongly approve	9	49	33	10
Somewhat approve	9	62	23	6
Strongly/somewhat disapprove	23	53	17	6
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who ___ of the way Trump is handling his job as president</i>				
Somewhat disapprove	14	63	16	5
Strongly disapprove	33	54	11	2

Note: The 6% of Democrats who approve of how Trump is handling his job as president is not a large enough sample to reliably include in the analysis. Somewhat approve/disapprove indicates those respondents who said they "not so strongly" approve/disapprove in the survey. Source: Surveys conducted April 29-May 13 and July 8-21, 2019.

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Loyalty to news sources, by approval of Trump's job performance within each political party

% of U.S. adults who say they are ___ to their news sources

	Loyal %	Not particularly loyal %
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who ___ of the way Trump is handling his job as president</i>		
Strongly approve	41	59
Somewhat approve	26	73
Strongly/somewhat disapprove	31	69
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who ___ of the way Trump is handling his job as president</i>		
Somewhat disapprove	35	65
Strongly disapprove	44	56

Note: The 6% of Democrats who approve of how Trump is handling his job as president is not a large enough sample to reliably include in the analysis. Somewhat approve/disapprove indicates those respondents who said they "not so strongly" approve/disapprove in the survey. Source: Surveys conducted Feb. 19-March 4 and April 29-May 13, 2019.

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Engagement – with politics and the news

Confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public, by political awareness

% of U.S. adults who have ___ confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public

	A great deal of %	A fair amount of %	Not too much %	No confidence at all %
Highly politically aware	21	37	22	20
Somewhat politically aware	13	40	29	18
Less politically aware	10	44	33	13
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who are ...</i>				
Highly politically aware	1	15	39	45
Somewhat politically aware	6	21	42	31
Less politically aware	5	41	35	19
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who are ...</i>				
Highly politically aware	37	54	9	*
Somewhat politically aware	19	60	17	4
Less politically aware	14	48	31	7

Source: Surveys conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018, and Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
"Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era"

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Views of journalists' ethical standards, by political awareness

% of U.S. adults who say journalists have ___ ethical standards

	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	%	%	%	%
Highly politically aware	8	41	27	23
Somewhat politically aware	5	36	40	18
Less politically aware	4	33	49	12
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who are ...</i>				
Highly politically aware	1	12	39	49
Somewhat politically aware	2	13	51	34
Less politically aware	2	24	56	16
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who are ...</i>				
Highly politically aware	15	67	17	1
Somewhat politically aware	8	57	30	4
Less politically aware	6	40	44	9

Source: Surveys conducted Feb. 19-March 4 and March 18-April 1, 2019.
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Views of the watchdog role of the news media, by political awareness

% of U.S. adults who say that criticism from news organizations keeps political leaders from doing ...

	Their job	Things that shouldn't be done
	%	%
Highly politically aware	26	72
Somewhat politically aware	31	66
Less politically aware	30	66
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who are ...</i>		
Highly politically aware	54	43
Somewhat politically aware	49	47
Less politically aware	38	59
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who are ...</i>		
Highly politically aware	5	94
Somewhat politically aware	14	84
Less politically aware	25	73

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
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Perceptions of fairness in news coverage, by political awareness

% of U.S. adults who say news organizations ___ when presenting the news on political and social issues

	Deal fairly with all sides	Tend to favor one side
	%	%
Highly politically aware	25	73
Somewhat politically aware	25	74
Less politically aware	28	69
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who are ...</i>		
Highly politically aware	3	97
Somewhat politically aware	10	89
Less politically aware	22	76
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who are ...</i>		
Highly politically aware	43	55
Somewhat politically aware	38	61
Less politically aware	31	67

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
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Trust in information from national news organizations, by political awareness

% of U.S. adults who say they have ___ trust in the information from national news organizations

	A lot of	Some	Not too much	No trust
	%	%	%	%
Highly politically aware	32	45	17	5
Somewhat politically aware	20	57	18	5
Less politically aware	12	60	23	5
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who are ...</i>				
Highly politically aware	11	45	33	11
Somewhat politically aware	9	54	28	9
Less politically aware	10	57	27	6
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who are ...</i>				
Highly politically aware	52	44	4	1
Somewhat politically aware	30	60	9	1
Less politically aware	15	63	19	4

Source: Surveys conducted Feb. 19-March 4 and July 8-21, 2019.
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Loyalty to news sources, by political awareness

% of U.S. adults who say they are ___ to their news sources

	Loyal	Not particularly loyal
	%	%
Highly politically aware	49	51
Somewhat politically aware	40	60
Less politically aware	31	68
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who are ...</i>		
Highly politically aware	44	55
Somewhat politically aware	34	66
Less politically aware	29	70
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who are ...</i>		
Highly politically aware	53	47
Somewhat politically aware	46	53
Less politically aware	33	66

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
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Confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public, by news engagement

% of U.S. adults who have ___ confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public

	A great deal of %	A fair amount of %	Not too much %	No confidence at all %
Highly engaged with news	21	38	23	18
Somewhat engaged with news	10	44	30	15
Less engaged with news	8	41	35	16
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who are ..</i>				
Highly engaged with news	3	20	40	38
Somewhat engaged with news	3	29	40	28
Less engaged with news	6	33	36	25
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who are ...</i>				
Highly engaged with news	35	54	10	1
Somewhat engaged with news	17	56	22	4
Less engaged with news	10	48	33	9

Source: Surveys conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018, and Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
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Views of journalists' ethical standards, by news engagement

% of U.S. adults who say journalists have ___ ethical standards

	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	%	%	%	%
Highly engaged with news	8	42	29	20
Somewhat engaged with news	5	34	46	14
Less engaged with news	3	31	48	15
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who are ...</i>				
Highly engaged with news	2	14	41	42
Somewhat engaged with news	2	16	55	26
Less engaged with news	1	21	54	23
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who are ...</i>				
Highly engaged with news	13	65	20	2
Somewhat engaged with news	8	49	38	5
Less engaged with news	5	39	44	10

Source: Surveys conducted Feb. 19-March 4 and March 18-April 1, 2019.
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Views of the watchdog role of the news media, by news engagement

% of U.S. adults who say that criticism from news organizations keeps political leaders from doing ...

	Their job	Things that shouldn't be done
	%	%
Highly engaged with news	28	71
Somewhat engaged with news	30	66
Less engaged with news	30	65
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who are ...</i>		
Highly engaged with news	53	45
Somewhat engaged with news	44	52
Less engaged with news	41	56
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who are ...</i>		
Highly engaged with news	9	90
Somewhat engaged with news	20	78
Less engaged with news	22	75

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
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Perceptions of fairness in news coverage, by news engagement

% of U.S. adults who say news organizations ___ when presenting the news on political and social issues

	Deal fairly with all sides	Tend to favor one side
	%	%
Highly engaged with news	28	70
Somewhat engaged with news	27	71
Less engaged with news	22	74
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who are ...</i>		
Highly engaged with news	6	93
Somewhat engaged with news	14	84
Less engaged with news	18	81
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who are ...</i>		
Highly engaged with news	44	53
Somewhat engaged with news	37	62
Less engaged with news	24	73

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
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Trust in information from national news organizations, by news engagement

% of U.S. adults who say they have ___ trust in the information from national news organizations

	A lot of	Some	Not too much	No trust
	%	%	%	%
Highly engaged with news	31	49	15	5
Somewhat engaged with news	17	58	20	5
Less engaged with news	9	59	27	5
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who are ...</i>				
Highly engaged with news	12	51	27	10
Somewhat engaged with news	11	55	26	8
Less engaged with news	7	51	35	6
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who are ...</i>				
Highly engaged with news	47	48	5	1
Somewhat engaged with news	24	60	14	2
Less engaged with news	12	66	19	3

Source: Surveys conducted Feb. 19-March 4 and July 8-21, 2019.
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Loyalty to news sources, by news engagement

% of U.S. adults who say they are ___ to their news sources

	Loyal	Not particularly loyal
	%	%
Highly engaged with news	52	48
Somewhat engaged with news	38	61
Less engaged with news	22	77
<i>Among Republicans/Lean Rep who are ...</i>		
Highly engaged with news	47	53
Somewhat engaged with news	33	67
Less engaged with news	21	78
<i>Among Democrats/Lean Dem who are ...</i>		
Highly engaged with news	56	44
Somewhat engaged with news	42	57
Less engaged with news	23	76

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
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Personal trust in others

Confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public, by personal trust in others

% of U.S. adults who have ___ confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public

	A great deal of %	A fair amount of %	Not too much %	No confidence at all %
High trusters	21	43	26	10
Medium trusters	16	42	27	14
Low trusters	9	38	31	22

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018.
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Views of journalists' ethical standards, by personal trust in others

% of U.S. adults who say journalists have ___ ethical standards

	Very high %	High %	Low %	Very low %
High trusters	8	43	33	15
Medium trusters	6	39	39	15
Low trusters	4	32	43	19

Source: Surveys conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018, and March 18-April 1, 2019.
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Views of the watchdog role of the news media, by personal trust in others

% of U.S. adults who say that criticism from news organizations keeps political leaders from doing ...

	Their job	Things that shouldn't be done
	%	%
High trusters	26	71
Medium trusters	30	67
Low trusters	31	67

Source: Surveys conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018, and Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
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Perceptions of fairness in news coverage, by personal trust in others

% of U.S. adults who say news organizations ___ when presenting the news on political and social issues

	Deal fairly with all sides	Tend to favor one side
	%	%
High trusters	26	72
Medium trusters	27	71
Low trusters	25	73

Source: Surveys conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018, and Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
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Trust in information from national news organizations, by personal trust in others

% of U.S. adults who say they have ___ trust in the information from national news organizations

	A lot of	Some	Not too much	No trust
	%	%	%	%
High trusters	28	53	16	3
Medium trusters	22	55	18	4
Low trusters	14	55	24	7

Source: Surveys conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018, and July 8-21, 2019.
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Loyalty to news sources, by personal trust in others

% of U.S. adults who say they are ___ to their news sources

	Loyal	Not particularly loyal
	%	%
High trusters	45	54
Medium trusters	40	60
Low trusters	34	65

Source: Surveys conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018, and Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.
"Trusting the News Media in the Trump Era"

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Demographic groups

Confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public, by demographic groups

% of U.S. adults who have ___ confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public

	A great deal of %	A fair amount of %	Not too much %	No confidence at all %
Total	15	41	28	16
Male	15	37	27	20
Female	14	44	29	12
Ages 18-29	15	44	28	13
30-49	13	41	31	15
50-64	15	43	26	16
65+	16	34	28	21
High school or less	12	39	32	16
Some college	13	39	29	18
College and higher	20	44	23	13
White	13	38	30	19
Black	23	52	20	5
Hispanic	15	41	31	11
Urban	18	44	25	11
Suburban	14	41	27	18
Rural	12	36	34	18
Protestant	12	38	31	18
White evangelical	7	29	37	26
White mainline	11	42	30	17
Black Protestant	27	48	20	5
Catholic	13	41	29	16
Unaffiliated	17	43	26	13

Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics; Hispanics can be of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 27-Dec. 10, 2018.

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Views of journalists' ethical standards, by demographic groups

% of U.S. adults who say journalists have ___ ethical standards

	Very high	High	Low	Very low
	%	%	%	%
Total	6	38	38	16
Male	6	35	38	20
Female	6	41	39	12
Ages 18-29	6	36	41	16
30-49	6	40	41	11
50-64	6	39	35	18
65+	6	37	34	22
High school or less	6	35	40	18
Some college	6	36	41	18
College and higher	8	46	33	12
White	6	35	39	19
Black	9	47	34	8
Hispanic	7	42	38	11
Urban	7	45	35	11
Suburban	6	37	39	17
Rural	5	33	40	20
Protestant	5	35	40	20
White evangelical	3	24	45	28
White mainline	5	35	39	20
Black Protestant	10	51	31	7
Catholic	6	37	37	17
Unaffiliated	8	44	36	12

Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics; Hispanics can be of any race.

Source: Survey conducted March 18-April 1, 2019.

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Views of the watchdog role of the news media, by demographic groups

% of U.S. adults who say that criticism from news organizations keeps political leaders from doing ...

	Their job	Things that shouldn't be done
	%	%
Total	29	68
Male	29	69
Female	30	66
Ages 18-29	24	73
30-49	27	69
50-64	33	64
65+	32	64
High school or less	32	65
Some college	32	65
College and higher	23	75
White	32	65
Black	22	74
Hispanic	25	72
Urban	24	73
Suburban	29	69
Rural	37	60
Protestant	35	61
White evangelical	44	52
White mainline	36	60
Black Protestant	23	73
Catholic	28	69
Unaffiliated	23	75

Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics; Hispanics can be of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.

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Perceptions of fairness in news coverage, by demographic groups

% of U.S. adults who say news organizations ___ when presenting the news on political and social issues

	Deal fairly with all sides	Tend to favor one side
	%	%
Total	26	72
Male	24	75
Female	29	69
Ages 18-29	26	72
30-49	27	71
50-64	30	68
65+	20	78
High school or less	28	69
Some college	25	73
College and higher	24	73
White	22	76
Black	41	56
Hispanic	31	66
Urban	31	67
Suburban	24	74
Rural	25	72
Protestant	24	73
White evangelical	14	84
White mainline	21	76
Black Protestant	44	53
Catholic	28	70
Unaffiliated	28	71

Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics; Hispanics can be of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.

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Trust in information from national news organizations, by demographic groups

% of U.S. adults who say they have ___ trust in the information from national news organizations

	A lot of	Some	Not too much	No trust
	%	%	%	%
Total	21	54	19	5
Male	22	52	22	5
Female	21	57	18	5
Ages 18-29	15	60	20	5
30-49	20	57	19	4
50-64	22	53	19	6
65+	27	46	20	7
High school or less	15	56	22	7
Some college	17	57	22	5
College and higher	33	50	14	3
White	22	53	19	5
Black	22	52	20	6
Hispanic	15	61	20	4
Urban	23	56	18	3
Suburban	23	53	20	5
Rural	16	56	21	7
Protestant	17	55	22	6
White evangelical	13	56	23	8
White mainline	21	55	20	4
Black Protestant	23	52	20	5
Catholic	23	54	18	4
Unaffiliated	24	53	18	5

Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics; Hispanics can be of any race.

Source: Survey conducted July 8-21, 2019.

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Loyalty to news sources, by demographic groups

% of U.S. adults who say they are ___ to their news sources

	Loyal	Not particularly loyal
	%	%
Total	39	60
Male	35	64
Female	42	57
Ages 18-29	27	72
30-49	36	63
50-64	44	55
65+	49	50
High school or less	40	59
Some college	36	63
College and higher	41	58
White	39	60
Black	47	52
Hispanic	34	64
Urban	39	60
Suburban	38	62
Rural	42	58
Protestant	41	58
White evangelical	39	60
White mainline	42	57
Black Protestant	48	51
Catholic	44	56
Unaffiliated	34	65

Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics; Hispanics can be of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.

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Jeffrey Gottfried, *Senior Researcher*
Galen Stocking, *Computational Social Scientist*
Amy Mitchell, *Director, Journalism Research*
Elizabeth Grieco, *Senior Writer/Editor*
Mason Walker, *Research Assistant*
Maya Khuzam, *Research Assistant*
Andrew Mercer, *Senior Research Methodologist*
Arnold Lau, *Research Analyst*
Claudia Deane, *Vice President, Research*
Margaret Porteus, *Information Graphics Designer*
Michael Barthel, *Senior Researcher*
Elisa Shearer, *Research Associate*
Kirsten Worden, *Research Assistant*
Rachel Weisel, *Senior Communications Manager*
Hannah Klein, *Communications Manager*
Calvin Jordan, *Communications Associate*
Shannon Greenwood, *Digital Producer*
Reem Nadeem, *Associate Digital Producer*
Sara Atske, *Associate Digital Producer*
David Kent, *Copy Editor*

Methodology

The data used in this report were collected from 12,256 members of Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel (ATP) who participated in at least one of seven surveys conducted between February 2018 and July 2019. The specific survey waves and links to their detailed methodologies are listed in the table below. This report was made possible by The Pew Charitable Trusts, which received support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

About the American Trends Panel

The ATP is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. Panelists participate via self-administered web surveys. Panelists who do not have internet access at home are provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection. The panel is being managed by Ipsos.

The ATP was created in 2014, with the first cohort of panelists invited to join the panel at the end of a large, national, landline and cellphone random-digit-dial survey that was conducted in both English and Spanish. Two additional recruitments were conducted using the same method in 2015 and 2017, respectively. Across these three surveys, a total of 19,718 adults were invited to join the ATP, of which 9,942 agreed to participate.

American Trends Panel (ATP) surveys included in the report

ATP survey wave	Field dates	Total sample size	Link to full methodology
32	Feb. 26 to March 11, 2018	6,251	Wave 32 methodology
36	June 19 to July 2, 2018	4,587	Wave 36 methodology
40	Nov. 27 to Dec. 10, 2018	10,618	Wave 40 methodology
45	Feb. 19 to March 4, 2019	6,127	Wave 45 methodology
46	March 18 to April 1, 2019	6,364	Wave 46 methodology
48	April 29 to May 13, 2019	10,170	Wave 48 methodology
51	July 8 to July 21, 2019	5,107	Wave 51 methodology

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American Trends Panel recruitment surveys

Recruitment Dates	Mode	Invited	Joined	Active panelists remaining
Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014	Landline/ cell RDD	9,809	5,338	2,500
Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015	Landline/ cell RDD	6,004	2,976	1,463
April 25 to June 4, 2017	Landline/ cell RDD	3,905	1,628	800
Aug. 8 to Oct. 31, 2018	ABS/web	9,396	8,778	8,679
	Total	29,114	18,720	13,442

Note: Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves or who did not complete an annual profiling survey are removed from the panel. Panelists also become inactive if they ask to be removed from the panel.

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In August 2018, the ATP switched from telephone to address-based recruitment. Invitations were sent to a random, address-based sample (ABS) of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service’s Delivery Sequence File. In each household, the adult with the next birthday was asked to go online to complete a survey, at the end of which they were invited to join the panel. For a random half-sample of invitations, households without internet access were instructed to return a postcard. These households were contacted by telephone and sent a tablet if they agreed to participate. A total of 9,396 were invited to join the panel, and 8,778 agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. Of the 18,720 individuals who had ever joined the ATP, 13,442 remained active panelists and continued to receive survey invitations at the time wave 51 (the last wave used in this report) was conducted.

The U.S. Postal Service’s Delivery Sequence File has been estimated to cover as much as 98% of the population, although some studies suggest that the coverage could be in the low 90% range.⁷

Weighting

The analyses in this report were performed using survey weights that account for each respondent’s initial probability of selection into the panel and are calibrated to align the sample with population benchmarks. The weights used in each analysis varied depending on which wave or waves were included. For analyses that relied only on questions taken from a single survey wave, the original weights created for that wave were used. Details on the creation of these single-wave weights can be found in each survey’s methodological appendix.

For analyses that combined data from two waves, custom weights were created for the subset of panelists who participated in both waves. New weights were created for all 28 pairs of surveys that were analyzed in the report. All of these weights used the same set of population benchmarks listed in the accompanying table. Likewise, they were all created using the variables that were measured on the 2018 annual profile survey that fielded from August through October 2018. This was done

Weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Gender	2017 American Community Survey
Age	
Education	
Race/Hispanic origin	2018 CPS March Supplement
Hispanic nativity	
Home internet access	
Region x Metropolitan status	2017 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Volunteerism	
Voter registration	2016 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement
Party affiliation	Average of the three most recent Pew Research Center telephone surveys.

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on non-institutionalized adults. Voter registration is calculated using procedures from Hur, Achen (2013) and rescaled to include the total US adult population.

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⁷ AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. [“AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling.”](#)

both to ensure a degree of consistency across analyses and to limit the complexity of the weighting process.

Imputation of weighting variables

Some of the analyses in this report involve pairs of waves where both surveys were conducted prior to the 2018 profile survey. In these instances, there are some panelists who completed both surveys but subsequently dropped out of the panel prior to the 2018 profile survey. A total of 290 cases (2%) fell into this category.

For these cases, their previously measured weighting variables were updated to reflect what they likely *would have said* if they had stayed in the panel and taken the 2018 profile survey.

Weighting variables were updated in one of two ways. For variables that generally do not change (sex, race/ethnicity, Hispanic nativity, year of birth), values were carried forward from the

most recent profile survey that the respondent had completed. For variables for which change over time is more likely (education, metropolitan status, census region, voter registration and party

How the study analyzed multiple American Trends Panel (ATP) surveys

For this study, researchers combed through more than 50 surveys conducted between 2014-2019 on Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel (ATP). Well over 100 different survey questions were initially analyzed. The final analysis focuses on data from 2018-2019.

Survey research often looks at one individual survey, focusing on the questions asked at that point in time. The people who took that survey are analyzed using a weight specific to that wave to align the sample with population benchmarks.

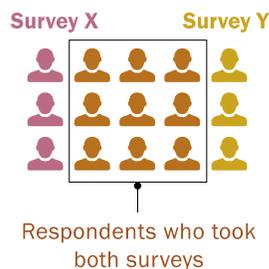
EXAMPLE: TYPICAL INDIVIDUAL SURVEY WAVES



For example, survey X and survey Y are analyzed individually, with different survey weights created specifically for each survey.

One of the major benefits of the ATP is that since it is a panel, many of the same people are taking different surveys across time. This allows researchers to analyze a greater universe of data by looking at survey questions from multiple surveys answered by the same individuals.

EXAMPLE: COMBINING THE TWO SURVEYS



Researchers analyze respondents who answered BOTH surveys and produce a special survey weight for these respondents who took both surveys.

Researchers can then look at the relationships between the questions asked in both surveys.

For this project, the goal was to understand more comprehensively the dynamics of media trust. This was done by comparing responses across many combinations of surveys from the ATP. For each combination of two surveys, a special weight was created for the sample who took both. While some analysis in this report does look at variables within a single wave, much of it uses this type of cross-wave analysis.

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affiliation), an iterative procedure known as imputation by chained equations was used to fill in missing values.⁸

To fill in a missing value for a given case, the procedure as applied here first finds cases who matched on the variable to be imputed in the previous profile survey *and* gave similar answers to the rest of the questions used in weighting. Then the missing value is replaced with a copy of the value from a randomly selected donor. For example, to impute the education variable for a case that previously indicated they had a high school degree or less, the imputed value is copied from a case that had also indicated a high school or less education *and* matched on several of the other weighting variables. The process is performed separately for each variable and repeated many times until the distribution of imputed values stabilizes. The procedure ensures that the imputed values are plausible for each respondent while also reflecting the level of change that would naturally occur in the population.

Sampling errors and test of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish, but the American Trends Panel's Hispanic sample is predominantly U.S. born and English speaking.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

⁸ See Azur, Melissa J., Elizabeth A. Stuart, Constantine Frangakis, and Philip J. Leaf. 2011. "[Multiple Imputation by Chained Equations: What Is It and How Does It Work?: Multiple Imputation by Chained Equations.](#)" International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research.

Group	Range of unweighted sample sizes	Margin of error when analyzing the measures of media trust in this report from the following ATP survey waves (plus or minus percentage points)			
		Wave 40 (Forms 2&3)	Wave 45	Wave 46	Wave 51
Total	5,107 - 6,364	± 2.1	± 1.6	± 1.7	± 1.7
Republican/lean Rep	2,130 - 2,600	3.2	2.4	2.5	2.6
Democrat/lean Dem	2,812 - 3,560	2.9	2.2	2.3	2.4
<i>Rep/lean Rep who ___ of the way Trump is handling his job as president</i>					
Strongly approve	1,264 - 1,550	-	3.1	3.0	3.3
Somewhat approve	364 - 437	-	5.7	5.7	6.1
Strongly/somewhat disapprove	302 - 385	-	6.6	6.3	7.1
<i>Dem/lean Dem who ___ of the way Trump is handling his job as president</i>					
Somewhat disapprove	236 - 286	-	7.6	7.3	7.9
Strongly disapprove	2,165 - 2,744	-	2.5	2.5	2.7
<i>Rep/lean Rep who are...</i>					
Highly politically aware	421 - 939	5.5	3.8	4.6	4.8
Less politically aware	364 - 840	6.1	4.3	4.7	4.8
<i>Dem/lean Dem who are...</i>					
Highly politically aware	645 - 1,350	4.9	3.4	4.4	4.4
Less politically aware	509 - 1,139	5.4	3.8	4.3	4.2
<i>Rep/lean Rep who are...</i>					
Highly engaged with news	517 - 1,125	5.1	3.6	4.1	4.2
Less engaged with news	286 - 632	7.1	4.9	5.6	5.6
<i>Dem/lean Dem who are...</i>					
Highly engaged with news	802 - 1,702	4.3	3.0	4.4	3.7
Less engaged with news	367 - 795	6.4	4.6	5.3	5.3
High trusters	1,182 - 1,592	3.8	3.1	3.1	3.5
Low trusters	1,384 - 1,702	3.9	2.9	3.0	3.2

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

Determining the variables included in the analysis

The purpose of this study was to integrate data from multiple surveys to develop a comprehensive understanding of what factors connect to the public's trust in the news media. Researchers reviewed more than 50 surveys fielded on the ATP between 2014 and 2019 to identify measures related to the public's trust in the news media as well as factors that influence these evaluations. Data from well over 100 questions were considered for inclusion in this study, with the focus of the final analysis on measures collected from seven surveys fielded between February 2018 and July 2019.

The dependent and explanatory variables included in the analysis were largely determined by previous Pew Research Center research as well as existing literature around trust in the news media. Dependent variables either directly measured trust (e.g., level of trust in the information from national news organizations) or other closely related concepts (e.g., level of confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public). Additionally, a wide range of explanatory variables were considered for inclusion in the analysis (e.g., approval of Trump's job performance, engagement with politics and the news, and being trusting of others). Researchers examined the explanatory variables to assess their connections to the public's trust in the news media to determine which would be included in the final analysis.

Several criteria were considered before variables were included in the final analysis. Variables without a large and robust enough sample size to analyze across waves or those with very skewed distributions were eliminated from consideration. If two questions measured similar concepts, preference was given to the one included on the most recent survey and/or had the larger sample size. For explanatory factors, if there were similar measures across waves, the one that were measured closest in time to the dependent measures was typically included in the analysis. Also, if a variable didn't adequately represent the desired concept, it was no longer considered. Finally, to ensure that these data shed light on current attitudes, researchers also decided to focus on data from more recent years. All the variables used in the analysis are from ATP surveys fielded in 2018 and 2019.

Once the list of dependent and explanatory variables was finalized, researchers examined the connection between the explanatory variables with media trust using crosstabulations and multivariate regression models. Depending on the measure being considered, many of these models controlled for demographic characteristics like age and education as well as party identification. The dependent variables used in the final report include:

- Trust in information from national news organizations

- Views of journalists' ethical standards
- Confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public
- Views of the news media's watchdog role
- Perceived fairness of news coverage
- Loyalty to news sources

The independent variables included in this report to test the connection with media trust include the following:

- Political party identification
- Approval for the way Trump is handling his job as president
- Political awareness
- Engagement with news
- Whether or not one is trusting of others
- Preferred pathway for news
- Life satisfaction
- Happiness with one's life
- Living in the community where one grew up
- Perception of current financial situation
- Perception of future financial situation
- A range of demographic characteristics, including age, race and ethnicity, education, income, urban-suburban-rural residency, religion, marital status, home ownership and having kids.

For a list of specific questions and variables used for each of these concepts, the original topline, and the dates that they were asked please see the table below.

List of measures used from previous surveys conducted on the American Trends Panel (ATP) that were used in report

	ATP survey wave	Field dates	Link to original topline	Variable name(s) in topline
Measures of media trust and closely related concepts				
<i>Confidence that journalists will act in the best interests of the public</i>	40	Nov. 27 to Dec. 10, 2018	Wave 40 topline	CONF1b2 (page 67)
<i>Views of news media's watchdog role</i>	45	Feb. 19 to March 4, 2019	Wave 45 topline	WATCHDOG_1 (page 16)
<i>Perceived fairness of news coverage</i>	45	Feb. 19 to March 4, 2019	Wave 45 topline	WATCHDOG_3 (page 16)
<i>Loyalty to news sources</i>	45	Feb. 19 to March 4, 2019	Wave 45 topline	MEDIALOYAL3 (page 5)
<i>Ethical standards of journalists</i>	46	March 18 to April 1, 2019	Wave 46 topline	ETHICS1c (page 1)
<i>Trust in the information from national news organizations</i>	51	July 8 to July 21, 2019	Wave 51 topline	GROUP_TRUSTa (page 2)
Measures for the analysis of what connects with media trust				
<i>Approval of President Donald Trump's job performance</i>	48	April 29 to May 13, 2019	Wave 48 topline	POL1DT (page 76); POL1DTSTR (page 76)
<i>Political knowledge (part of political awareness index)</i>	45	Feb. 19 to March 4, 2019	Wave 45 topline	KNOW1-2 (page 17); HOUCONTR (page 17)
<i>News seeking (part of news engagement index)</i>	45	Feb. 19 to March 4, 2019	Wave 45 topline	SEEK (page 5)
<i>Index of trust in other people</i>	40	Nov. 27 to Dec. 10, 2018	Wave 40 topline	SOCTRUST2 (page 65); GSSTRUST2 (page 65); GSSTRUST3 (page 65)
<i>Happiness with life</i>	36	June 19 to July 2, 2018	Wave 36 topline	HAPPYLIFE (page 1)
<i>Life satisfaction</i>	32	Feb. 26 to March 11, 2018	Wave 32 topline	SATLIFEa-c,e (page 1-2)
<i>Perception of current financial situation</i>	32	Feb. 26 to March 11, 2018	Wave 32 topline	INC (page 4)
<i>Perception of future financial situation</i>	32	Feb. 26 to March 11, 2018	Wave 32 topline	INCFUTURE (page 4)
<i>Preferred pathway for news</i>	45	Feb. 19 to March 4, 2019	Wave 45 topline	NEWSPREFV2 (page 2)

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