

FOR RELEASE OCTOBER 7, 2020

Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined

About two-thirds of Republicans say the U.S. has controlled the outbreak as much as it could have; 88% of Democrats disagree

BY Mark Jurkowitz, Amy Mitchell, Elisa Shearer, and J. Baxter Oliphant

FOR MEDIA OR OTHER INQUIRIES:

Amy Mitchell, Director, Journalism Research
Andrew Grant, Communications Associate

202.419.4372

www.pewresearch.org

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Pew Research Center, October, 2020, "Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined"

About Pew Research Center

Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world. It does not take policy positions. The Center conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other data-driven social science research. It studies U.S. politics and policy; journalism and media; internet, science and technology; religion and public life; Hispanic trends; global attitudes and trends; and U.S. social and demographic trends. All of the Center's reports are available at www.pewresearch.org. Pew Research Center is a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, its primary funder.

© Pew Research Center 2020

How we did this

Pew Research Center's [American News Pathways](#) project conducted this study to understand how Americans are engaging with and perceiving news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For this analysis, we surveyed 9,220 U.S. adults between Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020. Everyone who completed the survey is a member of Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel (ATP), an online survey panel that is recruited through national, random sampling of residential addresses. This way nearly all U.S. adults have a chance of selection. The survey is weighted to be representative of the U.S. adult population by gender, race, ethnicity, partisan affiliation, education and other categories. Read more about the [ATP's methodology](#).

See here to read more about the questions used for this [report](#) and the report's [methodology](#).

Visit our [interactive data tool](#) to access the questions included in this report, as well as content about the coronavirus outbreak and the 2020 presidential election.

Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined

About two-thirds of Republicans say the U.S. has controlled the outbreak as much as it could have; 88% of Democrats disagree

Six months into a pandemic that has [claimed more than 200,000 lives](#) in the United States and profoundly impacted daily life – and before President Donald Trump tested positive for the coronavirus – about six-in-ten Americans say the country has not controlled the [coronavirus outbreak](#) as much as it could have. At the same time, about four-in-ten also believe that the outbreak has been made into a bigger deal than it really is.

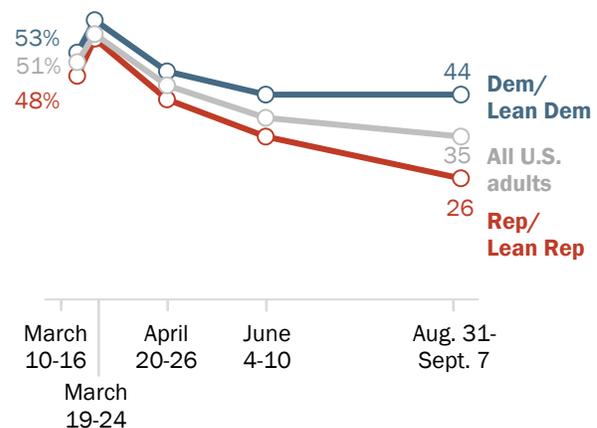
On these two issues, there is deep disagreement between Democrats and Republicans. And within the GOP, opinions vary considerably based on where people get their political and election news, according to a survey of 9,220 U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020 (prior to the first presidential debate and Trump's subsequent positive test for the virus) as part of Pew Research Center's [American News Pathways project](#).

For example, Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP are much more likely than Democrats and Democratic leaners to say the U.S. coronavirus outbreak has been controlled as much it could have and that it has been overblown. And among Republicans, those who cited Fox News and/or talk radio as their only major sources [among eight sources asked about](#) are far more likely than others to take these positions.

Meanwhile, Americans' attention to coronavirus news has declined, from a high of 57% following that news very closely in late March to 35% who say the same in September. And the degree of

Attention to coronavirus news drops overall, with decline sharpest among Republicans

*% of U.S. adults who are following news about the coronavirus outbreak **very closely***



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020. "Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

attention that Americans are paying to news about the coronavirus also reveals partisan differences, with substantially fewer Republicans now following that coverage closely than Democrats.

While those partisan differences were small in previous months, that gap has since grown significantly. As of early September, 44% of Democrats are following news of the outbreak very closely, compared with 26% of Republicans.

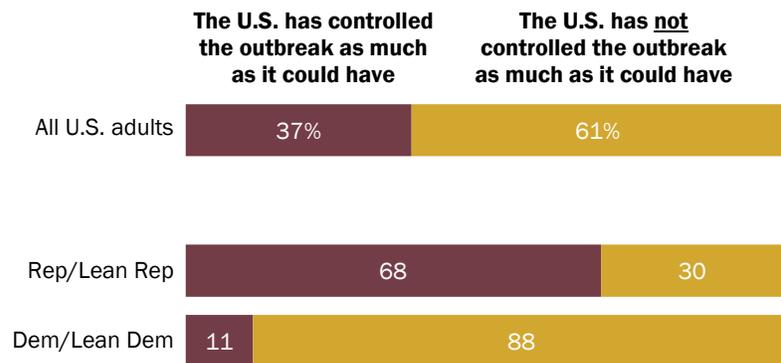
Major partisan gaps on key perceptions of the pandemic; among Republicans, large differences by media diet

Overall, 61% of adults say the U.S. has not controlled the COVID-19 outbreak as much as it could have, compared with 37% who say it has. Inside those numbers is a stark partisan divide: About two-thirds of Republicans and independents who lean Republican (68%) say the U.S. has done about as much as it could in controlling the outbreak. That view is held by only about one-in-ten Democrats, including independents who lean Democratic (11%).

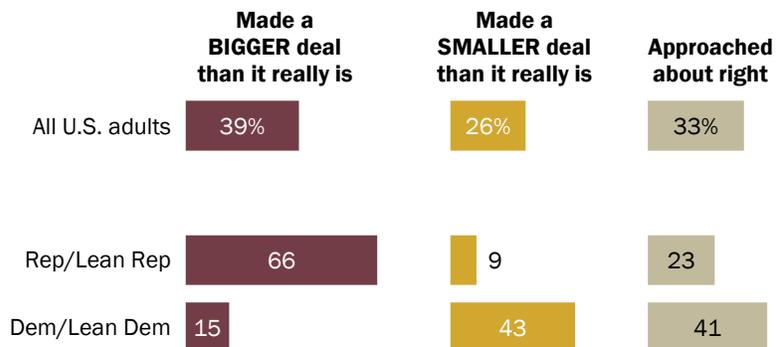
But even as most Americans say the outbreak has not been controlled to the extent it could have been, a plurality (39%) believes the pandemic has been made into a bigger deal than it really is.

Large party divides in views of severity of COVID-19 outbreak, adequacy of response

% of U.S. adults who say ...



% of U.S. adults who say the coronavirus outbreak has been ...



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

"Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

That compares with 26% of Americans who say it has gotten less attention than it should, and 33% who say it has received about the right amount of attention.

Those numbers **have not changed much since June**. But in April, when the outbreak was still in its early weeks in the U.S., a plurality (42%) said that it had been approached about right, while roughly equal shares thought it had been exaggerated (29%) or underplayed (27%).

On this question, too, there is a major difference by party affiliation, with Republicans much more likely than Democrats – 66% vs. 15% – to say the outbreak has been overblown. Conversely, 43% of Democrats say the pandemic has been made into a smaller deal than it really is, compared with only 9% of Republicans. Another 41% of Democrats say it has been approached about right, compared with 23% of Republicans. These same patterns existed when Americans were surveyed on the subject earlier this year.

Among Republicans, there also are major differences based on media diet.

The survey asked respondents whether each of eight news providers was a major source of political and election news for them. Researchers then grouped these responses based on the political composition of the outlets' audiences. For example, Republicans were analyzed based on the degree to which they get political news from the outlets with conservative-leaning audiences (specifically, Fox News and talk radio), and Democrats were categorized based on the degree to which they get news from the outlets with liberal-leaning audiences – CNN, MSNBC, NPR, The New York Times and The Washington Post. (The eighth source, national network TV such as ABC, NBC or CBS, has an audience that does not lean strongly in either direction; see [Appendix](#) and the box below for more details about how respondents were grouped by their major news sources.)

Partisans' major news sources [ACCORDION]

The categories in this analysis come from research on the major sources Republicans and Democrats use for political and election news.

Respondents indicated whether they use eight prominent news sources as a major source, a minor source or not a source for political and election news. The sources are Fox News cable channel, CNN, MSNBC, national network TV (ABC, CBS or NBC asked together), NPR, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and talk radio (examples of Sean Hannity or Rush Limbaugh were given).

Respondents' major news sources are grouped according to the political composition of their audiences – defined here as the respondents who say it is a major source for political and election news. A source is considered to have a left-leaning audience if the portion of those who say it is a major source who are liberal Democrats (including leaners) is at least two-thirds greater than the portion who identify as conservative Republicans (including leaners); if the reverse is true, the source is classified as having a right-leaning audience, and if neither is true, the source is classified as having a more mixed audience.

Using this method, two of the eight news sources analyzed have audiences who lean to the right politically (Fox News and talk radio); five have audiences who lean left (CNN, MSNBC, NPR, The New York Times and The Washington Post); and one group has a mixed audience (national network TV, such as ABC, CBS and NBC). ([Previous research](#) has found that Republicans and Republican-leaning independents generally use fewer news sources than Democrats and Democratic leaners.)

Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents (Dem/Lean Dem) and Republicans and Republican leaners (Rep/Lean Rep) are each divided into four groups based on which news sources they turned to as major sources for political and election news. The classifications within each party also include a group for those who do not use any of the eight sources asked about. The portion of partisans in each group is shown in the table. See [Appendix](#) for more details.

Classification of news sources

*% of **Rep/Lean Rep** who use ___ as a major source for political news*

Only Fox News and/or talk radio	29%
Fox News and/or talk radio and other sources	10
No Fox News/talk radio; only other sources	20
None of the sources asked about	42

*% of **Dem/Lean Dem** who use ___ as a major source for political news*

Only CNN, MSNBC, NPR, NY Times and/or Wash. Post	32
CNN, MSNBC, NPR, NY Times, Wash. Post and other sources	28
No CNN, MSNBC, NPR, NY Times, Wash. Post; only other sources	14
None of the sources asked about	26

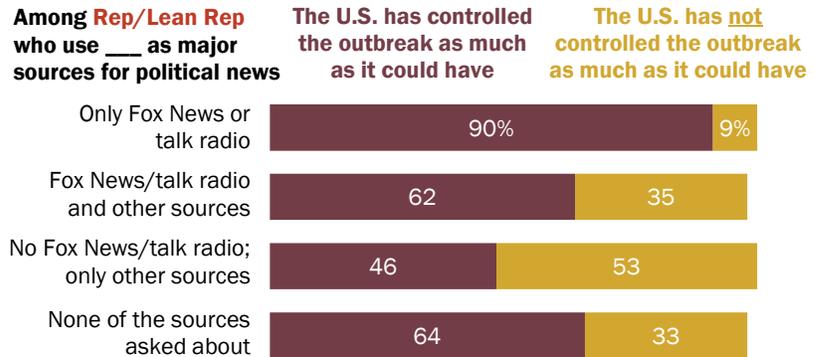
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020. "Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined"

Fully 90% of those Republicans who only indicated Fox News and/or talk radio – two platforms with conservative-leaning audiences – as major sources of political news say the country has controlled the outbreak as much as it could. But among Republicans who rely on neither Fox News nor talk radio but rely on at least one of the other major news providers mentioned in the survey, about half as many (46%) say the U.S. controlled the outbreak as well as it could.

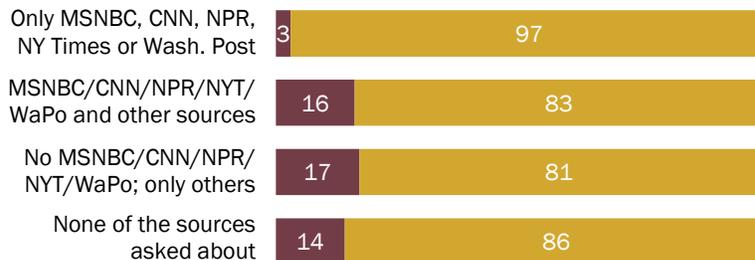
There are far smaller differences among Democrats with different media diets; large majorities in all cases say that the U.S. could have done more to control the outbreak. But unlike other groups, Democrats whose major sources are only those with liberal-leaning audiences – MSNBC, CNN, NPR, The New York Times and The Washington Post – are almost unanimous in saying that the U.S. has not controlled the outbreak as much as it could have (97%).

Republicans who rely a lot on Fox News and/or talk radio overwhelmingly say U.S. could not have controlled the coronavirus outbreak any better

% of U.S. adults who say ...



Among Dem/Lean Dem who use ___ as major sources for political news



Note: The Fox News cable channel and talk radio shows such as Sean Hannity or Rush Limbaugh have audiences that lean Republican and conservative. MSNBC, CNN, NPR, New York Times and Washington Post have audiences that lean Democratic and liberal. Sources whose audiences are more mixed include ABC, CBS or NBC network television news. Respondents who did not give an answer not shown. See Appendix for more details. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

"Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

There are similar patterns on the question about whether the pandemic has been overblown. As of early September, among Republicans with only Fox News and/or talk radio as major news sources, 78% say the coronavirus has been made a bigger deal than it really is. That falls to 54% among Republicans who use a mix of major sources, and 47% for those who name some major sources, but not Fox News or talk radio.

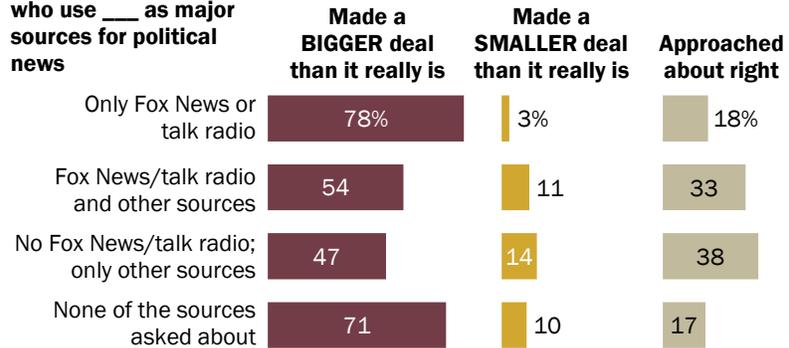
These patterns do not necessarily *prove* that Republicans are taking their cues directly from their news sources. Other factors beyond media diet may impact people's assessments of how the U.S. has reacted to the outbreak. And the relationship can go in either direction: People can either pick their media sources to fit their existing political views, or have their views shaped by those sources (or both at the same time). Still, the data shows a clear connection between news diet within the GOP and views on the pandemic.

These within-party differences hold true even when accounting for ideology. For example, conservative Republicans who only rely on Fox News or talk radio are more likely than conservative Republicans who also rely on other major sources to say that the U.S. has controlled the outbreak as much as it could have.

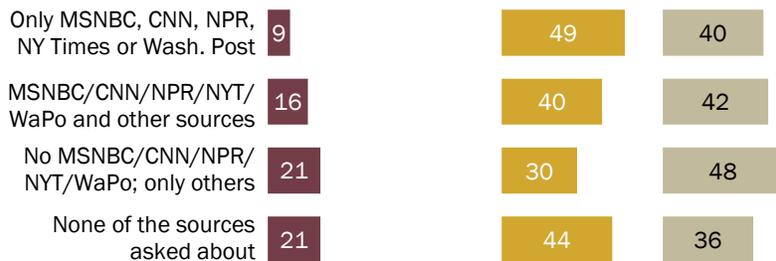
Partisans with different media diets have varying views of whether the outbreak has been overblown

% of U.S. adults who say the coronavirus outbreak has been ...

Among Rep/Lean Rep who use ___ as major sources for political news



Among Dem/Lean Dem who use ___ as major sources for political news



Note: The Fox News cable channel and talk radio shows such as Sean Hannity or Rush Limbaugh have audiences that lean Republican and conservative. MSNBC, CNN, NPR, New York Times and Washington Post have audiences that lean Democratic and liberal. Sources whose audiences are more mixed include ABC, CBS or NBC network television news. Respondents who did not give an answer not shown. See Appendix for more details. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

"Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

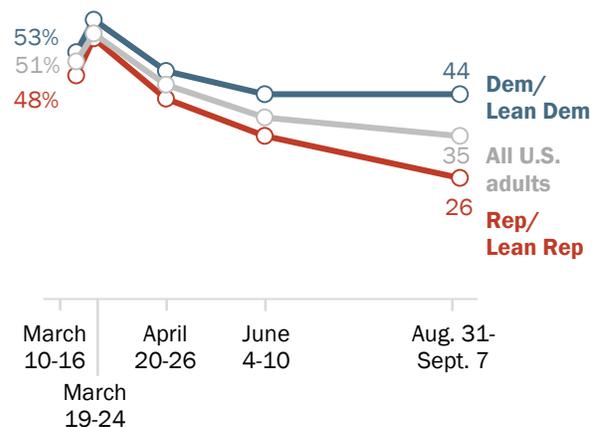
Republicans paying less attention to news about the coronavirus outbreak than Democrats

Republicans also are less likely than Democrats to be highly engaged with news coverage of the pandemic. As of early September, about a quarter of Republicans (26%) say they are following news about the outbreak “very closely,” down substantially from the early days of the pandemic in the U.S., when more than half (56%) were highly engaged in late March. At that time, there were minimal differences between the parties on this measure; now, Democrats are 18 percentage points more likely than Republicans to say they are following news about the outbreak very closely (44% vs. 26%). Among all U.S. adults, the percentage following coronavirus news dropped from 57% in late March to 35% in September.

Overall, interest in news about the outbreak has waned slightly, but remains high. In the September survey, 82% of U.S. adults say they are following coronavirus news either “very closely” (35%) or “fairly closely” (46%). That is down modestly from late March, when 92% were following very closely (57%) or fairly closely (35%).

Attention to coronavirus news drops overall, with decline sharpest among Republicans

% of U.S. adults who are following news about the coronavirus outbreak **very closely**



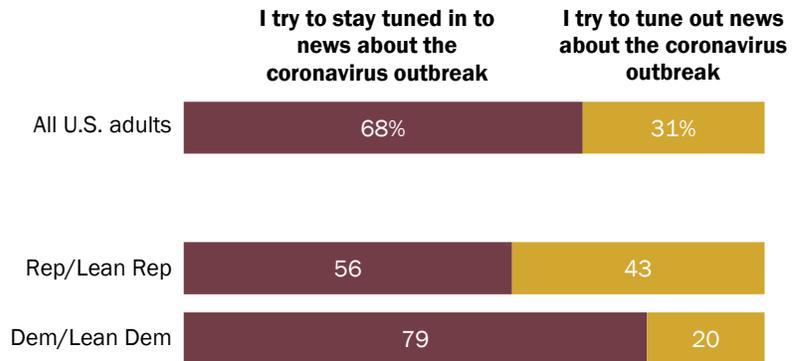
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020. “Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans’ Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

When it comes to COVID-19 coverage, some Americans seem to be trying to avoid the news: About three-in-ten (31%) say they try to tune out news about the coronavirus outbreak, with Republicans (43%) about twice as likely as Democrats (20%) to do this. But on the whole, most Americans (68%) say they are trying to stay tuned into news about the pandemic.

About three-in-ten Americans say they try to tune out coronavirus news

% of U.S. adults who say ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer not shown

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

"Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined"

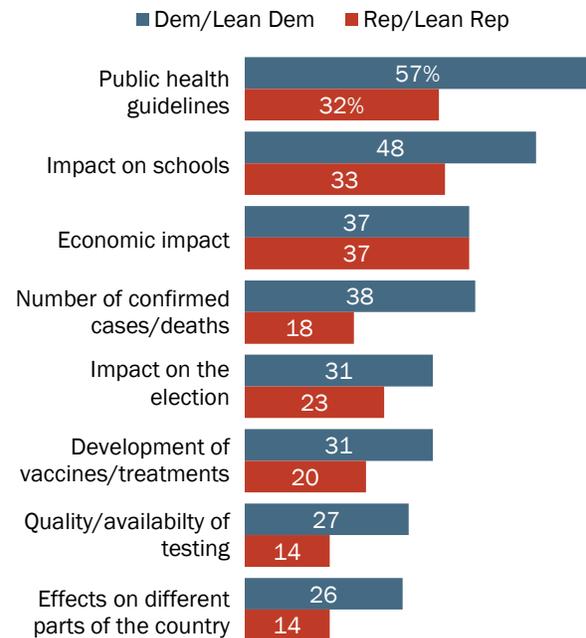
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Partisan gaps in attention are also evident when Americans are asked about several specific topics related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the eight topics asked about in early September, Democrats are paying more attention than Republicans to seven of them – often by significant margins. The only topic on which there is no partisan gap concerns the outbreak’s economic impact.

For example, Democrats are about twice as likely as Republicans (38% vs. 18%) to say they are following the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths very closely. On the topic of the quality and availability of testing, 27% of Democrats are following very closely, compared with 14% of Republicans. And when it comes to general public health guidelines about the virus, a majority of Democrats (57%) say they are following very closely; just about a third of Republicans (32%) say the same.

Democrats paying closer attention to nearly all specific coronavirus topics, except for economic impact

*% of U.S. adults who are following news related to the coronavirus outbreak about each topic **very closely***



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020. “Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans’ Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Within both parties, those with a mixed diet of news sources are paying the most attention to COVID-19 news

Aside from partisan differences, there are also differences within each party based on media diets.

In this report, Republicans are divided into a few groups: those whose major news sources consist *only* of outlets with right-leaning audiences (Fox News and talk radio); those who use a mix of sources with right-leaning audiences and other major sources; and those who rely on at least one

Partisans who turn to a mix of major sources (those with audiences with similar ideologies, and others) are more likely to closely follow most coronavirus topics

% of U.S. adults who are following news related to the coronavirus outbreak about each topic **very closely**

	Public health guidelines	Impact on schools	Economic impact	Number of confirmed cases/deaths	Impact on the election	Development of vaccines/treatments	Quality/availability of testing	Effects on different parts of the country
Among Rep/Lean Rep who use ___ as major sources for political news	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Only Fox News or talk radio	32	37	51	21	39	27	18	18
Fox News/talk radio and other sources	53	49	53	37	40	37	26	28
No Fox News/talk radio; only other sources	41	33	32	19	14	21	14	13
None of the sources asked about	22	27	27	12	12	12	9	7
Among Dem/Lean Dem who use ___ as major sources for political news								
Only MSNBC, CNN, NPR, NY Times or Wash. Post	62	48	39	41	35	30	27	26
MSNBC/CNN/NPR/NYT/WaPo and other sources	68	62	51	55	48	49	42	40
No MSNBC/CNN/NPR/NYT/WaPo; only other sources	59	47	34	31	22	28	23	20
None of the sources asked about	39	32	21	21	13	15	13	13

Note: The Fox News cable channel and talk radio shows such as Sean Hannity or Rush Limbaugh have audiences that lean Republican and conservative. MSNBC, CNN, NPR, New York Times and Washington Post have audiences that lean Democratic and liberal. Sources whose audiences are more mixed include ABC, CBS or NBC network television news. Respondents who did not give an answer not shown. See Appendix for more details.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

"Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

of the eight sources, but *not* Fox News or talk radio. For Democrats, the groups include those who use only the major sources with left-leaning audiences (i.e., MSNBC, CNN, NPR, New York Times and Washington Post); those who use a mix of these and other major sources; and those who name only sources without left-leaning audiences as a major source for political news. In both parties, there is a final group that says none of the eight sources for political and election news are major sources; this group is far less engaged overall. (See [Appendix](#) for more details about this methodology.)

In each party, those who use a mix of major sources – ones with ideologically similar audiences and ones without – are most likely to say that they are following coronavirus news very closely. Among Republicans, 45% of those who use a mix of major sources are following pandemic news very closely as of early September, compared with 33% who only rely on sources with a right-leaning audience and 27% of those whose major sources don't include any with a right-leaning audience. Among Democrats, 59% of those who rely on a mix of sources are following very closely, compared with 49% who turn only to sources with a left-leaning audience and 40% in the group whose major sources don't include any with a left-leaning audience.

The same pattern holds across most of the eight specific topics related to coronavirus news. For example, the percentage of Republicans who turn to a mix of sources who are following news about COVID-19 cases and deaths very closely (37%) is substantially larger than the portion among those who rely on only sources with right-leaning audiences (21%) or only sources without a right-leaning audience (19%). And about half of Democrats who use a mix of sources (55%) are following the confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths very closely, vs. 41% of Democrats who rely on only major sources with left-leaning audiences and 31% who rely on only major sources without left-leaning audiences.

On the subject of the outbreak's impact on schools, 49% of Republicans with a mix of major sources are following very closely, compared with 37% who rely on only major sources that have a right-leaning audience and 33% of those who rely on only major sources without right-leaning audiences. Among Democrats, 62% with a mixed media diet are following that topic closely, compared with 48% using only major sources with a left-leaning audience and 47% who only turn to major sources without a left-leaning audience.

Republicans and Democrats differ on how difficult they say it is to sort truth from fiction in coronavirus news

Americans overall are about evenly split over whether it has become harder or easier to distinguish truth from falsehoods about the coronavirus outbreak since the early days of the pandemic. While 38% of U.S. adults say that as of early September they are finding it harder to identify what is true and what is false, an almost identical share (36%) say they are finding it easier. The remainder (26%) say it hasn't changed much in either direction.

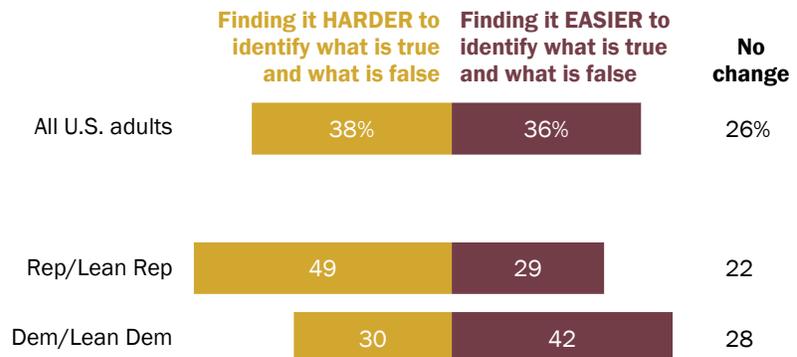
Again, there are differences between the two major parties on this question.

Nearly half of Republicans (49%) say it is harder to determine what is true compared with the first weeks of the outbreak. That is substantially more than the 29% of Republicans who say it is easier and the 22% who say there has been no change.

But Democrats are more likely to say it has become easier (42%) rather than harder (30%) to discern the truth about the outbreak. Another 28% say there has been no change.

Democrats more likely than Republicans to say it's becoming easier to determine facts of pandemic

% of U.S. adults who say, compared with the first couple of weeks of the coronavirus outbreak, they are ...



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

"Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

One specific area of disagreement is how susceptible young people (under the age of 18) are to becoming infected with the virus, a debate that often surfaces in discussions over whether and when to reopen schools for in-classroom learning.

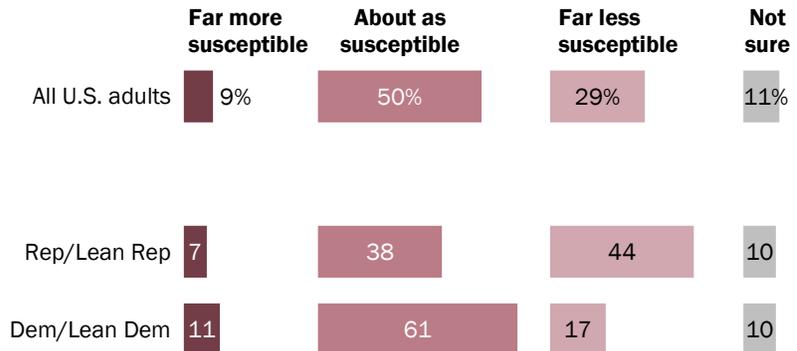
There is [no strong evidence](#) that younger people are less likely than adults to be infected with the virus, though there are [differences by age in likelihood of death and severity of symptoms](#).

Overall, half of U.S. adults say that people under 18 are about as susceptible as their elders to becoming infected with the coronavirus, while 29% say that minors are far less susceptible. Just 9% say that young people are far more susceptible, while 11% say they are not sure.

A majority of Democrats (61%) say that those under 18 are about as susceptible as adults, with 17% saying they are far less susceptible and 11% saying they are far more susceptible. In contrast, a plurality of Republicans (44%) say young people are far less susceptible than adults, modestly more than the 38% who say they are about as susceptible.

Differences between parties in perception of young people's susceptibility to coronavirus infection

% of U.S. adults who say that people under 18 are ____ than adults to becoming infected with the coronavirus



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

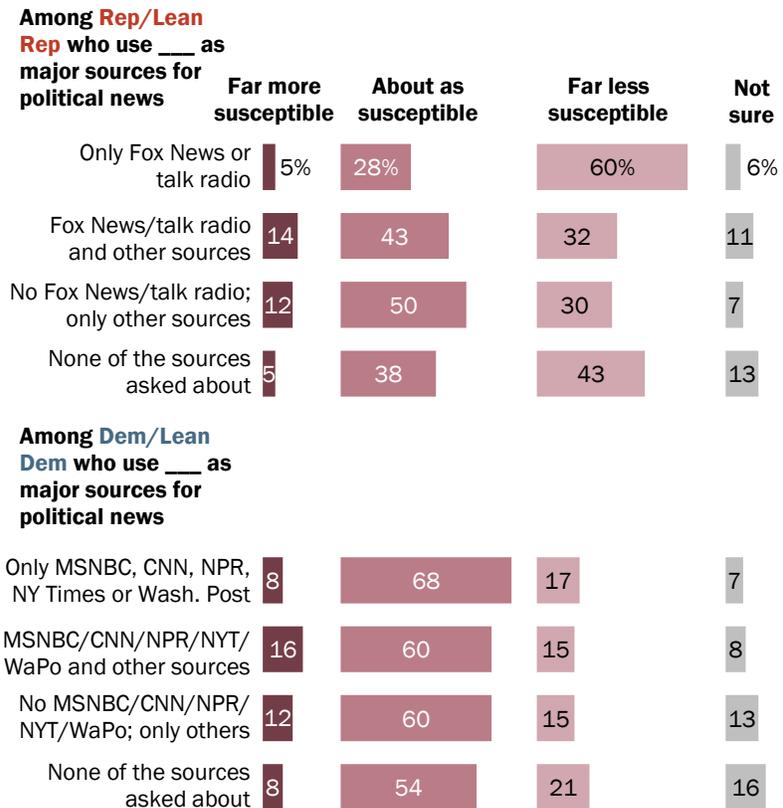
"Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

There are only small differences in responses to this question among Democrats who use different major sources for political news. But among Republicans who use only Fox News and/or talk radio as their major sources, a majority (60%) say that minors under 18 are far less susceptible, compared with far fewer among Republicans who use a mixed media diet (32%) or only major sources without conservative-leaning audiences (30%).

Among Republicans, those who rely only on Fox News or talk radio more likely to say young people are less susceptible to coronavirus infection

% of U.S. adults who say that people under 18 are ___ than adults to becoming infected with the coronavirus



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. The Fox News cable channel and talk radio shows such as Sean Hannity or Rush Limbaugh have audiences that lean Republican and conservative. MSNBC, CNN, NPR, New York Times and Washington Post have audiences that lean Democratic and liberal. Sources whose audiences are more mixed include ABC, CBS or NBC network television news. Respondents who did not give an answer not shown. See Appendix for more details.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

"Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Appendix: Grouping respondents by major news sources

The survey asked whether respondents use any of eight news sources as a major source, minor source or not a source for political and election news. (Responses for all eight sources are [available here](#).)

The sources identified as major sources were combined with the respondents' partisanship to identify those who get news from only sources with audiences that lean toward their party (i.e., Republicans who get news only from sources with right-leaning audiences and Democrats who only get news from sources with left-leaning audiences) or another mix of sources. Those who do not use any of the eight sources asked about as a major source for political and election news are in a separate category.

The eight sources asked about are:

- Fox News cable channel
- CNN
- MSNBC
- ABC, CBS or NBC national network TV
- NPR
- The New York Times
- The Washington Post
- Talk radio, such as Sean Hannity or Rush Limbaugh

Major sources for political and election news

% in each category

	U.S. adults %	Rep/ Lean Rep %	Dem/ Lean Dem %
Among Rep/Lean Rep			
Only Fox News and/or talk radio	13	29	--
Fox News/talk radio and other sources	4	10	--
No Fox News/talk radio; only other source	9	20	--
None of the sources asked about	19	42	--
Among Dem/Lean Dem			
Only MSNBC, CNN, NPR, NY Times and/or Wash. Post	16	--	32
MSNBC, CNN, NPR, NY Times or Wash. Post and other sources	15	--	28
No MSNBC, CNN, NPR, NY Times or Wash. Post; only other sources	7	--	14
None of the sources asked about	14	--	26

Note: The Fox News cable channel and talk radio shows such as Sean Hannity or Rush Limbaugh have audiences that lean Republican and conservative. MSNBC, CNN, NPR, New York Times and Washington Post have audiences that lean Democratic and liberal. Sources whose audiences are more mixed include ABC, CBS, or NBC network television news.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

"Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Sources were selected from among the top responses (used by about 10% or more of U.S. adults) to a question from November 2019 asking if respondents got news from each of 30 different sources in the past week. More details about this measure and what it reveals about Americans' news habits are [available here](#), and all data for the question is [available here](#).

The eight sources asked about were then classified according to the political partisanship and ideology of their audiences. For this analysis, respondents who call each source a “major source” for political and election news are considered part of its audience.

An outlet is considered to have a left-leaning audience if the proportion of all audience members that identify as liberal Democrats is at least two-thirds higher than the proportion who identify as conservative Republicans. Alternatively, an outlet is considered to have a right-leaning audience if the proportion of all audience members who identify as conservative Republicans is at least two-thirds higher than the proportion that identify as liberal Democrats. An outlet is classified as having a mixed audience if neither liberal Democrats nor conservative Republicans make up at least two-thirds more of the audience than the other.

Data for classifying the ideological composition of these source's audiences is below:

Sources by ideological profile of respondents who name them as a major source

	% of respondents who call the source a major source who identify as ...	
	Liberal Dem/Lean Dem	Conservative Rep/Lean Rep
	%	%
<i>Sources with an audience that leans right</i>		
Fox News cable channel	6%	55%
Talk radio, such as Sean Hannity or Rush Limbaugh	7%	66%
<i>Sources with a mixed audience</i>		
ABC, CBS, or NBC national network TV	24%	15%
<i>Sources with an audience that leans left</i>		
CNN	36%	6%
MSNBC	43%	5%
NPR	54%	7%
The New York Times	49%	5%
Washington Post	45%	5%

Source: Survey of U.S. adults Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.
 "Before Trump Tested Positive for Coronavirus, Republicans' Attention to Pandemic Had Sharply Declined"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Two of the eight outlets – Fox News and talk radio – have right-leaning audiences in this data, meaning the proportion of their audience who identify as conservative Republicans (including leaners) is at least two-thirds higher than the proportion that who are liberal Democrats, including leaners. Five of the eight outlets – MSNBC, CNN, NPR, The New York Times and The Washington Post – have left-leaning audiences, meaning the share of liberal Democrats using them is at least two-thirds higher than the share of conservative Republicans. The last group of sources (ABC, CBS or NBC national network TV) are those with a mixed audience; the share of liberal Democrats using them is not two-thirds higher than the share of conservative Republicans, and vice versa.

Acknowledgments

The American News Pathways project was made possible by The Pew Charitable Trusts. Pew Research Center is a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, its primary funder. This initiative is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals. Find related reports online at <https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/election-news-pathways/>.

Research Team

Amy Mitchell, *Director, Journalism Research*
J. Baxter Oliphant, *Senior Researcher*
Katerina Eva Matsa, *Associate Director, Journalism Research*
Elisa Shearer, *Research Associate*
Mason Walker, *Research Analyst*
Mark Jurkowitz, *Senior Writer*
Michael Lipka, *Editorial Manager, Religion Research*
Michael Barthel, *Senior Researcher*
Jeffrey Gottfried, *Senior Researcher*
Galen Stocking, *Computational Social Scientist*
Maya Khuzam, *Research Assistant*
Kirsten Worden, *Research Assistant*
Andrew Mercer, *Senior Research Methodologist*
Dorene Asare Marfo, *Survey Research Methodologist*
Scott Keeter, *Senior Survey Advisor*
Claudia Deane, *Vice President, Research*
Nick Bertoni, *Panel Manager*
Courtney Kennedy, *Director, Survey Research*

Editorial and Graphic Design

David Kent, *Senior Copy Editor*
Margaret Porteus, *Information Graphics Designer*
Alissa Scheller, *Information Graphics Designer*
Peter Bell, *Design Director*
Andrea Caumont, *Digital Engagement Manager*
John Gramlich, *Senior Writer/Editor*
Bruce Drake, *Senior Editor*

Communications and Web Publishing

Rachel Weisel, *Senior Communications Manager*

Hannah Klein, *Communications Manager*

Calvin Jordan, *Communications Associate*

Andrew Grant, *Communications Associate*

Sara Atske, *Associate Digital Producer*

Shannon Greenwood, *Digital Producer*

Stacy Rosenberg, *Associate Director, Digital*

Seth Rubenstein, *Lead Web Developer*

Benjamin Wormald, *Web Developer*

Carrie Elizabeth Blazina, *Associate Digital Producer*

Kelly Browning, *User Experience Manager*

Michael Piccorossi, *Director, Digital Strategy*

Methodology

The American Trends Panel survey methodology

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by Pew Research Center, 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. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish. The panel is being managed by Ipsos.

Data in this report is drawn from the panel wave conducted Aug. 31 to Sept. 7, 2020. A total of 9,220 panelists responded out of 9,810 who were sampled, for a response rate of 94%.

This does not include two panelists who were removed from the data due to extremely high rates of refusal or straightlining. The cumulative response rate accounting for nonresponse to the recruitment surveys and attrition is 5%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged on to the survey and completed at least one item is 1%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 9,220 respondents is plus or minus 1.7 percentage points.

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	2,302
Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015	Landline/ cell RDD	6,004	2,976	1,334
April 25 to June 4, 2017	Landline/ cell RDD	3,905	1,628	683
Aug. 8 to Oct. 31, 2018	ABS/web	9,396	8,778	6,398
Aug. 19 to Nov. 30, 2019	ABS/web	5,900	4,720	3,023
June 1 to July 19, 2020	ABS/web	1,865	1,636	1,633
	Total	36,879	25,076	15,373

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.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The subsample from the ATP consisted of 9,810 ATP members that responded to the Wave 57 survey and the annual profile survey and were still active. Panelists who had not yet completed the annual profile survey were ineligible.

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. Across these three surveys, a total of 19,718 adults were invited to join the ATP, of whom 9,942 agreed to participate.

In August 2018, the ATP switched from telephone to address-based recruitment. Invitations were sent to a random, address-based sample 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. The same recruitment procedure was carried out on August 19, 2019, from which a total of 5,900 were invited to join the panel and 4,720 agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. Another recruitment using the same procedure was carried out on June 1, 2020, from which a total of 1,865 were invited to join the panel and 1,636 agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. Of the 25,076 individuals who have ever joined the ATP, 15,373 remained active panelists and continued to receive survey invitations at the time this survey 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.¹ The American Trends Panel never uses breakout routers or chains that direct respondents to additional surveys.

¹ AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. "[AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling](#)."

Weighting

The ATP data was weighted in a multistep process that accounts for multiple stages of sampling and nonresponse that occur at different points in the survey process. First, each panelist begins with a base weight that reflects their probability of selection for their initial recruitment survey (and the probability of being invited to participate in the panel in cases where only a subsample of respondents were invited). The base weights for panelists recruited in different years are scaled to be proportionate to the effective sample size for all active panelists in their cohort.

To correct for nonresponse to the initial recruitment surveys and gradual panel attrition, the base weights for all active panelists are calibrated to align with the population benchmarks identified in the accompanying table to create a full-panel weight.

For ATP waves in which only a subsample of panelists are invited to participate, a wave-specific base weight is created by adjusting the full-panel weights for subsampled panelists to account for any differential probabilities of selection for the particular panel wave. For waves in which all active panelists are invited to participate, the wave-specific base weight is identical to the full-panel weight.

In the final weighting step, the wave-specific base weights for panelists who completed the survey are again calibrated to match the population benchmarks specified above. These weights are trimmed (typically at about the 1st and 99th percentiles) to reduce the loss in precision stemming from variance in the weights. Sampling errors and test of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting.

Weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Age x Gender	2018 American Community Survey
Education x Gender	
Education x Age	
Race/Ethnicity x Education	
Born inside vs. outside the U.S. among Hispanics and Asian Americans	
Years lived in the U.S.	
Census region x Metro/Non-metro	2019 CPS March Supplement
Volunteerism	2017 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Voter registration	2018 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement
Party affiliation	Average of the three most recent Pew Research Center telephone surveys
Frequency of internet use	ATP 2020 ABS recruitment survey

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 U.S. adult population. The ATP 2020 ABS recruitment survey featured 1,862 online completions and 2,247 mail survey completions.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

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:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	9,220	1.7 percentage points
Rep/Lean Rep	3,818	2.5 percentage points
Dem/Lean Dem	5,221	2.4 percentage points
<i>Among Rep/Lean Rep</i>		
Only Fox News and/or talk radio	1,298	4.1 percentage points
Fox News/talk radio and other sources	359	7.6 percentage points
No Fox News/talk radio; only other sources	768	5.5 percentage points
None of the sources	1,393	4.3 percentage points
<i>Among Dem/Lean Dem</i>		
Only MSNBC, CNN, NPR, NY Times and/or Wash. Post	2,123	3.7 percentage points
MSNBC, CNN, NPR, NY Times or Wash. Post and other sources	1,550	4.6 percentage points
No MSNBC, CNN, NPR, NY Times or Wash. Post; only other sources	606	6.7 percentage points
None of the sources	942	5.2 percentage points

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