

FOR RELEASE MAY 17, 2018

# Fact Sheet: News Media and Political Attitudes in the United Kingdom

**FOR MEDIA OR OTHER INQUIRIES:**

Amy Mitchell, Director, Journalism Research  
Katie Simmons, Associate Director, Research  
Rachel Weisel, Communications Manager

202.419.4372

[www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org)

**RECOMMENDED CITATION**

Pew Research Center, May, 2018, "In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

## About Pew Research Center

Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and 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](http://www.pewresearch.org). Pew Research Center is a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, its primary funder.

© Pew Research Center 2018

# News Media and Political Attitudes in the United Kingdom

Below are specific findings about news media attitudes and habits in the United Kingdom. The findings come from a Pew Research Center survey about news media and politics across eight Western European countries conducted from Oct. 30 to Dec. 20, 2017. The survey covered five countries in the north (Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and three in the south (France, Italy and Spain).

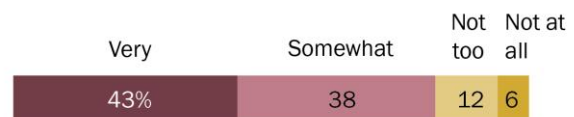
## Views of the news media in the UK

The sense of importance of and trust in the news media vary considerably by country. In general, adults in northern European countries – for example, Sweden and Germany – are more likely to say the news media are very important and that they trust the news media, while people in France and Italy are the least likely to say this.

Among British adults, 43% consider the news media very important to society, but only around a third (32%) say they trust the news media. This includes just 5% who trust the news media *a lot*.

### About four-in-ten British adults believe the news media are very important; about one-third trust the media

*% of adults in the UK who say the news media are \_\_\_ important to the functioning of the country's society*



*% who trust the news media ...*



Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

"In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

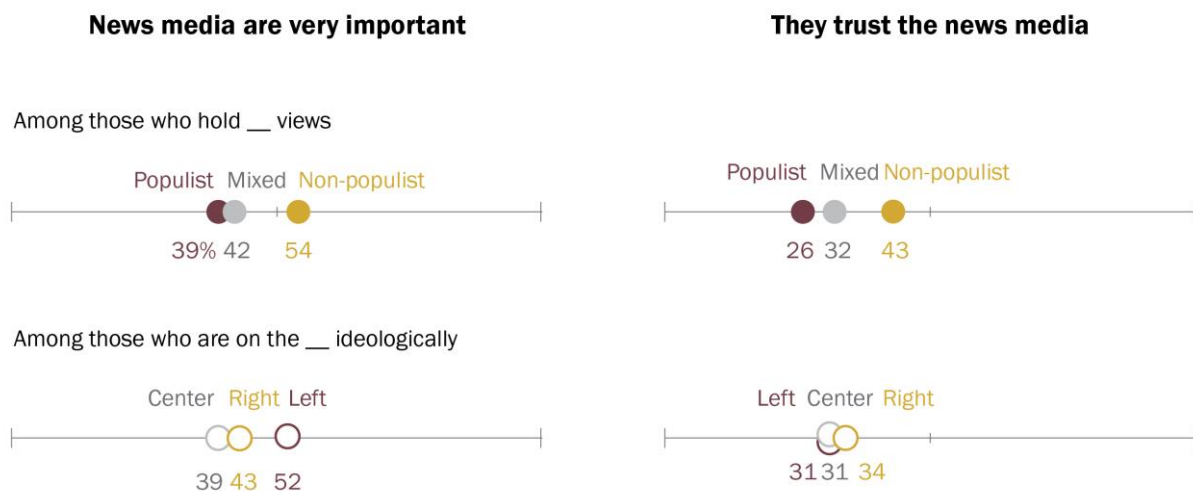
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

In most of the countries surveyed, people who hold populist views are less likely to say the news media are important and to trust the news media than people who don't hold populist views. In general, the differences in these attitudes about the news media are small when comparing between people on the left and right of the ideological spectrum.

This pattern holds true in the UK as well: Just 26% of people with populist views say they trust the news media, compared with 43% of those without populist views. On the question of importance, 39% of those with populist views say the news media are very important for society in the UK, compared with 54% of those with non-populist views.

## Divides in the UK between those with and without populist views in their attitudes toward the news media

*% of adults in the UK who say ...*



Note: Respondents are classified as holding populist views if they answered: "Most elected officials don't care what people like me think" and "Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials."

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

"In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

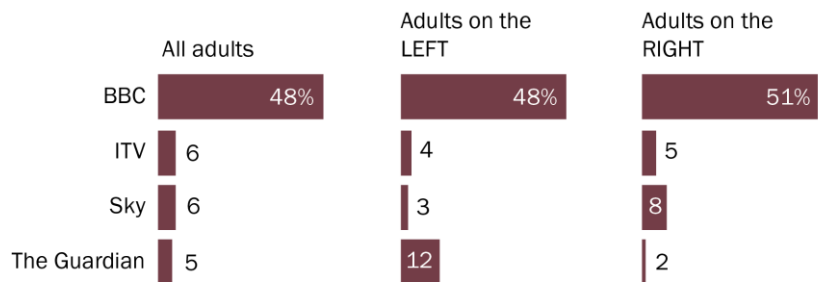
## Main sources used for news in the UK

When it comes to the news sources people say they turn to most frequently, the divides between adults with and without populist leanings are not as strong as those seen for attitudes about the news media more generally. And in the southern countries, there tend to be larger divides in main news source preference between people on the left and right of the ideological spectrum than between those with and without populist views.

In the UK, those on the left and right do not differ in regard to the media source they turn to most for news. Both those on the ideological right and left cite the BBC as their main news source.

### British adults across the ideological spectrum generally share the same main news source

*% of adults in the UK who name each outlet as their main news source*



Note: Only sources named by 5% of adults or more are shown. Respondents were asked to name the outlet they turn to the most for news. For the purposes of this analysis, major channels or brands were grouped into their larger news organization.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

"In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

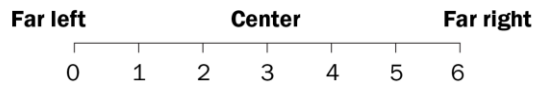
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Where users place outlets' ideologies, on the right and on the left

For many of the news outlets across the eight countries, people who use an outlet to get news tend to think the outlet is closer to their own left-right ideological position. In the UK, this is true for five outlets asked about: BBC, ITV, The Guardian, The Times and HuffPost. For these outlets, news users on either the right or left tend to place them closer to their own ideology. This pattern does not occur for the news channel Sky, which right-aligned and left-aligned news users agree on its placement. The tabloid newspapers the Daily Mail and The Daily Mirror are not included in this analysis, because they did not have a large enough sample of left or right users to analyze.

## Ideological placement of news outlets in the UK

Users of each outlet were asked to place the outlet on a left-right scale



% of users on the left and right who place the outlet at position ...

0-2                      3                      4-6

### BBC

92% of adults use this outlet at least once a week



Left users and right users ARE different in their placement of this outlet

### The Guardian

29% of adults use this outlet at least once a week



Left users and right users ARE different in their placement of this outlet

### ITV

62% of adults use this outlet at least once a week



Left users and right users ARE different in their placement of this outlet

### The Times

24% of adults use this outlet at least once a week



Left users and right users ARE different in their placement of this outlet

### Sky

44% of adults use this outlet at least once a week



Left users and right users are NOT different in their placement of this outlet

### HuffPost

18% of adults use this outlet at least once a week



Left users and right users ARE different in their placement of this outlet

Note: Some outlets are not included, because their audience sample sizes are too small to analyze. Left and right users' outlet placements are considered different if the percentage of left and right users that place the outlet on the left (from 0 to 2), on the right (from 4 to 6), or both are significantly different.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

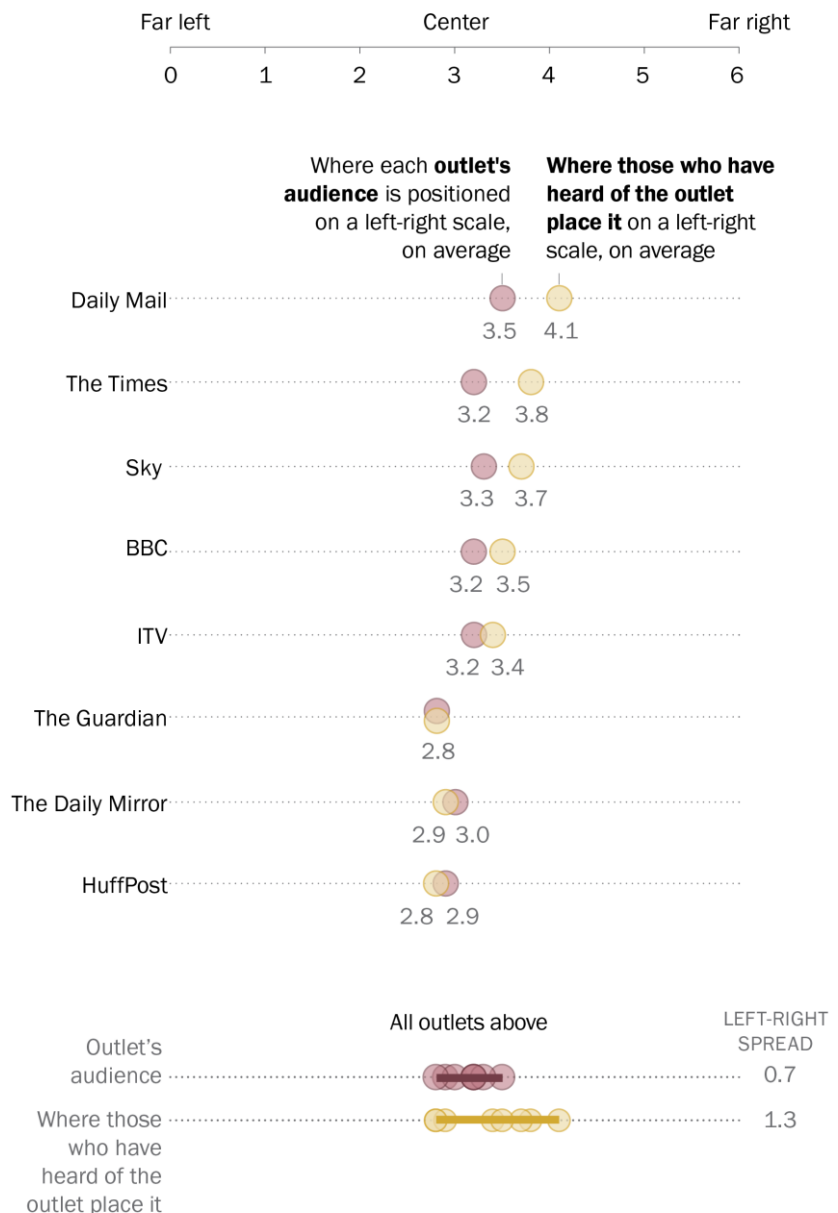
"In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

In general, where the public places an outlet tends to differ from where the average audience actually sits ideologically. For each of the news outlets asked about in the survey, the average audience (based on self-reported usage) tends to fall near the ideological center. People who have heard of each outlet, however, tend to place the outlet either farther to the left or farther to the right than the actual ideological position of the outlet's audience.

The UK is no exception. For most outlets, while their news audiences are near the ideological center, people who have heard of the outlets tend to think they lean slightly more to the right. The Times, for example, has an audience that sits at about the middle of the left-right spectrum (3.2 on the 0-to-6 scale), but when asked to place the outlet on the same left-right scale, people who have heard of The Times place it farther to the right (at 3.8).

## British adults tend to think news outlets in the UK are more partisan than what their average audiences actually are

*Mean placement of each outlet's audience on a 0-to-6 left-right scale compared with where those who have heard of the outlet place it on that same scale*



Note: An outlet's audience is defined as respondents who say they get news regularly from that outlet. Left-right spread is the difference between the outlet farthest to the left and the outlet farthest to the right.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

"In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

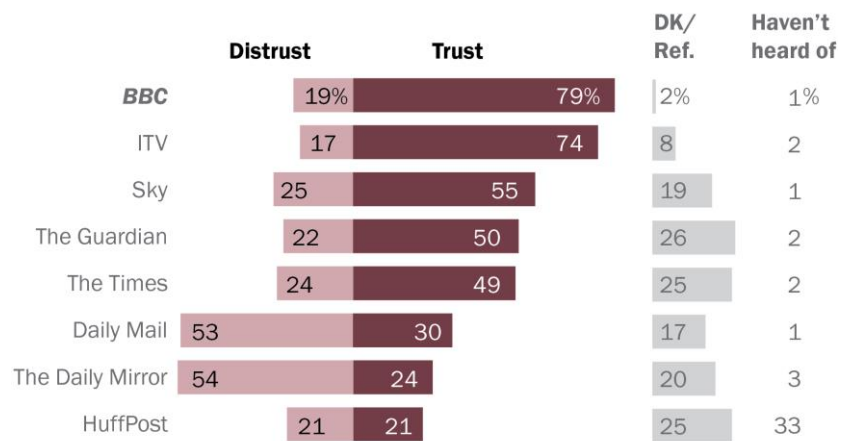
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Trust in news media outlets

In seven of the eight countries surveyed, the most trusted news outlet asked about is the public news organization in each country. In the UK, around eight-in-ten adults (79%) say they trust the public news organization BBC.

### In the UK, a large majority trusts the public news organization

*% of adults in the UK who generally trust or distrust each news outlet*



Note: People who said they had not heard of an outlet or refused to respond to the question about whether they get news from an outlet are grouped under "Haven't heard of" here. Public broadcaster is in **bold**.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

"In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

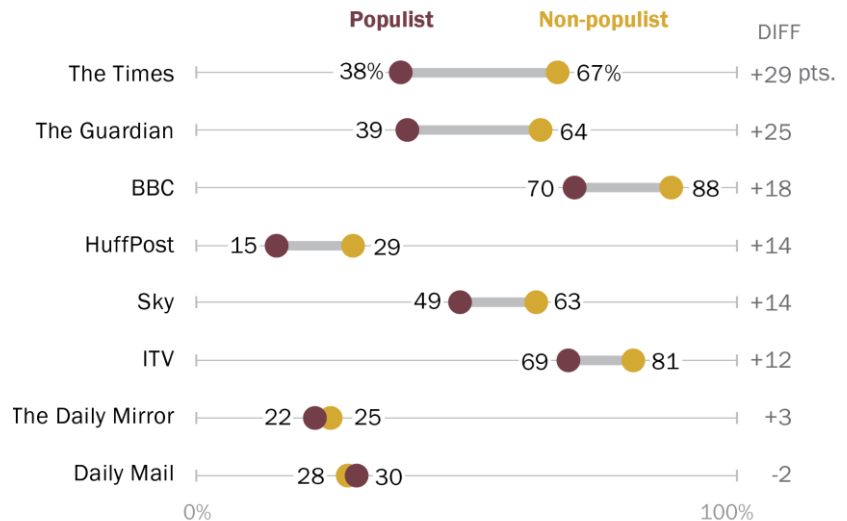
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

As with trust in the news media generally, trust in specific outlets varies by populist leanings, with those who hold populist views expressing lower levels of trust than those who don't.

In the UK, for example, those with populist leanings are 29 percentage points less likely than those with non-populist views to say they trust The Times. But, ideologically right- and left-leaning adults are equally likely to trust The Times.

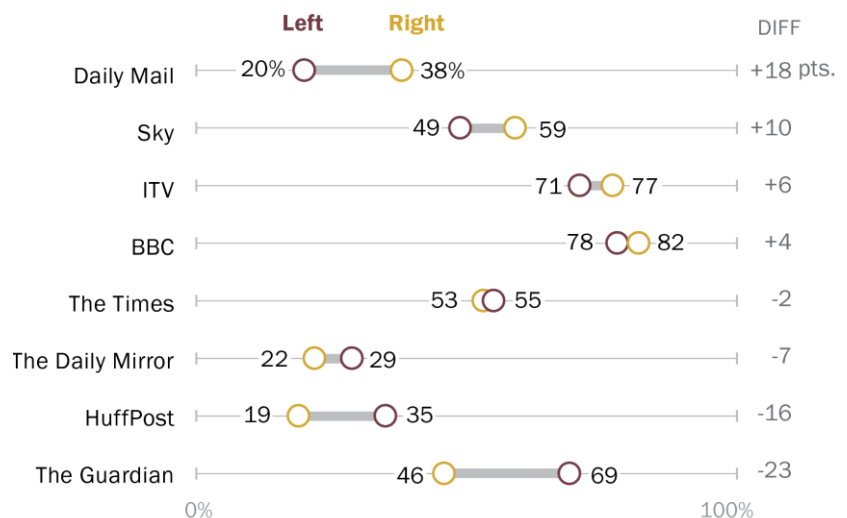
### In the UK, those with populist views tend to trust news outlets less than those without such views

*% of adults in the UK who hold \_\_\_\_ views and generally trust each news outlet*



### Trust is also divided along the left-right spectrum

*% of adults in each ideological group who generally trust each news outlet*



Note: Respondents are classified as holding populist views if they answered: "Most elected officials don't care what people like me think" and "Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials."

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

"In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

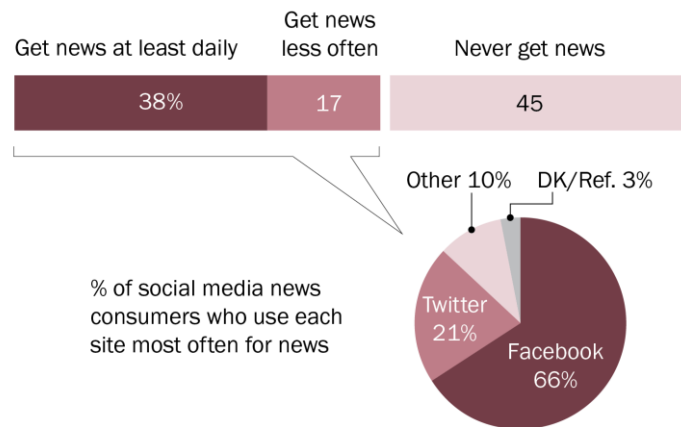
## Social media usage and views

Many people in Western Europe get news through social media, with Facebook cited as the most widely used platform for news.

A majority of adults in the UK (55%) get news on social media, including 38% who get news on social media *daily*. Facebook is the most common social network used for news. In the UK, young people (those 18 to 29 years old) are more likely to get news on social media daily than those 50 and older (61% vs. 19%).

### Many in the UK get news on social media, mainly from Facebook

*% of adults in the UK who \_\_\_\_\_ from social media*



Note: "Other" includes social media sites mentioned by 5% or less of respondents across all countries studied.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

"In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

About half or more social media news consumers in each of the eight countries surveyed say they are familiar with the sources they see on social media. Still, sizeable minorities say they typically do not pay attention to the source of the news they encounter there.

Social media news consumers in the UK are similar to other Western Europeans – 58% are familiar with the news sources they find on social media, but around three-in-ten do not pay attention to the sources there.

## Many in the UK who get news on social media don't pay attention to sources there

*% of social media news consumers in the UK who say most of the news they see on social media comes from news source they ...*



Note: “Don’t know” responses not shown. Question asked: “In general, does most of the news you see on social media come from news sources you are familiar with, sources you are not familiar with, or do you not pay attention to the sources?”

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

“In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Find out more

Read the full report online for the methodology and more on the UK:

<https://pewrsr.ch/WesternEuropeNewsAttitudes>.

To view this information online, as well as data on the seven other Western European countries included in the survey, visit: <https://pewrsr.ch/UKNewsAttitudes>.