

FOR RELEASE NOVEMBER 23, 2020

Americans Paid Close Attention as Election Returns Came In

Democrats were more satisfied by how their news sources explained the results

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RECOMMENDED CITATION

Pew Research Center, November, 2020,
"Americans Paid Close Attention as Election Returns Came In"

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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 2020 presidential election.

For this analysis, we surveyed 11,818 U.S. adults between Nov. 12-17, 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.

Americans Paid Close Attention as Election Returns Came In

Democrats were more satisfied by how their news sources explained the results

As election returns rolled in – albeit more slowly than in recent years – Americans were tuning in closely. They also, for the most part, gave their news sources positive marks for the coverage of the returns, though Republicans were less likely to do so than Democrats.

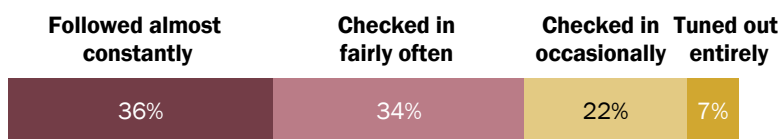
About a third of U.S. adults (36%) say they followed the results of the presidential election “almost constantly,” according a Pew Research Center survey of 11,818 U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020, as a part of the Center’s

[American News Pathways project](#). Another 34% say they checked in fairly often, while about two-in-ten (22%) did so occasionally. Just 7% of

Americans say they tuned out the results entirely. What’s more, about four-in-ten U.S. adults (38%) say the sources they turned to most did very well in helping them understand the results after polls closed. A similar portion (40%) say they did somewhat well, for a total of 77% who gave positive marks. Only 14% say their most turned-to sources for election results did not too or not very well.

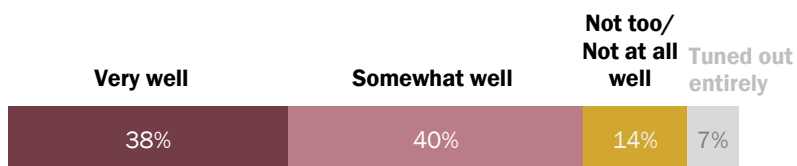
Most Americans checked in on election results at least fairly often, very few tuned them out entirely ...

% of U.S. adults who say they ___ the results of the presidential election after polls closed on Election Day



... And a large majority say their news sources did well at explaining the results

% of U.S. adults who say that the sources they used the most after polls closed on Election Day helped them understand the results as they came in ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. Only those who followed election results at least occasionally often were asked how well their news sources helped them understand the election results.

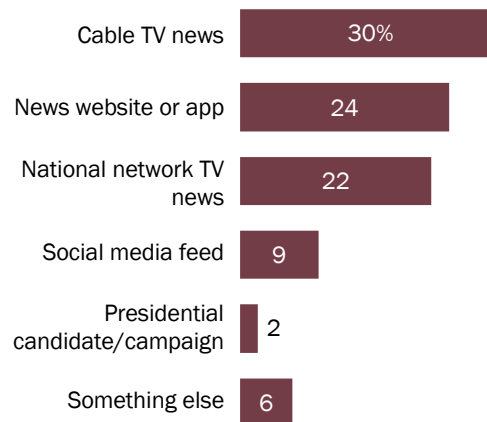
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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Cable TV was the most relied-on platform for election night news among those asked about, with news websites and apps and network TV the next most likely places to turn. Three-in-ten Americans say that in following the results, they turned most to cable TV. About a quarter (24%) say they turned most to news websites or apps while about two-in-ten (22%) relied most on network TV. Only 9% say they turned most to their social media feeds – a platform that some were concerned would serve as a place for [misinformation and conspiracy theories to spread](#). A mere 2% focused most on what the candidates and their campaigns had to say, while 6% say they mostly turned somewhere else.

Cable TV was the most relied-on platform for election night returns; few turned mainly to social media

% of U.S. adults who used ____ the most to follow the results of the presidential election after polls closed on Election Day



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer or who tuned out the election results are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.

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Democrats followed the presidential election returns somewhat more closely than Republicans: 42% of Democrats and independents who lean Democratic followed them almost constantly once polls closed, versus 31% of Republicans and Republican leaners. Republicans were more likely to check in fairly often or occasionally, while few in either party tuned them out entirely.

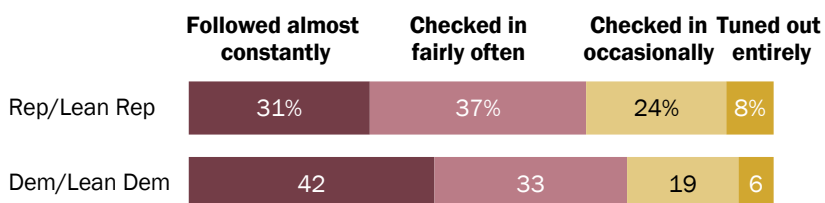
Partisans' use of different pathways to keep up with returns was generally similar, but differences emerge in how well each side of the aisle say their sources did in explaining those results. Republicans expressed far less satisfaction with their news sources than did Democrats – in line with [previous findings](#) that Republicans tend to be less satisfied and more distrusting

of the media in general. While a solid majority of Democrats (54%) say their most turned-to sources did a very good job of helping them understand the results, the same is true of just 21% of Republicans. Instead, 46% of Republicans say their sources did “somewhat well,” while about a quarter (23%) say their sources did not too or not at all well in helping them understand the results. Just 6% of Democrats offered a negative assessment of their news sources.

Some portion of the Republican dissatisfaction could be tied to the fact that the returns showed Joe Biden leading in electoral votes. One media-related [controversy that emerged](#) election night

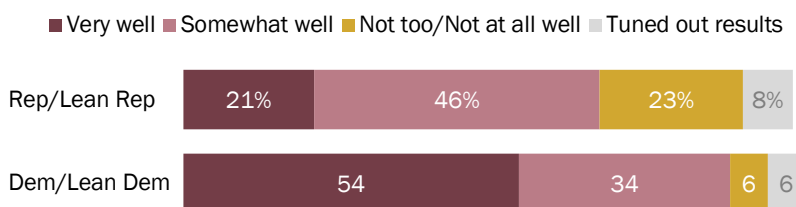
Democrats followed election returns more closely than Republicans ...

% of U.S. adults who say they ___ the results of the presidential election after polls closed on Election Day



... And were far more likely to give their news sources high marks on explaining the election results

% of U.S. adults who say that the sources they used the most after polls closed on Election Day helped them understand the results as they came in ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. Only those who followed election results at least occasionally were asked how well their news sources helped them understand the election results.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.

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was over the fact that Fox News – which [33% of Republicans say is a major source](#) of political news – [called Biden the winner in Arizona](#) not long after 11 p.m. Eastern in a close race that [most news organizations waited several days to call](#). Indeed, the Republicans who say that Fox News is a major source for political news are slightly more likely than other Republicans to say that their news sources did a poor job of helping them understand the election night results – 28% of these Republicans say this, compared with 21% of Republicans who do not say Fox News is a major source of news for them. However, the difference between the two parties is much wider, so possible dissatisfaction with individual news sources does not seem to be the main driver of partisan difference.

These are some of the findings of this survey conducted from Nov. 12-17. Major news outlets [called the race for Biden on Nov. 7](#), and in the days that followed, Donald Trump’s campaign [continued filing lawsuits in battleground states](#) and [he continued to call the results fraudulent](#). As of this publication date, many of the Trump campaign’s legal challenges have [largely been unsuccessful](#) in court.

Among the other findings:

- Those who turned to cable TV to follow the election results were the most likely to say they followed the results “almost constantly,” with 51% saying this compared with 35% of those who mostly used news websites or apps, 34% of those who mostly used national network TV, and 25% of those who say they mostly turned to their social media feeds to follow the results.
- Republicans who use only Fox News and/or talk radio as major news sources (among eight sources asked about) were more likely than other Republicans to say they followed the election results almost constantly, while Democrats who listed sources with mostly left-leaning audiences (CNN, MSNBC, NPR, The New York Times and/or The Washington Post) as major sources were more likely than Democrats who don’t to say they were following the election results almost constantly.
- Americans who followed the election closely were much more likely to say their news sources did very well at helping them understand election results. Of those following the results constantly, 58% said their news sources did very well at this, vs. 35% of those who say they checked in on the results fairly often, and just 21% of those who say they checked in occasionally.

1. A majority of Americans say they followed election results at least occasionally on election night

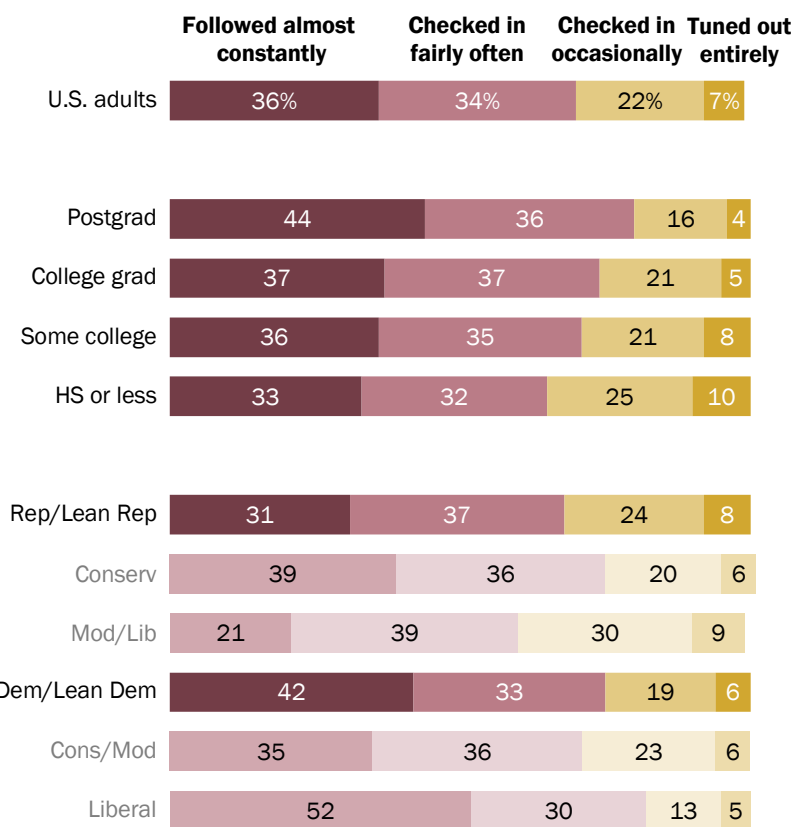
About one-third of U.S. adults (36%) say they followed the results of the presidential election almost constantly after polls closed on Election Day, and a similar portion (34%) say they did so fairly often. About two-in-ten Americans (22%) say they checked in occasionally, while far fewer (7%) say they tuned the election night results out entirely.

Consistent with other findings about [attention to political and election news](#), more educated adults (particularly those with postgraduate degrees) say they followed the incoming results almost constantly (44%) than do those who have a college degree (37%), some college experience (36%) or a high school diploma or less (33%).

Overall, a greater share of Democrats and independents who lean toward the Democratic Party (42%) than Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (31%) say they followed returns for the presidential election almost constantly after polls closed. But, larger differences in attention

More educated Americans paid more attention to the election results

% of U.S. adults who say they ___ the results of the presidential election after polls closed on Election Day



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.

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emerge when political ideology is layered in. Liberal Democrats were by far the most engaged after polls closed on Election Day: About half (52%) say they were following almost constantly, while nearly another three-in-ten checked in fairly often. Conservative and moderate Democrats were less engaged, with 35% saying they followed almost constantly.

Among Republicans, conservatives were the most engaged. About four-in-ten conservative Republicans (39%) followed almost constantly, while far fewer moderate and liberal Republicans were similarly engaged (21% say they followed almost constantly). Conservative Republicans, however, still substantially trailed liberal Democrats in attention.

Attention to the presidential election results also varies greatly based on which news platform Americans reported relying on most for election results. Cable TV had the most engaged audience, while those relying on social media were the least engaged.

About half of Americans who say they mostly turned to cable TV news (such as CNN, Fox News or MSNBC) for coverage of the election results followed them very closely: 51% say they followed almost constantly, while another 34% say they checked

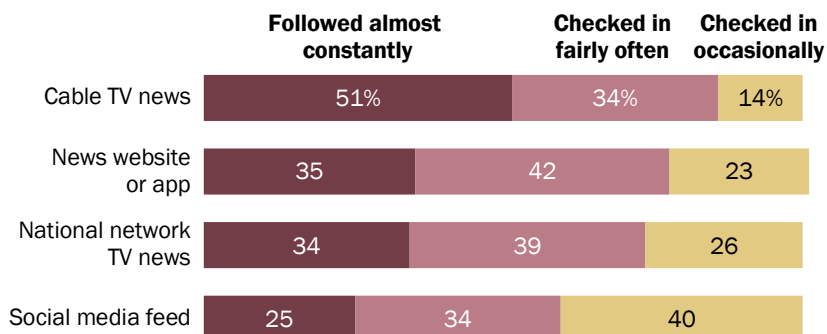
in fairly often. The share of cable TV watchers constantly following is at least 16 percentage points higher than the share saying the same in all the other groups analyzed here.

On the other hand, those who say their social media feeds were their main way of following the results report being less glued to their screens. Four-in-ten of this social media group say they checked in only occasionally, 14 points higher than the share saying this among the next highest group analyzed (26% of those who used national network TV news say this).

Attention to election night results among those who relied most on news websites or apps and those who relied on national network TV news fell between cable and social media, with 35% and 34%, respectively, saying they followed almost constantly.

People who turned mostly to cable TV news were following election results the closest

Among those who say they used each the most to follow election results, % who say they ____ the results of the presidential election after polls closed on Election Day



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. Only those who followed election results at least occasionally were asked which news platform they used the most. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020. "Americans Paid Close Attention as Election Returns Came In"

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In addition to the pathways relied on most to follow election returns, the [Americans News Pathways project](#) previously gathered data on the [specific sources turned to most for political and election news](#). Among eight sources asked about, Republicans and Democrats (including leaners) who rely only on news sources with like-minded audiences are the most likely to say they followed the results almost constantly.

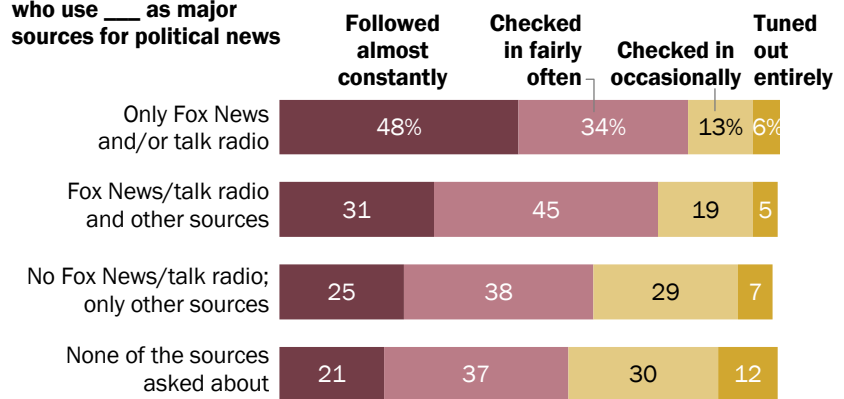
Republicans who said in September that they use Fox News or talk radio programs (such as Sean Hannity or Rush Limbaugh) as major sources for political and election news – but don’t use any of the other [six outlets asked about](#) – were more engaged than Republicans with different news habits. About half of Republicans who only turn to outlets with right-leaning audiences (48%) say they were following Election Day results almost constantly. That compares with about a third of Republicans who use other outlets in addition to those with right-leaning audiences (31%) and a quarter of Republicans who rely only on outlets other than Fox News or talk radio.

Among Democrats, those who rely on the outlets with left-

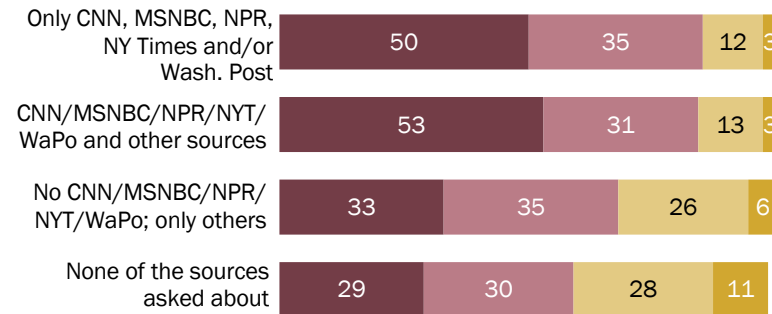
Among partisans, attention to election news differs based on media diet

% who say they ___ the results of the presidential election after polls closed on Election Day

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. CNN, MSNBC, 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. Use of these news sources was measured in early September 2020. See appendix for more details. Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020. “Americans Paid Close Attention as Election Returns Came In”

leaning audiences (CNN, MSNBC, NPR, The New York Times and/or The Washington Post) as a major source (regardless of whether they also rely on other sources) were the most attentive to results as they came in. About half of those who use only outlets with left-leaning audiences (50%) or those outlets plus others (53%) say they followed almost constantly on Nov. 3. Democrats who only use other outlets as major sources (besides the five outlets asked about with left-leaning audiences) were less attentive, with 33% following returns almost constantly.

2. Americans' views of how well news sources informed them about 2020 election returns vary by party, engagement, media diet, age

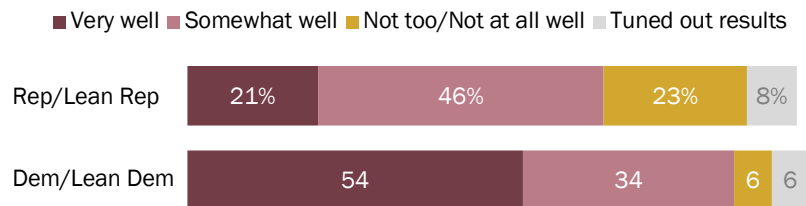
Americans generally give the news media high marks for helping them understand the returns for the presidential election as they came in. But within these generally high marks, several areas of difference emerge.

One clear distinction emerges along party lines. Just over half of Democrats and independents who lean Democratic (54%) say the sources they used most after the polls closed did very well in helping them understand the results. Another 34% say they did somewhat well. But only about two-in-ten Republicans and independents who lean Republican (21%) say their sources did very well, while 46% say their sources did somewhat well. About four times as many Republicans (23%) as Democrats (6%) say those sources did not too well or not at all well helping them understand the results.

Americans' degree of engagement in following election returns as they came in also comes into play in how they evaluated their sources' ability to help them understand those results.

Democrats far more likely to say their news sources helped them understand the election results

% of U.S. adults who say that the sources they used the most after polls closed on Election Day helped them understand the results as they came in ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.
"Americans Paid Close Attention as Election Returns Came In"

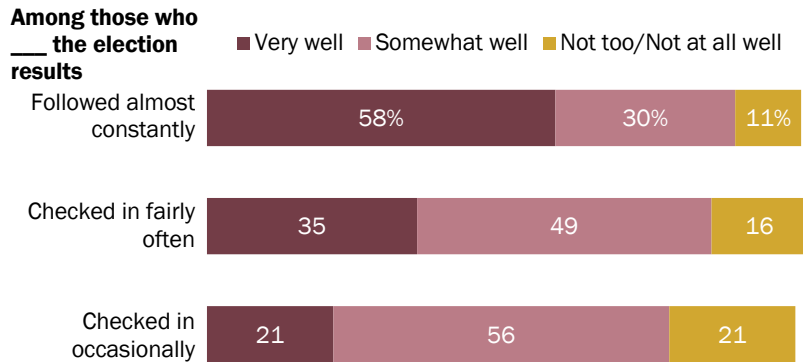
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Americans who say they followed the results of the presidential election “almost constantly” after polls closed on Election Day are more likely than those who followed less closely to say the news sources they used most did a good job of helping them understand those returns as they came in.

About six-in-ten U.S. adults who followed the results almost constantly (58%) say the sources they used most did very well helping them understand those results. The same is true of about one-third of those who say they checked in on the returns fairly often (35%). Continuing the downward slope, 21% of U.S. adults who checked in occasionally give their main sources the highest marks at helping them understand the results. It is worth noting that some of these differences get made up by the portion in each group who say their sources did “somewhat” well. The percentage of those who say their sources did not do too well or not at all well ranges from 11% among those who followed almost constantly to 21% in the group that checked in occasionally.

Those who followed election results closely are more likely to give their sources high marks on coverage

% of U.S. adults who say that the sources they used the most after polls closed on Election Day helped them understand the results as they came in ...



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.

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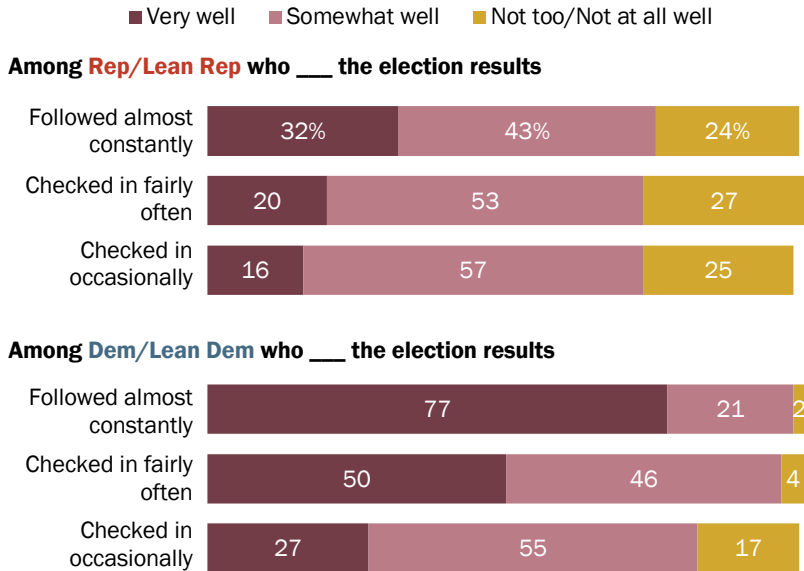
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Within each party, those who spent the most time following the returns are the most likely to say their favorite sources did very well. But the differences between parties remain large.

Indeed, 77% of Democrats who followed returns almost constantly say their most-used sources did very well helping them understand the returns, with almost all the rest (21%) saying those sources did somewhat well. Among Democrats who checked in fairly often, the percentage saying their favorite sources did very well slid to 50%, with almost the same share (46%) saying those sources did somewhat well. For Democrats who checked in occasionally to follow returns, the percentage saying their sources did very well falls to 27%, with 55% saying they did somewhat well and 17% saying they did not too well or not at all well.

Within parties, differences in election coverage ratings by how closely Americans followed the results

% of U.S. adults who say that the sources they used the most after polls closed on Election Day helped them understand the results as they came in ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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About a third of Republicans who followed returns almost constantly (32%) are the most likely in their party say their sources did very well, higher than Republicans who were following the results less closely, but far lower than the Democrats paying the same amount of attention. Another 43% in that group say those sources did somewhat well, and 24% say not too well or not at all well. Of Republicans who followed the returns fairly often, 20% say their most-used sources did very well in helping them understand, less than the 27% who say those sources did not too well or not at all well. Roughly half (53%), however, say those sources did somewhat well.

And among Republicans who checked in occasionally, 16% say their favorite sources did very well, compared with 57% who say they did somewhat well and 25% who say they did not too well or not at all well.

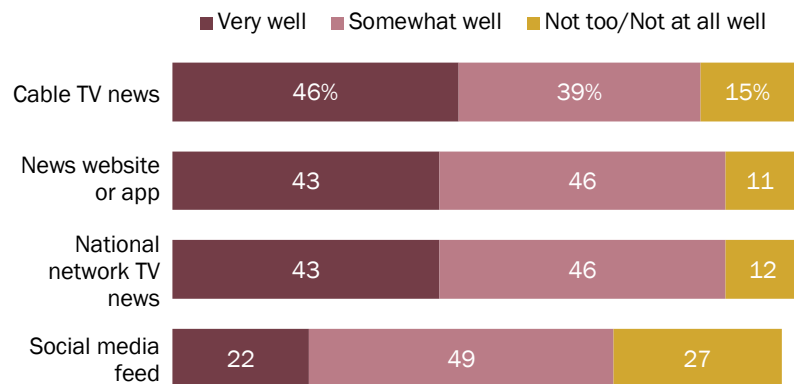
Americans who mainly turned to their social media feeds for election results did not feel well-served

U.S. adults who mainly turned to national network news sources, cable TV news sources or news websites or apps for election night returns offered similarly positive assessments of how those sources did helping them understand the returns. More negative assessments come from those who primarily relied on their social media feeds to follow the results.

Just under half (46%) of U.S. adults who turned most to cable news outlets (such as CNN, Fox News or MSNBC) to follow the results say their sources did very well at helping them understand the results. About four-in-ten (39%) say they did somewhat well, and 15% say they did not do too well or not at all well.

Americans who used social media most to follow the election give their sources lower ratings on explaining the results

Among those who used each the most to follow election results, % of U.S. adults who say that the sources they used the most after polls closed on Election Day helped them understand the results as they came in ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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Results were quite similar among Americans who turned to network TV news outlets (such as ABC, CBS, NBC or PBS). In that case, 43% say their main sources did very well helping them understand the returns; another 46% say they did somewhat well; and 12% say they did not too well or not at all well.

Among those whose primary sources were news websites or apps, the results were virtually the same – 43% say their main sources did very well; 46% say somewhat well; and 11% say not too well or not at all well.

The outlier, however, is the group that mostly used social media feeds to follow the election returns. Far fewer (22%) in that group say that their main sources did very well in helping them understand the results, while 27% say they did not too or not at all well. That 27% is roughly double that of any other group. Still, the largest segment of the group, 49%, say their main sources did somewhat well.

As with their media assessments overall, Republicans who turned most to each of these pathways gave their sources lower marks than Democrats who turned to those pathways. Large gaps emerge among partisans who relied most on cable and network TV. About two-thirds of Democrats (including leaners) who turned most to cable news outlets for election results (68%) say their main sources did very well. That was true of just 22% of Republicans (including leaners) who relied most on cable TV. And 60% of Democrats who turned to national network TV news the most say their sources did very well, compared with 21% of Republicans who turned mostly to national network television.

Large gaps among partisans in ratings of sources' election results coverage, regardless of news pathways

% of U.S. adults who say that the sources they used the most after polls closed on Election Day helped them understand the results as they came in ...

	Very well	Somewhat well	Not too/Not at all well
<i>Among Rep/Lean Rep who used ___ the most to follow election results</i>			
	%	%	%
Cable TV news	22	51	27
News website or app	27	52	20
National network TV news	21	59	20
Social media feed	12	47	37
<i>Among Dem/Lean Dem who used ___ the most to follow election results</i>			
Cable TV news	68	28	3
News website or app	55	41	4
National network TV news	60	36	4
Social media feed	32	49	18

Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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Older Americans more likely than younger to say their sources did very well helping them understand election results as they came in

There are a few notable differences among demographic groups when it comes to evaluating how well their favorite sources for election news did in helping them understand the results after the polls closed.

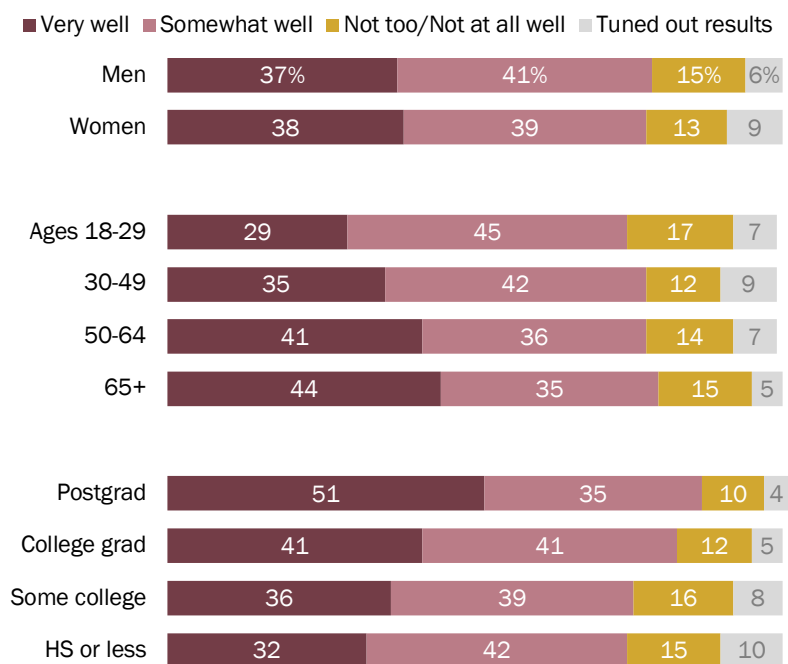
One such area is age. About three-in-ten (29%) of the youngest adults – ages 18 to 29 – say their most-used sources did very well in helping them understand the results. That number inches up to 35% among those 30 to 49, to 41% among those 50 to 64, and 44% among those 65 and older.

When it comes to education levels, about half (51%) of Americans with at a postgraduate degree say their most-used sources did very well helping them understand the results as they came in. That number falls to 41% among those with a bachelor’s degree, 36% with some college education but no bachelor’s degree, and 32% for those with a high school education or less.

Men and women, on the other hand, offered virtually the same assessment: 37% of men say their most-used source did very well and 41% say somewhat well, as well as 38% and 39%, respectively, among women.

Older, more educated adults more likely to say that their news sources did very well at helping them understand election results

% of U.S. adults who say that the sources they used the most after polls closed on Election Day helped them understand the results as they came in ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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Appendix: Grouping respondents by major news sources

A survey conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020, 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.

Researchers merged the responses to these questions from late August and early September to the survey data collected Nov. 12-17, 2020.

The eight sources asked about are:

- Fox News cable channel
- CNN
- MSNBC
- ABC, CBS or NBC national network TV
- NPR
- The New York Times

Major sources for political and election news

% in each category for the survey conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020

	U.S. adults	Rep/Lean Rep	Dem/Lean Dem
	%	%	%
Among Rep/Lean Rep			
Only Fox News and/or talk radio	13	28	--
Fox News/talk radio and other sources	5	10	--
No Fox News/talk radio; only other source	9	20	--
None of the sources asked about	20	43	--
Among Dem/Lean Dem			
Only MSNBC, CNN, NPR, NY Times and/or Wash. Post	15	--	30
MSNBC, CNN, NPR, NY Times or Wash. Post and other sources	14	--	29
No MSNBC, CNN, NPR, NY Times or Wash. Post; only other sources	7	--	13
None of the sources asked about	13	--	27

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 Nov. 12-17, 2020.

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- The Washington Post
- Talk radio, such as Sean Hannity or Rush Limbaugh

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.

Respondents who did not complete the survey conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020, are not included in the analysis using these media habits.

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/>.

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Methodology

The American Trends Panel survey methodology

Overview

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 Nov. 12 to Nov. 17, 2020. A total of 11,818 panelists responded out of 13,568 who were sampled, for a response rate of 87%. 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 11,818 respondents is plus or minus 1.6 percentage points.

Panel recruitment

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 whom 9,942 (50%) 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

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	2,187
Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015	Landline/ cell RDD	6,004	2,976	1,245
April 25 to June 4, 2017	Landline/ cell RDD	3,905	1,628	622
Aug. 8 to Oct. 31, 2018	ABS/web	9,396	8,778	5,906
Aug. 19 to Nov. 30, 2019	ABS/web	5,900	4,720	2,334
June 1 to July 19, 2020	ABS/web	1,865	1,636	1,274
	Total	36,879	25,076	13,568

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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from the U.S. Postal Service’s Delivery Sequence File. Two additional recruitments were conducted using the same method in 2019 and 2020, respectively. Across these three address-based recruitments, a total of 17,161 adults were invited to join the ATP, of whom 15,134 (88%) agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. 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. Of the 25,076 individuals who have ever joined the ATP, 13,568 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.

Sample design

The overall target population for this survey was non-institutionalized persons ages 18 and older, living in the U.S., including Alaska and Hawaii.

Questionnaire development and testing

The questionnaire was developed by Pew Research Center in consultation with Ipsos. The web program was rigorously tested on both PC and mobile devices by the Ipsos project management team and Pew Research Center researchers. The Ipsos project management team also populated test data which was analyzed in SPSS to ensure the logic and randomizations were working as intended before launching the survey.

Incentives

All respondents were offered a post-paid incentive for their participation. Respondents could choose to receive the post-paid incentive in the form of a check or a gift code to Amazon.com or could choose to decline the incentive. Incentive amounts ranged from \$5 to \$20 depending on whether the respondent belongs to a part of the population that is harder or easier to reach. Differential incentive amounts were designed to increase panel survey participation among groups that traditionally have low survey response propensities.

Data collection protocol

The data collection field period for this survey was Nov. 12 to Nov. 17, 2020.

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

On Nov. 12 and Nov. 13, invitations were sent out in two separate launches: Soft Launch and Full Launch. Sixty panelists were included in the soft launch, which began with an initial invitation sent on November 12, 2020. The ATP panelists chosen for the initial soft launch were known responders who had completed previous ATP surveys within one day of receiving their invitation. All remaining English- and Spanish-speaking panelists were included in the full launch and were sent an invitation on November 13, 2020.

All panelists with an email address received an email invitation and up to two email reminders if they did not respond to the survey. All ATP panelists that consented to SMS messages received an SMS invitation and up to one SMS reminder. Interactive voice recording (IVR) reminder calls were made on November 14, 2020 to 179 tablet households that previously provided consent to receive these reminders.

Invitation and reminder dates

	Soft Launch	Full Launch
Initial invitation	11/12/2020	11/13/2020
First reminder	11/15/2020	11/15/2020
IVR reminder	11/14/2020	11/14/2020
Final reminder	11/16/2020	11/16/2020

Data quality checks

To ensure high-quality data, the Center’s researchers performed data quality checks to identify any respondents showing clear patterns of satisficing. This includes checking for very high rates of leaving questions blank, as well as always selecting the first or last answer presented. As a result of this checking, two ATP respondents were removed from the survey dataset prior to weighting and analysis.

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.

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	2020 National Public Opinion Reference Survey
Religious affiliation	
2020 popular vote turnout	Projections based on Cook Political Report as of 4:55 PM, November 17

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 2020 National Public Opinion Reference Survey featured 1,862 online completions and 2,247 mail survey completions.

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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.

A final adjustment was applied to the trimmed weights to ensure that turnout and the popular vote margin exactly matched the weighting benchmark.

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	11,818	1.6 percentage points
Rep/Lean Rep	4,802	2.4 percentage points
Dem/Lean Dem	6,740	2.3 percentage points
<i>Among Rep/Lean Rep</i>		
Only Fox News and/or talk radio	1,212	4.5 percentage points
Fox News/talk radio and other sources	313	9.5 percentage points
No Fox News/talk radio; only other sources	712	6.4 percentage points
None of the sources	1,295	4.8 percentage points
<i>Among Dem/Lean Dem</i>		
Only CNN, MSNBC, NPR, NY Times and/or Wash. Post	2,012	4.3 percentage points
CNN, MSNBC, NPR, NY Times or Wash. Post and other sources	1,432	5.2 percentage points
No CNN, MSNBC, NPR, NY Times or Wash. Post; only other sources;	564	7.6 percentage points
None of the sources	855	6.3 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.

Dispositions and response rates

Final dispositions	AAPOR code	Total
Completed interview	1.1	11,818
Logged onto survey; broke-off	2.12	117
Logged onto survey; did not complete any items	2.1121	74
Never logged on (implicit refusal)	2.11	1557
Survey completed after close of the field period	2.27	0
Completed interview but was removed for data quality		2
Screened out		N/A
Total panelists in the survey		13,568

Completed interviews	I	11,818
Partial interviews	P	0
Refusals	R	1,750
Non-contact	NC	0
Other	O	0
Unknown household	UH	0
Unknown other	UO	0
Not eligible	NE	0
Total		13,568
AAPOR RR1 = $I / (I+P+R+NC+O+UH+UO)$		87%

Cumulative response rate	Total
Weighted response rate to recruitment surveys	11%
% of recruitment survey respondents who agreed to join the panel, among those invited	73%
% of those agreeing to join who were active panelists at start of Wave 78	65%
Response rate to Wave 78 survey	87%
Cumulative response rate	5%

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