Methodology

The American Trends Panel survey methodology

Overview

Data in this report comes from Wave 185 of the American Trends Panel (ATP), Pew Research Center's nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. The survey was conducted from Jan. 20 to 26, 2026. A total of 8,512 panelists responded out of 9,302 who were sampled, for a survey-level response rate of 92%.

The cumulative response rate accounting for all stages of nonresponse and attrition is 3%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged on to the survey and completed at least one item is 2%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 8,512 respondents is plus or minus 1.4 percentage points.

The survey includes oversamples of non-Hispanic Asian adults and adults ages 18 to 29 to provide more precise estimates of the opinions and experiences of these smaller demographic subgroups. These oversampled groups are weighted back to reflect their correct proportions in the population.

SSRS conducted the survey for Pew Research Center via online (n=8,272) and live telephone (n=240) interviewing. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish.

To learn more about the ATP, visit our American Trends Panel webpage.

Panel recruitment

Since 2018, the ATP has used address-based sampling (ABS) for recruitment. A study cover letter and a pre-incentive are mailed to a stratified, random sample of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service's Computerized Delivery Sequence File. This Postal Service file has been estimated to cover 90% to 98% of the population.[1] Within each sampled household, the adult with the next birthday is selected to participate. Other details of the ABS recruitment protocol have changed over time but are available upon request.[2] Prior to 2018, the ATP was recruited using landline and cellphone random-digit-dial surveys administered in English and Spanish.

A national sample of U.S. adults has been recruited to the ATP approximately once per year since 2014. In some years, the recruitment has included additional efforts (known as an "oversample")

[1] AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. "AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling."
[2] Email pewsurveys@pewresearch.org.

to improve the accuracy of data for underrepresented groups. For example, Hispanic adults, Black adults and Asian adults were oversampled in 2019, 2022 and 2023, respectively.

Sample design

The overall target population for this survey was noninstitutionalized persons ages 18 and older living in the United States. It featured a stratified random sample from among ATP members who previously completed Wave 183. Non-Hispanic Asian adults and adults ages 18 to 29 were selected with certainty. The remaining panelists were sampled at rates designed to ensure that the share of respondents in each stratum is proportional to its share of the U.S. adult population to the greatest extent possible. Respondent weights are adjusted to account for differential probabilities of selection as described in the Weighting section below.

Questionnaire development and testing

The questionnaire was developed by Pew Research Center in consultation with SSRS. The web program used for online respondents was rigorously tested on both PC and mobile devices by the SSRS project team and Pew Research Center researchers. The SSRS project team also populated test data that 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 gift code to Amazon.com, Target.com or Walmart.com. 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 Jan. 20 to Jan. 26, 2026. Surveys were conducted via self-administered web survey or by live telephone interviewing.

For panelists who take surveys online:[3] Postcard notifications were mailed to a subset on Jan. 20.[4] Survey invitations were sent out in two separate launches: soft launch and full launch.

[3] The ATP does not use routers or chains in any part of its online data collection protocol, nor are they used to direct respondents to additional surveys.

[4] Postcard notifications for web panelists are sent to 1) panelists who were recruited within the last two years and 2) panelists recruited prior to the last two years who opt to continue receiving postcard notifications.

Sixty panelists were included in the soft launch, which began with an initial invitation sent on Jan. 20. All remaining English- and Spanish-speaking sampled online panelists were included in the full launch and were sent an invitation on Jan. 21.

Invitation and reminder dates for web respondents, ATP Wave

	Soft launch	Full launch
Initial invitation	Jan. 20, 2026	Jan. 21, 2026
First reminder	Jan. 22, 2026	Jan. 22, 2026
Final reminder	Jan. 24, 2026	Jan. 24, 2026

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Panelists participating online were sent an email invitation and up to two email reminders if they did not respond to the survey. ATP panelists who consented to SMS messages were sent an SMS invitation with a link to the survey and up to two SMS reminders.

For panelists who take surveys over the phone with a live interviewer: Prenotification postcards were mailed on Jan. 16. Soft launch took place on Jan. 20 and involved dialing until a total of four interviews had been completed. All remaining English- and Spanish-speaking sampled phone panelists' numbers were dialed throughout the remaining field period. Panelists who take surveys via phone can receive up to six calls from trained SSRS interviewers.

Data quality checks

To ensure high-quality data, Center researchers performed data quality checks to identify any respondents showing patterns of satisficing. This includes checking for whether respondents left questions blank at very high rates or always selected 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 is weighted in a process that accounts for multiple stages of sampling and nonresponse that occur at different points in the panel survey process. First, each panelist begins with a base weight that reflects their probability of recruitment into the panel. These weights are then calibrated to align with the population benchmarks in the accompanying table to correct for nonresponse to recruitment surveys and panel attrition. If only a subsample of panelists was invited to participate in the wave, this weight is adjusted to account for any differential probabilities of selection. Because respondents to this wave were sampled from among respondents to Wave 183, the weights were also adjusted to account for nonresponse to Wave 183.

American Trends Panel weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Age (detailed) Age x Gender Education x Gender Education x Age Race/Ethnicity x Education Race/Ethnicity x Gender Race/Ethnicity x Age Born inside vs. outside the U.S. among Hispanics and Asian Americans Years lived in the U.S. Census region x Metropolitan status	2023 American Community Survey (ACS)
Volunteerism	2023 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Frequency of internet use Religious affiliation Party affiliation x Race/Ethnicity Party affiliation x Age	2025 National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS)
Validated 2024 presidential election turnout and vote choice	Candidate vote share is based on official results from the Federal Election Commission. Turnout is based on estimates from the Election Lab at the University of Florida. The size of the voting-eligible population is based on the 2023 ACS.

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on noninstitutionalized adults. For weighting to the 2024 presidential election results, panelists are considered validated voters if their self-report of having voted was confirmed after matching to a national voter registry.

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Among the panelists who completed the survey, this weight is then calibrated again to align with the population benchmarks identified in the accompanying table and trimmed at the 1st and 99th percentiles to reduce the loss in precision stemming from variance in the weights. Sampling errors and tests of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting.

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.

Sample sizes and margins of error, ATP Wave 185

Group	Unweighted sample size	Weighted %	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	8,512		1.4 percentage points
Men	3,788		2.2 percentage points
Women	4,642		1.9 percentage points
Ages 18-29	818		4.3 percentage points
30-49	2,866		2.3 percentage points
50-64	2,332		2.6 percentage points
65+	2,487		2.5 percentage points
White, non-Hispanic	5,773		1.7 percentage points
Hispanic	973		4.2 percentage points
Black, non-Hispanic	830		4.7 percentage points
Asian, non-Hispanic	544		6.0 percentage points
Upper income	2,015		2.6 percentage points
Middle income	4,161		2.0 percentage points
Lower income	1,894		3.0 percentage points
Rep/Lean Rep	3,913	46	2.1 percentage points
Dem/Lean Dem	4,343	48	2.0 percentage points

Note: Estimates for Asian adults are representative of English speakers only. Family income tiers are based on adjusted 2024 earnings. This survey includes oversamples of non-Hispanic Asian adults and adults ages 18-to-29 respondents. Unweighted sample sizes do not account for the sample design or weighting and do not describe a group's contribution to weighted estimates. See the Sample design and Weighting sections above for details.

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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, ATP Wave 185

	AAPOR code	Total
Completed interview	1.1	8,512
Logged in (web)/Contacted (CATI), but did not complete any items	2.11	145
Started survey; broke off before completion	2.12	100
Never logged on (web)/Never reached on phone (CATI)	2.20	541
Survey completed after close of the field period	2.27	0
Other non-interview	2.30	2
Completed interview but was removed for data quality	2.90	2
Total panelists sampled for the survey		**9,302**
Completed interviews	I	8,514
Partial interviews	P	0
Refusals	R	245
Non-contact	NC	541
Other	O	4
Unknown household	UH	0
Unknown other	UO	0
Not eligible	NE	0
Total		**9,302**
AAPOR RR1 = I/(I+P+R+NC+O+UH+UO)		92%

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Cumulative response rate, ATP Wave 185

	Total
Weighted response rate to recruitment surveys	12%
% of recruitment survey respondents who agreed to join the panel, among those invited	74%
% of those agreeing to join who were active panelists at start of Wave 185	40%
Response rate to Wave 183 survey	92%
Response rate to Wave 185 survey	92%
Cumulative response rate	**3%**

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How family income tiers are calculated

Family income data reported in this study is adjusted for household size and cost-of-living differences by geography. Panelists then are assigned to income tiers that are based on the median adjusted family income of all American Trends Panel members. The process uses the following steps:

1. First, panelists are assigned to the midpoint of the income range they selected in a family income question that was measured on either the most recent annual profile survey or, for newly recruited panelists, their recruitment survey. This provides an approximate income value that can be used in calculations for the adjustment.

2. Next, these income values are adjusted for the cost of living in the geographic area where the panelist lives. This is calculated using price indexes published by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. These indexes, known as Regional Price Parities (RPP), compare the prices of goods and services across all U.S. metropolitan statistical areas as well as non-metro areas with the national average prices for the same goods and services. The most recent available data at the time of the annual profile survey is from 2023. Those who fall outside of metropolitan statistical areas are assigned the overall RPP for their state's non-metropolitan area.

3. Family incomes are further adjusted for the number of people in a household using the methodology from Pew Research Center's previous work on the American middle class. This is done because a four-person household with an income of say, $50,000, faces a tighter budget constraint than a two-person household with the same income.

4. Panelists are then assigned an income tier. "Middle-income" adults are in families with adjusted family incomes that are between two-thirds and double the median adjusted family income for the full ATP at the time of the most recent annual profile survey. The median adjusted family income for the panel is roughly $77,800. Using this median income, the middle-income range is about $51,900 to $155,600. Lower-income families have adjusted incomes less than $51,900 and upper-income families have adjusted incomes greater than $155,600 (all figures expressed in 2024 dollars and scaled to a household size of three). A panelist is assigned "no answer" in the income tier variable if they did not provide all three pieces of information needed to calculate their tier (family income, household size and residential address).

Two examples of how a given area's cost-of-living adjustment was calculated are as follows: the Pine Bluff metropolitan area in Arkansas is a relatively inexpensive area, with a price level that is

19.7% less than the national average. The San Francisco-Oakland-Berkeley metropolitan area in California is one of the most expensive areas, with a price level that is 18.2% higher than the national average. Income in the sample is adjusted to make up for this difference. As a result, a family with an income of $40,200 in the Pine Bluff area is as well off financially as a family of the same size with an income of $59,100 in San Francisco.