

FOR RELEASE OCTOBER 17, 2016

# Trump, Clinton Supporters Differ on How Media Should Cover Controversial Statements

*Trump supporters split on whether news media should highlight offensive statements, but nearly three-in-four Clinton supporters favor it*

**BY** Michael Barthel, Jeffrey Gottfried and Kristine Lu

**FOR MEDIA OR OTHER INQUIRIES:**

Amy Mitchell, Director, Journalism Research

Michael Barthel, Research Associate

Jeffrey Gottfried, Senior Researcher

Rachel Weisel, Communications Manager

202.419.4372

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

## 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 2016

# Trump, Clinton Supporters Differ on How Media Should Cover Controversial Statements

*Trump supporters split on whether news media should highlight offensive statements, but nearly three-in-four Clinton supporters favor it*

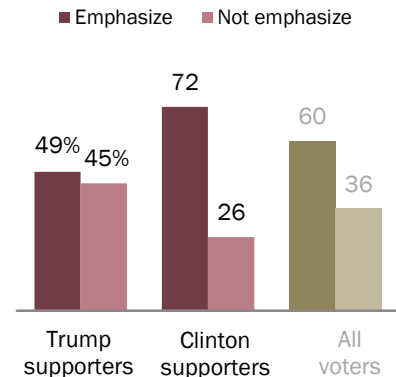
As the news media cover the turbulent 2016 presidential election, there's been considerable debate around how much emphasis they should put on inaccurate or potentially offensive statements made by candidates. A new Pew Research Center survey finds that while those who support Donald Trump are divided in their views on whether journalists should highlight statements that many may find offensive, supporters of both candidates overwhelmingly say the news media should draw attention to claims that are inaccurate. Additionally, more voters see Trump as over-covered by the news media than say the same of Hillary Clinton.

The presidential campaign has been marked by controversy over comments made by the candidates. Some have [offended groups of people](#), while others have included false claims. Should the media emphasize statements like these because it is important for the public to know about them? Or should the media let the statements pass because they unfairly give too much attention to one candidate?

Overall, six-in-ten registered voters favor the media emphasizing a candidate's offensive statement, according to the survey, conducted Sept. 27-Oct. 10 among 4,132 adults, including 3,616 registered voters on Pew Research Center's nationally representative American Trends Panel. (Most of the survey took place before the Oct. 7 release of the video of Trump's lewd comments about women.)

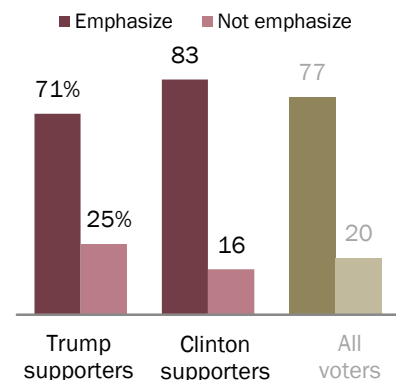
## Trump supporters split on whether news media should emphasize offensive statements

*% of registered voters who say the news media should ... a candidate's offensive statement*



## But supporters of both candidates agree they should emphasize inaccurate statements

*% of registered voters who say the news media should ... a candidate's inaccurate statement*



Source: Survey conducted Sep. 27-Oct. 10, 2016.

"Trump, Clinton Supporters Differ on How Media Should Cover Controversial Statements"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

But Trump supporters are much more divided on this issue than Clinton supporters. Roughly half (49%) of Trump supporters want the news media to emphasize offensive statements, and about the same portion (45%) think that such statements should not be emphasized. There is much less disagreement among Clinton supporters. Roughly seven-in-ten (72%) favor emphasis, while only about a quarter (26%) do not.

On the issue of *inaccurate* statements, there is broader support overall for the idea of enhanced media coverage – about three-quarters (77%) of registered voters favor emphasizing them. While Trump supporters again are less likely than Clinton backers to say this, substantial majorities of both candidates' supporters prefer the media to highlight inaccurate statements. Fully 83% of Clinton backers favor emphasizing them, which is somewhat higher than the 71% of Trump supporters who say the same.

## Majorities of both candidates' supporters say the media should fact-check, though a larger share of Clinton supporters say this

Along with the clear sense that journalists have a role in emphasizing inaccuracies, the vast majority of registered voters (83%) also think that it is the news media's responsibility to fact-check political candidates and campaigns. Nearly two-thirds (65%) say it is a major responsibility, while just 16% think fact-checking is not at all a responsibility of the news media.

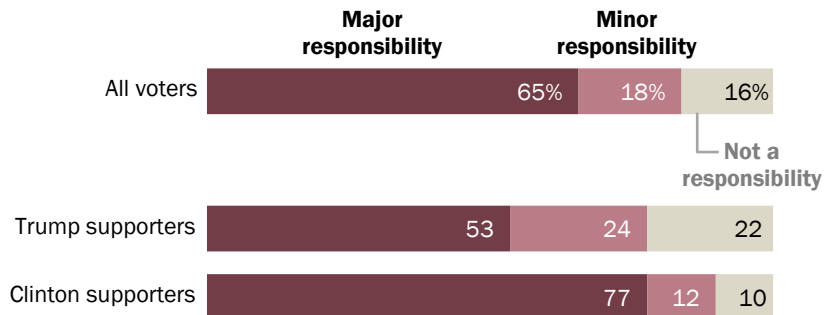
Majorities of both Clinton and Trump supporters take this

position, though the sentiment is more common among Clinton backers. About three-quarters (77%) of Clinton supporters think it is a *major* responsibility of the news media to fact-check political candidates and campaigns. That's higher than the roughly half (53%) of Trump supporters who say the same. An additional 24% of Trump supporters and 12% of Clinton supporters say the media have some responsibility to fact-check.

At the same time, this sense of agreement on fact-checking may be simpler in theory than practice. A [new Pew Research Center report](#) found that roughly eight-in-ten voters – including nearly equal shares of Clinton and Trump supporters – say the two sides cannot agree on the basic facts of important issues.

### Majorities of Trump and Clinton supporters think fact-checking is the media's responsibility

% of registered voters who say fact-checking is a ... of the news media



Source: Survey conducted Sep. 27-Oct. 10, 2016.

"Trump, Clinton Supporters Differ on How Media Should Cover Controversial Statements"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

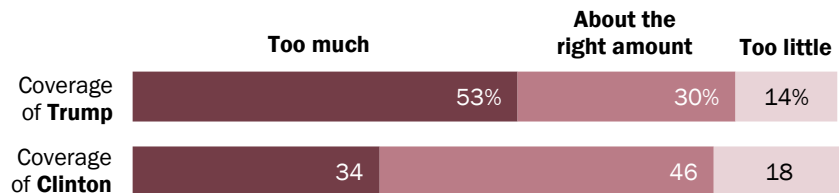
## About half of voters feel news media have given Trump too much coverage, Clinton about the right amount

Without a doubt, the election has been covered extensively. In July, most Americans were [already worn out](#) by the amount of coverage the presidential candidates and campaigns had received.

But when the public considers the amount of coverage the specific candidates receive, Trump is far more likely than Clinton to be seen as getting too much. Around half of registered voters (53%) say Trump has been over-covered, compared with about a third (34%) who say the same of Clinton.

### Many more voters see Trump as getting too much coverage than think so of Clinton

*% of registered voters who say that news media have given ... coverage to each candidate*



Source: Survey conducted Sep. 27-Oct. 10, 2016.

"Trump, Clinton Supporters Differ on How Media Should Cover Controversial Statements"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

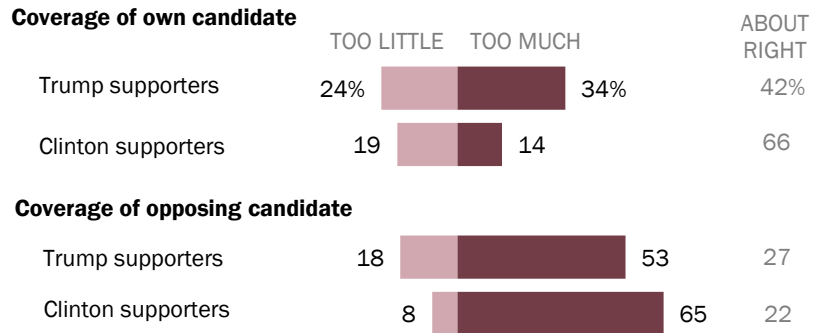
Even 34% of Trump's own supporters say he gets too much coverage – 20 percentage points higher than the share of Clinton backers who say the same of their candidate (14%).

On the other hand, the feeling that the *opposing candidate* has received too much coverage is mutual. Still, Clinton supporters are somewhat more likely to say this of Trump's coverage (65%) than Trump supporters are of Clinton's (53%).

Overall, only 18% of registered voters say that *both* candidates receive too much coverage, while 27% say that neither candidate does.

## About a third of Trump supporters think he gets too much coverage

*% of registered voters who say that news organizations have given too little/too much coverage to their own or opposing candidate*



Source: Survey conducted Sep. 27-Oct. 10, 2016.

"Trump, Clinton Supporters Differ on How Media Should Cover Controversial Statements"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Acknowledgments

This report was made possible by The Pew Charitable Trusts. Pew Research Center is a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, its primary funder.

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals.

Michael Barthel, *Research Associate*

Jeffrey Gottfried, *Senior Researcher*

Kristine Lu, *Research Assistant*

Elisa Shearer, *Research Analyst*

Amy Mitchell, *Director, Journalism Research*

Rachel Weisel, *Communications Manager*

Travis Mitchell, *Digital Producer*



## 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 recruited from landline and cellphone random-digit-dial (RDD) surveys. Panelists participate via monthly self-administered Web surveys. Panelists who do not have internet access are provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection. The panel is being managed by Abt SRBI.

Data in this report are drawn from the panel wave conducted Sept. 27-Oct. 10, 2016 among 4,132 respondents. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 4,132 respondents is plus or minus 2.8 percentage points.

Members of the American Trends Panel were recruited from two large, national landline and RDD surveys conducted in English and Spanish. At the end of each survey, respondents were invited to join the panel. The first group of panelists was recruited from the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey, conducted Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014. Of the 10,013 adults interviewed, 9,809 were invited to take part in the panel and a total of 5,338 agreed to participate.<sup>1</sup> The second group of panelists was recruited from the 2015 Survey on Government, conducted Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015. Of the 6,004 adults interviewed, all were invited to join the panel, and 2,976 agreed to participate.<sup>2</sup>

The ATP data were weighted in a multi-step process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents' original survey selection probability and the fact that in 2014 some panelists were subsampled for invitation to the panel. Next, an adjustment was made for the fact that the propensity to join the panel and remain an active panelist varied across different groups in the sample. The final step in the weighting uses an iterative technique that aligns the sample to population benchmarks on a number of dimensions. Gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region parameters come from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014 American Community Survey. The county-level population density parameter (deciles) comes from the 2010 U.S. Decennial Census. The telephone service benchmark is comes from the July-Dec. 2015 National Health Interview Survey and is projected to 2016. The volunteerism benchmark comes from the 2013 Current Population Survey Volunteer Supplement. The party affiliation benchmark is the average of the three most recent Pew Research Center general public telephone surveys. The Internet

---

<sup>1</sup> When data collection for the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey began, non-internet users were subsampled at a rate of 25%, but a decision was made shortly thereafter to invite all non-internet users to join. In total, 83% of non-internet users were invited to join the panel.

<sup>2</sup> Respondents to the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey who indicated that they are internet users but refused to provide an email address were initially permitted to participate in the American Trends Panel by mail, but were no longer permitted to join the panel after February 6, 2014. Internet users from the 2015 Survey on Government who refused to provide an email address were not permitted to join the panel.

access benchmark comes from the 2015 Pew Survey on Government. Respondents who did not previously have internet access are treated as not having internet access for weighting purposes. The frequency of internet use benchmark is an estimate of daily internet use projected to 2016 from the 2013 Current Population Survey Computer and Internet Use Supplement. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish, but the Hispanic sample in the ATP is predominantly native born and English speaking.

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:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	4,132	2.8%
All registered voters	3,616	2.9%
<i>Among registered voters who support ...</i>		
Donald Trump	1,396	4.7%
Hillary Clinton	1,775	4.2%

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.

The September 2016 wave had a response rate of 80% (4,132 responses among 5,185 individuals in the panel). Taking account of the combined, weighted response rate for the recruitment surveys (10.0%) and attrition from panel members who were removed at their request or for inactivity, the cumulative response rate for the wave is 2.6%<sup>3</sup>.

© Pew Research Center, 2016

<sup>3</sup> Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves are removed from the panel. These cases are counted in the denominator of cumulative response rates.

**2016 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL  
WAVE 21 SEPTEMBER  
FINAL TOPLINE  
September 27 – October 10, 2016  
TOTAL N=4,132<sup>4</sup>**

**ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE****ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY RELEASED****ASK ALL:**

PRESCOVERAGE      Now thinking about how news organizations have been covering the presidential candidates in the campaign so far, would you say news organizations have given too much, too little, or about the right amount of coverage to...  
**[RANDOMIZE ITEMS A & B]**

		<u>Too much</u>	<u>Too little</u>	<u>About the right amount</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
a.	Hillary Clinton Sept 27-Oct 10, 2016	33	18	46	3
b.	Donald Trump Sept 27-Oct 10, 2016	52	14	31	3

**[RANDOMIZE CANDACCURACY AND CANDOFFENSE]****ASK ALL:**

CANDACCURACY      Thinking about how the news media covers the presidential campaign and candidates, if a candidate makes a statement that is inaccurate, which comes closer to your view about what the news media should do? **[RANDOMIZE 1 AND 2 IN SAME ORDER AS CANDOFFENSE]**

Sept 27-  
Oct 10  
2016  
76  
21  
3

Emphasize the statement because it is important for the public to know  
NOT emphasize the statement because it unfairly gives the candidate  
extra attention  
No Answer

---

<sup>4</sup> The Wave 21 survey was administered exclusively in web mode. The survey included N=147 previous mail mode panelists that were converted to web and were provided an internet-enabled tablet if necessary.

**[RANDOMIZE CANDACCURACY AND CANDOFFENSE]****ASK ALL:**

CANDOFFENSE

Thinking about how the news media covers the presidential campaign and candidates, if a candidate makes a statement that many people might find offensive, which comes closer to your view about what the news media should do? **[RANDOMIZE 1 AND 2 IN SAME ORDER AS CANDACCURACY]**

Sept 27-

Oct 10

2016

62

Emphasize the statement because it is important for the public to know

35

NOT emphasize the statement because it unfairly gives the candidate extra attention

4

No Answer

**ASK ALL:**

CANDRESP

More broadly, in covering political campaigns and candidates, how much of a responsibility is it of the news media to correct statements that a candidate makes that are inaccurate?

Sept 27-

Oct 10

2016

62

A major responsibility

19

A minor responsibility

17

Not a responsibility

1

No Answer