

FOR RELEASE November 1, 2016

# Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits

*Local voters and those who feel attached to their communities stand out*

**BY** *Michael Barthel, Jesse Holcomb, Jessica Mahone and Amy Mitchell*

**FOR MEDIA OR OTHER INQUIRIES:**

Amy Mitchell, Director of Journalism Research

Jesse Holcomb, Associate Director, Research

Rachel Weisel, Communications Manager

202.419.4372

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

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## **Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits**

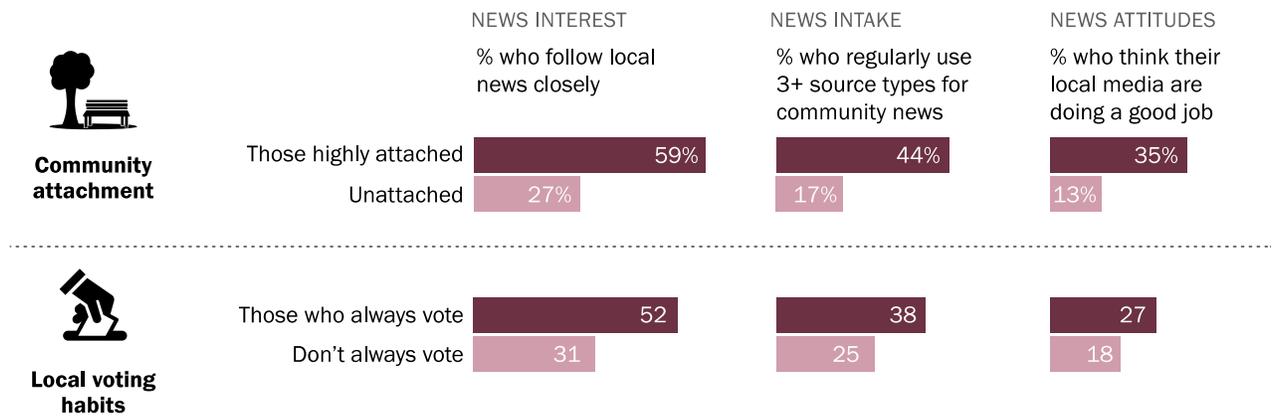
*Local voters and those who feel attached to their communities stand out*

In local communities, the civically engaged – the people who vote, volunteer and connect with those around them – play a key role in community life. Thus, how and to what degree they stay informed about their communities carries added weight.

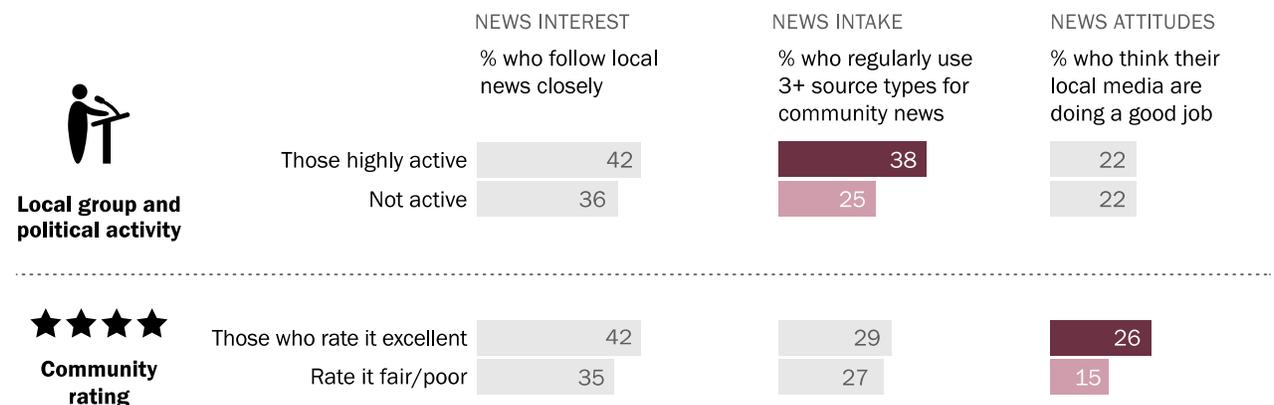
A new study by Pew Research Center in association with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation reveals that, overall, the civically engaged are indeed more likely than the less engaged to use and value local news. But two particular aspects of civic engagement stand out as most closely associated with local news habits: a strong connection to one's community and always voting in local elections. Americans with one of these two attributes, the study finds, consistently display stronger local news habits across a range of measures: news interest, news intake (the number and types of sources they turn to) and news attitudes – their views of local news organizations.

This report focuses on five ways the public can connect to civic life and compares the local news habits of Americans who engage in each with those who do not. While these civic factors and news habits are related to each other, the data do not indicate the extent to which there is a causal relationship. In other words, the study does not point to whether civic engagement triggers local news interest, intake or more positive attitudes about local news media, or whether it is, in fact, the reverse.

## Local community attachment and regular voting connect strongly to local news habits



## Local group and political activity, as well as community rating, show less connection



Note: Gray bars indicate no statistically significant differences between the two groups.

“Those who always vote” includes only people who are registered to vote and say they always vote in local elections. “Don’t always vote” includes people who vote less than always in local elections, say they never vote or are not registered to vote.

“Unattached” consists of those who say they are “not very” attached or “not at all” attached to their local communities.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016.

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**The roughly one-in-five U.S. adults (19%) who feel highly attached to their communities demonstrate much stronger ties to local news than those who do not feel attached** – revealing a link between personal connection to these areas and a desire to stay more informed about current issues and events. Nearly six-in-ten (59%) of the highly attached follow local news very closely – about twice the share of the unattached (27%). Fully 44% regularly get community news from three or more different source types, compared with 17% of the

unattached. And about a third (35%) think their local media do a good job of keeping them informed – more than double the share of the unattached (13%).

Similar to the highly attached, **those who say they always vote in local elections (27% of U.S. adults) display strikingly stronger local news habits than those who do not regularly vote in local elections**, perhaps a reflection of the unique service local journalism provides in its coverage of local elections and politics. They are more likely to follow local news closely (52% of regular local voters, compared to 31% of those who do not always vote), get local news from three or more source types (38% compared with 25%), follow multiple locally relevant topics (45% compared with 23%), and to approve of the job local news organizations do (27% compared with 18%).

Unlike local voting, however, regularly voting in national elections alone does not relate to stronger local news habits. Those who vote regularly in national elections – but not local elections – match those who do not vote regularly in *either* local or national elections in their more limited enthusiasm for local news.

While there is some overlap between those who are highly attached to their communities and regular local voters, these are largely separate groups: Only about a third (32%) of regular voters also consider themselves highly attached to their communities. And just under half (45%) of the highly attached are regular voters. Together, then, the two groups amount to 37% of U.S. adults – and these individuals discuss news more frequently than others, perhaps giving them greater influence on the public conversation about community affairs.

Another trait closely associated with broad community attachment is how well one knows their neighbors (23% of U.S. adults), which indeed reveals a similarly consistent connection to all three areas of local news habits. Fully half (52%) of those who know all their neighbors, for example, follow local news very closely, compared with 32% who don't know any of their neighbors. And 71% say the local media are in touch with their communities versus about half (49%) of those who don't know their neighbors.

**U.S. adults who connect to civic life in other ways manifest stronger local news habits in some areas but not consistently across the board.** The roughly one-quarter of Americans (27%) who actively participate in local groups and political activities, for example, demonstrate stronger news behaviors, but not more positive attitudes; just 22% approve of the job their local media are doing.

Americans who rate their local communities as excellent (29% of U.S. adults), on the other hand, have more positive views of their local news media than those who rate their communities less highly – about three-quarters of these high raters (77%) feel the local media are in touch with their local communities – but they express few stronger news habits.

**The one civic factor studied here which seems to have the weakest connection to local news habits is the political diversity of one’s community:**

The seven-in-ten Americans who say they live in areas with differing political views display very similar local news habits as those who believe most people in their communities share the same political views. While there are a few areas in which small differences emerge, roughly equal shares very closely follow multiple locally relevant news topics and neighborhood news, consume local news via most source types, and approve of the job their local media are doing. What’s more, this finding holds up when examined in terms of one measure of *observed* political diversity. Those who live in congressional districts where the 2012 presidential election was closely contested show similar local news habits to those living in districts that were not contested.

Those who are younger are generally less likely to be highly civically engaged than their elders, and [as we have found in the past about news use in general](#), local news habits are less strong among younger adults. Nevertheless, the relationships we see between local news habits and these various aspects of civic engagement all hold up when controlling for age, as well as income and education.

These findings come from a study that asked U.S. adults a wide range of questions about their news habits and attitudes. The survey was conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016, among 4,654 U.S. adults ages 18 and older who are members of Pew Research Center’s nationally representative American Trends Panel.

**How we measured civic engagement and local news habits**

We examined five different aspects of civic engagement.

**Attachment to local community:** Those who say they feel “highly attached” to their local communities are compared to those who say they feel somewhat or not attached. These groups are referred to throughout the report as “the highly attached,” “the somewhat attached” and “the unattached”

**Voting in local elections:** Those registered voters who always vote in local elections are compared to those who vote less often, not at all or are not registered to vote.

**Local group and political activity:** The civically active – those who participate in three or more of 13 different civic groups and political activities asked about in the survey – are compared to those who are somewhat active (participating in one or two activities) or those who are not active (participating in none). These groups are referred to throughout the report as “the highly active,” “the somewhat active” and “the inactive”

**Rating of local community:** Those who rate their local communities as excellent places to live are compared to those who rate their communities as good or fair/poor. These groups are referred to throughout the report as “high raters,” “moderate raters” and “poor raters.”

**Political diversity:** Those who see most people in their communities as having different political views are compared to those who see most as having similar political views.

For each of these aspects, the local news habits of the highly engaged – the highly attached, regular local voters, etc. – are compared with the habits of those who are less engaged, focusing on those with strong habits in three broad areas:

Those with high **local news interest** closely follow news about their local communities, neighborhoods and/or multiple locally relevant news topics such as crime, business or government.

Those with high **local news intake** get community news multiple times a week or more from a variety of source types, such as local TV, local newspapers, word of mouth and local radio.

Those with very positive **local news attitudes** see local news organizations in a good light: they think the local news media are in touch with their communities, do a good job keeping them informed and produce trustworthy information.

## 1. Regular local voting, community attachment strongly linked to news habits

Overall, those most engaged in civic life tend to also be the most tapped into local news, but an examination of five aspects of civic life and their relationships to three areas of local news habits finds that attachment to one's community and regular voting in local elections connect most strongly to local news habits. (Knowing all of one's neighbors, another measure of how rooted one is in their community, often does not have quite as strong a relationship with local news habits as does community attachment.)

### News habits of the highly attached

Only a minority of U.S. adults – about one-in-five (19%) – feel highly attached to their communities, while 47% feel somewhat attached and 33% feel little or no sense of attachment. But these highly attached individuals represent a core slice of those who give a lot of attention to local news.

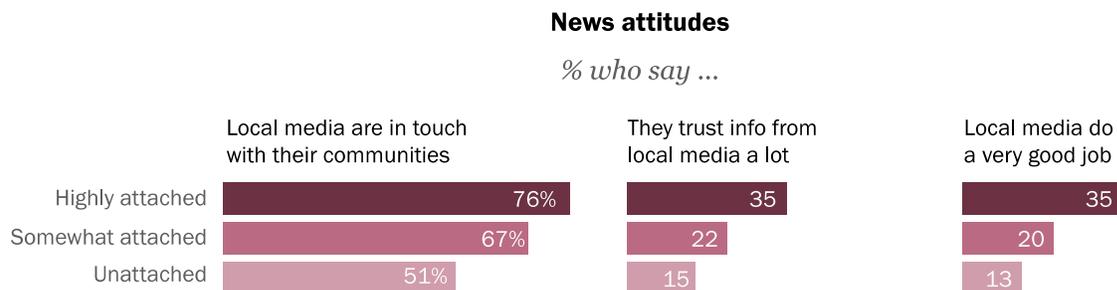
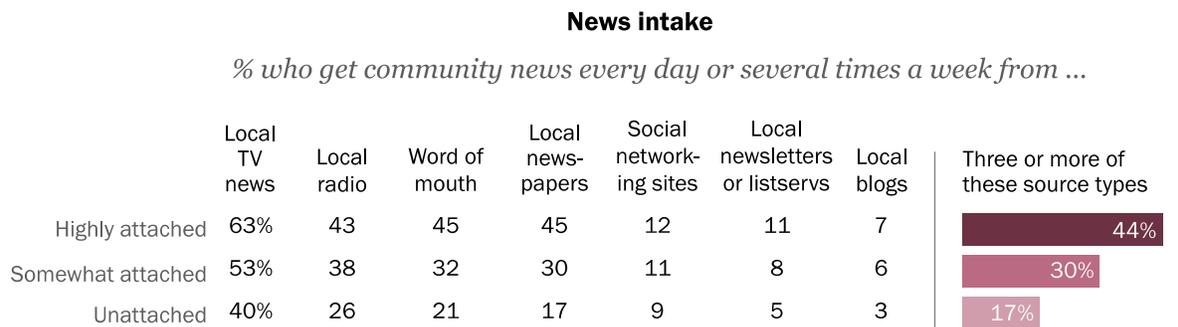
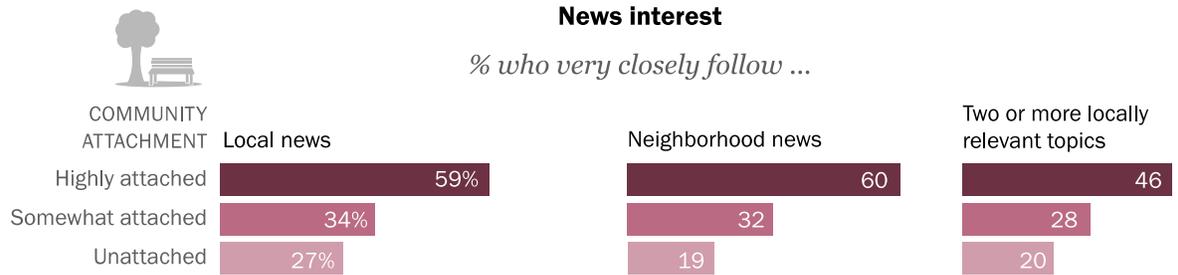
At the broadest level, their overall interest in news stands out. Roughly six-in-ten (59%) of the highly attached follow local news very closely, roughly twice that of the unattached (27%) and more than the somewhat attached (34%).<sup>1</sup> A similar gap emerges in the level of interest in neighborhood news.

The highly attached are much more likely than the less attached to very closely follow four of the five locally relevant topics asked about: people and events in their local communities, crime, business and finance, and government and politics. In one striking example, 41% of the highly attached follow news about people and events in their communities very closely, while just 15% of the somewhat attached and 6% of the unattached do so. The one exception is sports, where roughly equal shares of each group follow the topic very closely. Altogether, nearly half of the highly attached (46%) follow at least two of these locally relevant news topics very closely, compared with 28% of the somewhat attached and 20% of the unattached.

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<sup>1</sup> The unattached consist of those who say they are “not very” attached (25%) or “not at all” attached (8%) to their local communities.

## Attachment to one's community is consistently related to local news habits



Note: "Unattached" consists of those who say they are "not very" attached or "not at all" attached to their local communities.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016.

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These highly attached community members also tend to get local news across a wider array of news platforms. Fully 44% of the highly attached regularly use at least three of the seven types of sources asked about, from local newspapers to local radio to local blogs, outpacing the 30% of the somewhat attached and 17% of the unattached who do so. This greater tendency for news consumption often reflects a heavier reliance on individual sources: They are nearly three times as likely as the unattached (45% compared with 17%) to get community news from their local newspapers at least several times a week. And about six-in-ten (63%) regularly get news from local TV, more than the 53% of the somewhat attached and 40% of the unattached. One exception here

is social networking sites, where equally low shares of the highly attached, somewhat attached and the unattached regularly get local news – a trend that carries through to most other aspects of civic life discussed in this report as well.

The highly attached are not just more likely to consume local news regularly, but are also more likely to have their voices heard in the news cycle. Roughly a third (34%) of the highly attached have spoken with or been interviewed by local journalists, compared with about a quarter (26%) of the somewhat attached and a fifth (20%) of the unattached.

The highly attached are also more positive in their views of the local media. About a third (35%) think the local media do a good job informing them of important local news — a view shared by 20% of the somewhat attached and just 13% of the unattached. Similarly, the highly attached are more likely than the somewhat attached and the unattached to trust the information their local media provide and to hold the view that local media are in touch with their communities.

## News habits of local voters

Another segment of the public to demonstrate a consistently stronger connection to local news is registered voters who say they always vote in local elections.

This group (consisting of 27% of U.S. adults) is much more likely to follow both local and neighborhood news than those who do not always vote in local elections.<sup>2</sup> Roughly half of these regular local voters (52%) follow local news very closely, while just three-in-ten who don't always vote in local elections do so. They are also more likely to follow at least two of the five locally relevant news topics asked about.

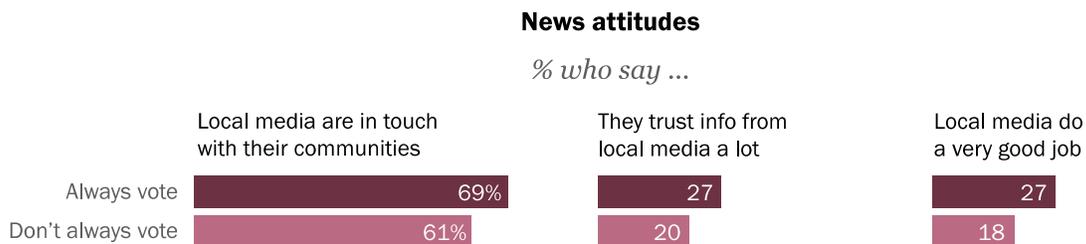
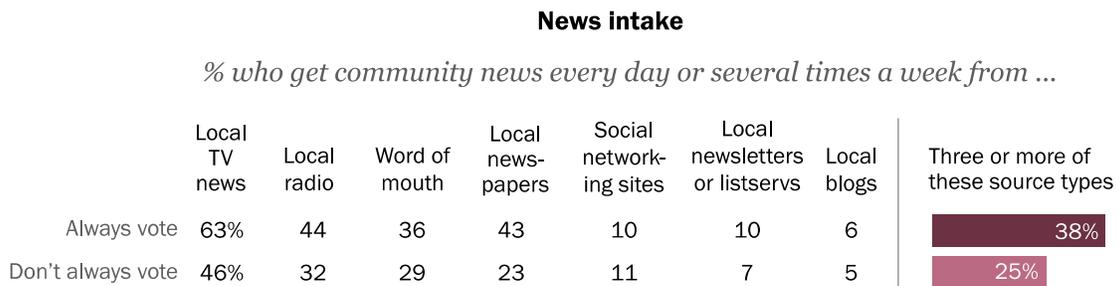
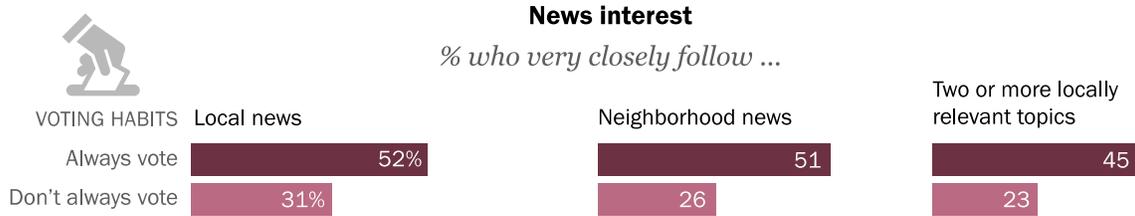
People who always vote in local elections are also more likely than those who don't to use multiple source types for local news. Nearly four-in-ten regular voters (38%) turn to at least three source types several times a week, compared with 24% who don't always vote locally. Regular voters' pathway of choice is local TV, which is used several times a week or more by 63% of this group. Getting local news through social media, local newsletters or local blogs are the three source types where there is no difference between regular local voters and those who do not always vote locally. Regular local voters are also more likely to have spoken with or been interviewed by local journalists (35% vs. 22%).

When it comes to attitudes, regular local voters are more likely than those who don't always vote locally to view the local media as trustworthy, to feel they do a good job and to think they're in touch with their local communities.

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<sup>2</sup> Regular local voters are those who are registered to vote and say they always vote in local elections. Those who don't always vote in local elections includes those who say they vote less than always, those who say they never vote and those who are not registered to vote.

## Regular local voters show stronger news habits than less consistent voters



Note: "Always vote" includes only people who are registered to vote and say they always vote in local elections. "Don't always vote" includes people who vote less than always in local elections, who say they never vote or who are not registered to vote.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016.

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The study also examined this connection between voting and local news habits based on respondents' observed voting history, using data taken from public records (the "[voter file](#)") to construct a measure of how regularly they actually show up to the polls. However, survey responses were deemed more robust for a variety of reasons (which are discussed in [Appendix A](#)). Most prominently, these records provide reliable data about voting in federal elections but not local elections. Given the local focus of this study, self-reported data was the best available option when it came to voting behavior.

Unlike local voting, regularly voting in national elections alone does not relate to stronger local news habits. In fact, Americans who always vote in national elections but *not* always in local elections are no more likely than those who don't always vote in *either* local or national elections to follow local news very closely. They are also no more likely to regularly use most source types for local news or to highly trust or approve of local media organizations. (National-only voters do show stronger *national* news habits compared with those who don't vote in either type of election regularly – though, even here, those who vote regularly in both local and national elections generally show the strongest national news habits.)

## Neighborliness and local news habits

Another sign of how connected one is to their local community is the extent to which a person knows their neighbors. About a quarter of U.S. adults (23%) report knowing all their neighbors' names. This group is distinct from the highly attached – about four-in-ten overlap (41% of those who know all their neighbors are also highly attached to their communities). But these neighborly residents also stand out from their counterparts for having stronger local news habits across all three types of measures: interest, intake and attitudes. However, this trait often shows less strong relationships with local news habits than community attachment does, though it largely shows similarly strong relationships with local news habits as does regular local voting.

“Neighborly” Americans are more tuned in to local and neighborhood news. Roughly half (52%) follow local news very closely, compared with about a third (32%) of both those who know some or none of their neighbors. People who know all their neighbors' names are also more likely to closely follow at least two locally relevant news topics (42% compared with 25% of those who know some and 23% who know none). They are also more likely to regularly use at least three source types for local news (39%, vs. 26% of those who know some and 23% who know none). Three-in-ten of those who know all their neighbors' names have spoken with or been interviewed by local journalists — a greater share than among those who know none of their neighbors (17%).

## Americans who know their neighbors embrace stronger local news habits

% who ...

Among those who ...

	Know all their neighbors	Know some	Know none
	%	%	%
<b>Interest: Very closely follow ...</b>			
Local news	<b>52</b>	32	32
Neighborhood news	<b>51</b>	29	21
Two or more locally relevant news topics	<b>42</b>	25	23
<b>Intake: Get community news at least several times a week from ...</b>			
Local TV news	<b>60</b>	49	41
Local radio	<b>43</b>	33	30
Word of mouth	<b>42</b>	27	28
Local newspapers	<b>38</b>	27	20
Social networking sites	9	11	10
Local newsletters or listservs	8	7	8
Local blogs	5	6	4
Three or more source types	<b>39</b>	26	23
<b>Attitudes: Say ...</b>			
Local media are in touch with their communities	<b>71</b>	64	49
They trust the information local media provide a lot	<b>28</b>	21	19
Local media do a very good job keeping the public informed	<b>28</b>	19	17

Note: Bolded numbers are significantly higher than both other groups in the same row.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016. “Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits”

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Finally, views of local media stand out among this group as well. Nearly three-in-ten (28%) who know all their neighbors' names trust their local media organizations a lot — the same share who think their local media are doing a very good job. Fully 71% feel the local media are in touch with their local communities.

## 2. Participation in civic life and community rating show weaker ties to local news habits

While community attachment and local voting show a consistent relationship with local news habits, other types of qualities that one might expect to be associated with these habits show more mixed relationships. How active people are in local groups and political activities, for example, corresponds primarily with their interest in and intake of local news, not their attitudes toward local media organizations. And how highly respondents rate their local communities corresponds primarily with their attitudes about the local news media.

### News habits of the civically active

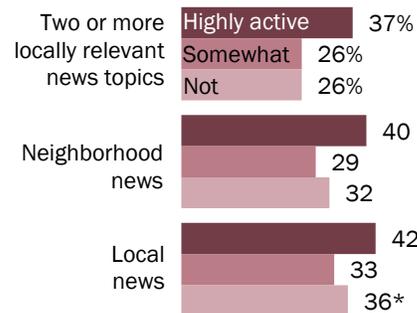
To measure participation at the local level, the study asked about activity in seven different types of civic groups, from sports leagues to church groups to charity organizations, and six political activities respondents may have done in their local areas in the past year, including attending city council meetings, starting or participating in group discussions, or contacting elected officials.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, roughly a quarter (27%) of respondents report a high level of civic activity, that is, they participate in at least three of these 13 activities. (These findings echo those from our 2015 study of [the news environments](#) in three metropolitan areas in the U.S.)

This quarter of the population who is highly active stands out from both the somewhat active (those who have engaged in one or two of the 13 activities or groups) and the inactive (those who engaged in none) for more closely following local news, but not for having more positive attitudes toward local media, suggesting a link between active civic behavior and active news behavior.

### The civically active more closely follow local news topics and neighborhood news

Of those who are \_\_\_ active in local politics and groups, % who very closely follow ...



\* Not statistically different from the highly active.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016. "Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits"

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<sup>3</sup> The civic items ask about membership in community groups or neighborhood associations, church groups, sports leagues (for themselves or their children), social groups (such as book clubs), parent groups (such as the PTA), youth groups (such as the Scouts or 4-H club), or charitable groups. The political items ask whether, in the last year, the respondents have done any of the following in their local communities: attended public hearings (such as city council), attended neighborhood meetings, attended rallies or protests, participated in discussion groups on local issues (offline or online), contacted elected officials (offline or online), or attended ethnic or cultural meetings.

Nearly four-in-ten (37%) of the highly active follow two or more locally relevant news topics very closely, compared with substantially less (26%) of both the somewhat active and the inactive. And four-in-ten closely follow neighborhood news, while about three-in-ten of the somewhat active (29%) and inactive (32%) do so.

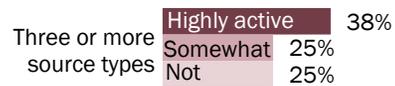
The relationship is mixed for following local news. While the highly active are more likely to do so than the somewhat active (42% vs. 33%), they are not more likely than the inactive (36%).

The highly active also report higher levels of local news intake. When it comes to specific sources, they are more likely than those who are less active to get community news on three or more source types, with nearly four-in-ten (38%) of the highly active doing so, compared with a quarter of both the somewhat active and the inactive.

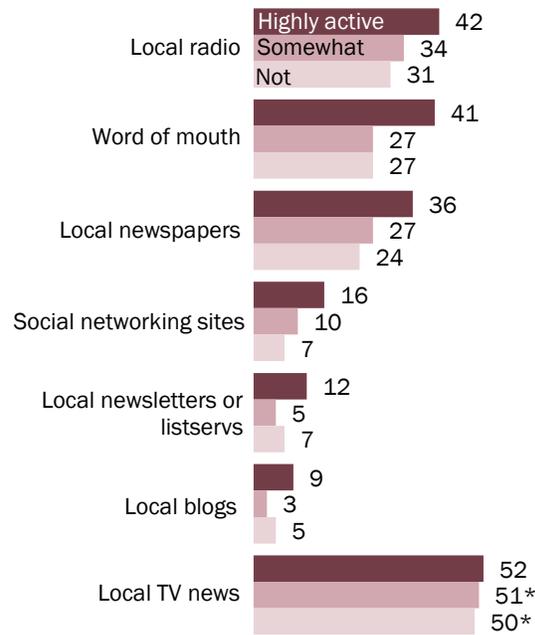
On all source types asked about except local TV, the highly active get local news more often than the less active. For example, about four-in-ten of the highly active (42%) get local news at least several times a week on local radio, compared with less of the somewhat and inactive (34% and 31%, respectively). A similar share of the highly active (41%) get local news via word of mouth, higher than the roughly quarter of the somewhat and inactive (27% each). And just over a third (36%) gets local news from local newspapers, outpacing the 27% of the somewhat active and 24% of the not active who do so. And while only a small percentage overall get local news from local digital-only source types, the highly active stand out for higher use of social networking sites for community news (16%, compared to 10% of the

**The civically active use a greater variety of local news sources ...**

*Of those who are \_\_\_ active in local politics and groups, % who get local news at least several times a week from ...*



**... and use each type more frequently**



\* Not statistically different from the highly active  
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016.  
 "Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits"

somewhat active and 7% of the inactive) as well as local blogs (9%, compared to 3% of the somewhat active and 5% of the inactive).

The highly active are also more than twice as likely to have spoken to local journalists (40%) than the inactive (16%), while roughly a quarter of the somewhat active have done so (23%).

Despite greater news intake, however, the highly active do not have more positive attitudes about their local news media. Similar proportions of the highly active and less active trust local news organizations and feel that these organizations do a very good job keeping them informed, though a greater share of the highly active feel that the local media are in touch with their local communities.

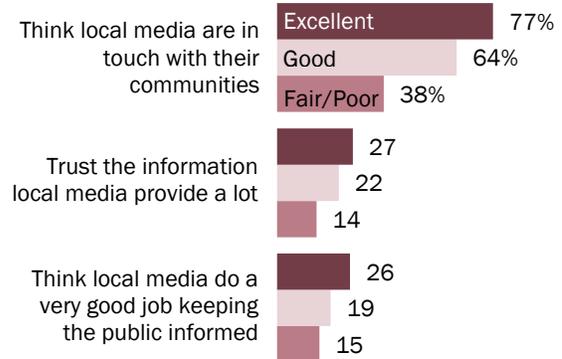
## News habits of those highly satisfied with their communities

Just as taking part in local political and civic groups is closely associated with greater interest in and intake of local news, positive civic attitudes closely connect with positive attitudes about local news.

Those who rate their communities as excellent have notably more positive attitudes about the local news media than those who rate their communities less positively. (There are [other aspects of community involvement](#), including perceptions of how engaged and how trustworthy other community members are; these indicators largely demonstrate a similar pattern to what we see with community rating.) Overall, roughly three-in-ten (29%) rate their communities as excellent.

### Those who rate their communities highly rate local media more positively

*Of those who think their community is a(n) \_\_\_ place to live, % who ...*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016. "Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits"

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Nearly eight-in-ten (77%) of these "high raters," for example, feel that local media are in touch with their communities, compared with 38% of those who rate their communities as only fair or poor (64% of those who rate their communities as "good" believe local media are in touch.)

Those with the most positive view of their communities are also more likely to trust the information provided by local news organizations (27%, compared with 22% of moderate raters and 14% of poor raters) and to believe local news organizations do a good job (26%, compared with 19% of those who rate their communities moderately and 15% of those who rate them poorly).

But there is only one platform from which high raters are more likely to get community news: radio. For the rest of the platforms asked about, high raters do not differ from others in their usage. They are also no more likely to get community news from three or more source types than those who rate their communities less positively.

Similarly, while high raters are slightly more likely than others to show interest in local and neighborhood news, it is a considerably smaller gap than for the other civic qualities studied in this report. About four-in-ten high raters follow local news very closely (42%), which is higher than among moderate raters (34%) but not poor raters (35%).

When it comes to the locally relevant news topics people follow, a similar pattern emerges. High raters (35%) are more likely than moderate (27%) or low raters (24%) to closely follow at least two items, but again, the gap between these groups is smaller than when other civic qualities are measured, such as community attachment or local voting.

### 3. Perceived political diversity shows little relationship with local news habits

One aspect of civic life that registers little connection with local news habits is perceived political diversity — that is, whether a person feels residents of their community generally share the same political views or not.

Seven-in-ten U.S. adults report living in communities with a mix of political views, while about three-in-ten (27%) say the political views are similar where they live. While [past research](#) has shown sharply polarized media diets at the national level, these new data suggest that at the local level, general news tendencies are quite similar.

Those who see their communities as politically diverse are slightly more likely to very closely follow local news (39%) than those in politically similar communities (32%) – but this is a far smaller gap than for other civic measures. (For instance, 52% of regular local voters follow local news very closely, compared with 31% of those who do not vote regularly.) And both those in politically diverse and politically similar communities follow neighborhood news at similar rates – roughly one-in-three do so (34% and 31% respectively). They are also similarly likely to follow two or more locally relevant news topics (30% and 27% respectively).

Similarly, there are few differences between those who say they live in politically diverse and politically similar communities when it comes to getting community news from various source types. There is a small difference for local TV, with 52% of those who say they live in politically diverse communities using that source multiple times a week or more, compared with 47% of

#### Living in politically diverse or similar communities has little impact on local news habits

Of those who say they live in \_\_\_\_ communities, % who ...

	Politically diverse	Politically similar
<b>Interest: Very closely follow ...</b>	%	%
Local news	<b>39</b>	32
Neighborhood news	34	31
Two or more locally relevant news topics	30	27
<b>Intake: Get community news at least several times a week from ...</b>		
Local TV news	<b>52</b>	47
Local radio	36	34
Word of mouth	32	30
Local newspapers	30	26
Social networking sites	10	13
Local newsletters or listservs	7	9
Local blogs	5	6
Three or more source types	<b>30</b>	24
<b>Attitudes: Say ...</b>		
Local media are in touch with their communities	65	62
They trust the information local media provide a lot	23	21
Local media do a very good job keeping the public informed	22	18

Note: Bolded numbers are significantly higher than the other group in the same row.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016. "Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits"

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those in politically similar communities. And three-in-ten in diverse communities get news from three or more source types (vs. 24% of those in communities with similar political values) – but again, these gaps are considerably smaller than what we see for community attachment or local voting. The two groups do not differ in their use of local radio, local newspapers, word of mouth, social networking sites, local newsletters and local blogs.

When it comes to attitudes, the two groups line up even more closely. Those who say their communities are politically diverse and politically similar are about equally likely to trust their local media organizations and approve of the job the local media are doing – roughly one-in-five for each.

These similarities are also evident using an external measure of political diversity: whether similar proportions of voters in one’s area cast their ballots for Barack Obama and Mitt Romney in the 2012 election.<sup>4</sup> There are almost no differences between those who live in congressional districts where the 2012 presidential election was closely contested and those who do not.

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<sup>4</sup> This analysis is based only on the 3,712 respondents whose congressional district has been determined. A “closely contested” district is one where Obama received between 45% and 55% of the vote in the 2012 presidential election, calculated using [Daily Kos’ district-level data](#). One-in-five respondents live in such closely contested districts.

## Acknowledgments

This report was made possible by The Pew Charitable Trusts, which received support for the project from the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#).

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

Amy Mitchell, *Director, Journalism Research*

Michael Barthel, *Research Associate*

Jesse Holcomb, *Associate Director, Research*

Jessica Mahone, *Temporary Research Associate*

Allison Becker, *Research Assistant*

Jeffrey Gottfried, *Senior Researcher*

Rachel Weisel, *Communications Manager*

Margaret Porteus, *Information Graphics Designer*

Shannon Greenwood, *Associate Digital Producer*

Courtney Kennedy, *Director, Survey Research*

Ruth Igielnik, *Research Associate*

## 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 living in households. Respondents who self-identify as internet users and who provided an email address participate in the panel via monthly self-administered web surveys, and those who do not use the internet or decline to provide an email address participate via the mail. The panel is being managed by Abt SRBI.

Data in this report are drawn from the January wave of the panel, conducted from Jan. 12 to Feb. 8, 2016, among 4,654 respondents (4,339 by web and 315 by mail). The January wave of the panel was conducted by Pew Research Center in association with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Panelists who have access to the internet but take surveys by mail were not sampled in this wave (i.e. mail respondents to this wave are all non-internet users). The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 4,654 respondents is plus or minus 2.4 percentage points.

Members of the American Trends Panel were recruited from two large, national landline and cellphone random-digit-dial (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>5</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>6</sup>

Participating panelists provided either a mailing address or an email address to which a welcome packet, a monetary incentive and future survey invitations could be sent. Panelists also receive a small monetary incentive after participating in each wave of the survey.

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

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<sup>5</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>6</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 Feb. 6, 2014. Internet users from the 2015 Survey on Government who refused to provide an email address were not permitted to join the panel.

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 matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014 American Community Survey. Population density is weighted to match the 2010 U.S. Decennial Census. Telephone service is weighted to estimates of telephone coverage for 2016 that were projected from the January-June 2015 National Health Interview Survey. Volunteerism is weighted to match the 2013 Current Population Survey Volunteer Supplement. It also adjusts for party affiliation using an average of the three most recent Pew Research Center general public telephone surveys. Internet access is adjusted using a measure from the 2015 Survey on Government. Frequency of internet use is weighted to an estimate of daily internet use projected to 2016 from the 2013 Current Population Survey Computer and Internet Use Supplement. The share of respondents who get news from 10 different social networks was weighted to match a Pew Research Center survey from March-April 2016. 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 American Trends Panel 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	4,654	2.4%
Highly attached	1,220	4.6%
Somewhat attached	2,224	3.4%
Unattached	1,168	4.7%
Regular voters	1,735	3.9%
Irregular/non-voters	2,901	3.0%
Highly active	2,191	3.5%
Somewhat active	1,630	4.0%
Inactive	833	5.6%
Rate excellent	1,669	4.0%
Rate good	2,454	3.3%
Rate fair/poor	516	7.1%
Perceive community as politically diverse	3,175	2.9%
Perceive community as politically similar	1,379	4.4%

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 web component of the January wave had a response rate of 69% (4,339 responses among 6,301 web-based individuals in the panel); the mail component had a response rate of 67% (315 responses among 474 non-web 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 January ATP wave is 2.9%.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</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.

## Appendix A: Measuring local voting habits

The study suggests that being a dedicated voter in local elections is strongly connected to local news habits. To measure proclivity to vote, the survey used self-reports about frequency of voting in three types of elections: national elections, presidential primary elections and “local elections, such as for mayor or school board.” Overall, 27% of registered voters say they always vote in local elections.

Before settling on self-reported local voting behavior as the best method of measuring behavior, researchers also explored the possibility of measuring local voting behavior through the “voter file.” The voter file, gathered from publicly available individual voter lists from each state and standardized by a vendor, contains information on nearly every voters’ turnout history along with a variety of demographic information. The voter file does not indicate the candidates for whom a person voted, only whether he or she has a record of having voted in that election. Pew Research Center has suggested that incorporating voter file data in pre-election surveys [may improve estimates of which respondents are most likely to vote](#).

However, the voter file poses several challenges for studying local voting. One of the biggest challenges is that local elections vary by jurisdiction: Elections for local, statewide and federal offices occur on the same date in some jurisdictions, while in other places they occur separately. Since the voter file records whether or not a person cast a ballot in a given election administration (rather than for a particular office or measure), in cases when multiple offices or measures are on the ballot, it is not possible to separate voting in elections for local offices from voting for statewide and federal offices using the voter file. Moreover, the voting records for some municipal elections are not reported to the state and thus will not be included in the state voter files from which the national file is compiled by the vendors. For these reasons, it was determined that the self-reported measure of local voting is a better-suited measure.

Finally, a common concern about self-reported measures of socially desirable behaviors like voting is that they may result in over-reporting. To minimize this, this study used a novel approach that asked respondents questions about voting in three types of elections, beginning with national and working down to local elections. Respondents thus had two opportunities to indicate that they were voters before being asked about local voting. In addition, the question text included information about the average rate of turnout for elections in each of the three types of elections – information designed to indicate to respondents that not voting in local elections is a common phenomenon. The full set of questions is available in the [topline](#).

## Appendix B: Detailed tables of demographic characteristics

### Demographic characteristics of community attachment, local voting and knowledge of neighbors

	Community Attachment			Local Voting		Neighbors		
	Very	Somewhat	Not very/ at all	Always	Less often	Know all	Know some	Know none
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	17	45	37	28	71	21	63	15
Female	22	48	29	26	74	24	63	13
18-29	11	40	49	9	91	11	59	29
30-49	17	46	36	20	80	19	65	16
50-64	19	50	29	34	65	26	66	8
65+	32	49	18	46	53	35	60	4
High school or less	19	45	34	21	78	23	62	15
Some college	16	46	37	29	71	21	63	15
College degree	23	48	28	31	69	25	64	11
Less than \$30,000	17	44	38	19	80	19	60	20
\$30,000 to \$74,999	20	47	33	28	72	23	65	12
\$75,000+	21	49	28	34	65	27	65	9
White, non-Hispanic	21	46	31	30	69	27	64	9
Nonwhite	16	47	36	20	80	15	61	24
Republican	22	48	30	36	64	30	61	9
Democrat	23	45	31	29	71	21	65	14
Independent	17	47	35	24	75	21	64	15
Urban	17	46	35	28	72	17	65	18
Suburban	19	46	33	25	74	23	64	12
Rural	24	47	28	29	71	35	55	9

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016.  
 "Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits"

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## Demographic characteristics of civic participation, community rating and perceived community political diversity

	Civic Participation			Community Rating			Political Diversity	
	Highly active	Somewhat active	Not active	Excellent	Good	Fair/poor	Different views	Same views
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	25	38	37	27	57	15	69	28
Female	29	41	30	30	54	15	70	26
18-29	21	39	40	20	59	20	66	31
30-49	28	40	32	28	56	16	69	28
50-64	27	39	34	29	57	14	72	25
65+	33	40	27	38	51	10	71	24
High school or less	16	38	46	20	60	19	73	23
Some college	26	42	32	28	54	17	71	26
College degree	42	39	19	38	52	9	66	33
Less than \$30,000	19	38	42	19	60	21	69	25
\$30,000 to \$74,999	26	43	31	29	54	17	72	26
\$75,000+	38	38	24	40	53	7	69	30
White, non-Hispanic	28	41	31	32	56	11	71	26
Nonwhite	26	37	38	21	55	24	67	29
Republican	31	44	25	33	56	11	72	25
Democrat	28	41	31	27	55	18	68	29
Independent	30	37	34	30	56	14	71	27
Urban	27	38	35	25	56	19	72	25
Suburban	29	41	30	32	55	12	70	26
Rural	23	38	39	25	58	17	64	33

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016.  
 "Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits"

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## Overlap between different aspects of civic life

Of those who (are) ...	% who (are) ...				
	Highly attached	Know all neighbors	Regular local voters	Highly active	Highly rate community
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Highly attached</b>	-	48	45	42	59
<b>Know all their neighbors</b>	41	-	42	34	40
<b>Regular local voters</b>	32	36	-	40	36
<b>Active in local groups &amp; politics</b>	30	29	40	-	36
<b>Highly rate community</b>	40	32	34	35	-

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016.  
 "Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits"

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## Topline Questionnaire

### 2016 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL

WAVE 14 January

FINAL TOPLINE

January 12<sup>th</sup>-February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016

TOTAL N=4,654

WEB RESPONDENTS N=4,339

MAIL RESPONDENTS N=315<sup>8</sup>

**ASK ALL:**

LOCALRATING Overall, how would you rate your community as a place to live?

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N=4,654

29	Excellent
56	Good
13	Only Fair
3	Poor
*	No answer

**ASK ALL:**

LOCALIMPACT How much impact do you think people like you can have in making your community a better place to live?

Jan 12-Feb

8

2016

N=4,654

27	A big impact
44	A moderate impact
23	A small impact
5	No impact at all
1	No answer

Nov 17-Dec

15

2014

N=3,212

32	
37	
23	
7	
1	

**ASK ALL:**

LIVE3 How close do you currently live to where you grew up?

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N=4,654

24	Less than 10 miles
15	10-25 miles
8	26-50 miles
7	51-100 miles
45	More than 100 miles
1	No answer

<sup>8</sup> Question wording in this topline is that from the web version of the survey. Question wording and format was adapted for the paper questionnaire delivered by mail; this questionnaire is available on request. All questions asked in both modes unless noted.

**ASK ALL:**

WORKCLOSE How close do you currently live to your workplace?

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N=4,654

20	Less than 5 miles
17	5-10 miles
15	11-20 miles
12	21-50 miles
3	More than 50 miles
33	I don't work
1	No answer

**ASK ALL:**

NEIGHBORS Do you happen to know the names of your neighbors who live close by to you or no?

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N=4,654

23	Yes, know them all
63	Yes, know some of them
14	No, do not know any of them
*	No answer

**ASK ALL:**

COMATTACH In general, how attached do you feel to your local community?

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N=4,654

19	Very
47	Somewhat
25	Not very
8	Not at all
1	No Answer

**ASK ALL:**

SOCTRUST Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N=4,654

43	Most people can be trusted
56	Can't be too careful
1	No Answer

**ASK ALL:**

COMTRUST Now thinking specifically about your local community, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N=4,654

55	Most people can be trusted
45	Can't be too careful
1	No Answer

**ASK IF AT LEAST YES TO 1 ITEM SNS (SNSA, SNSB, SNSD-K=1):**

SNS2 Now, thinking specifically about posts and activities on social media related to politics, do you ever use social networking sites to... **[RANDOMIZE]**

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
a. Post links to political stories or articles for others to read <sup>9</sup> Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=3,956]	22	78	1
b. Post your own thoughts or comments on political or social issues Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=3,956]	32	67	1
c. Encourage other people to take action on a political or social issue that is important to you Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=3,956]	28	72	1
d. Encourage other people to vote Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=3,956]	36	63	1
e. Repost content related to political or social issues that was originally posted by someone else Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=3,956]	33	66	1
f. "Like" or promote material related to political or social issues that others have posted Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=3,956]	45	54	1
g. Change your profile picture to draw attention to an issue or event Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=3,956]	14	86	1
h. Contact a politician or public official Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=3,956]	16	84	*

<sup>9</sup> SNS2a only asked of those SNS news users that post links in SNS (SNSACTb=1-3). Those who did not post links (SNSACTb=4) are put in as "No" for SNS2a. Those that were "No Answer" for SNSACTb are put in as "No Answer" for SNS2a.

Turning to a different topic, we are going to ask you a few questions about your local community.

**ASK ALL:**

LOCAL\_PLATFORM How often, if ever, do you get information about YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY from each of the following sources, whether online or offline?

*a. Local newspaper*

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

13	Every day
15	Several times a week
18	Several times a month
30	Less often
23	Never
1	No Answer

*b. Local television news*

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

30	Every day
21	Several times a week
14	Several times a month
21	Less often
14	Never
1	No Answer

*c. Local radio*

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

17	Every day
18	Several times a week
13	Several times a month
25	Less often
26	Never
1	No Answer

*d. A blog about your local community*

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

1	Every day
4	Several times a week
5	Several times a month
20	Less often
69	Never
1	No Answer

**LOCAL\_PLATFORM CONTINUED...**

e. *A person or organization you follow on a social networking site*

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

3	Every day
8	Several times a week
11	Several times a month
19	Less often
58	Never
1	No Answer

f. *A newsletter or email listserv about your local community*

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

3	Every day
5	Several times a week
10	Several times a month
30	Less often
51	Never
1	No Answer

g. *Word of mouth from friends, family, co-workers and neighbors*

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

9	Every day
22	Several times a week
30	Several times a month
29	Less often
10	Never
1	No Answer

**ASK ALL:**

TALKJOUR Have you ever spoken with or been interviewed by a local journalist or reporter?

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

26	Yes
74	No
*	No Answer

**ASK ALL:**

LOCMED\_INTOUCH Overall, would you say that local journalists in your area are mostly in touch or out of touch with your local community?

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

63	In touch
34	Out of touch
3	No Answer

**[PROGRAMMING NOTE: RANDOMIZE SOCIALCAP1-4]****ASK ALL:**

SOCIALCAP1 My local community is a place where... **[RANDOMIZE]**

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

49	People socialize with one another
49	People mostly keep to themselves
2	No Answer

**ASK ALL:**

SOCIALCAP2 My local community is a place where... **[RANDOMIZE]**

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

59	People mostly share the same values as one another
39	People mostly don't share the same values
3	No Answer

**ASK ALL:**

SOCIALCAP3 My local community is a place where... **[RANDOMIZE]**

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

52	People frequently work together to fix or improve something
45	People do not typically come together to fix or improve something
2	No Answer

**ASK ALL:**

SOCIALCAP4 My local community is a place where... **[RANDOMIZE]**

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

27	People tend to share the same political views
70	There are a lot of different political views
3	No Answer

**ASK ALL:**

VOTE How often do you vote in each type of election?

a. *NATIONAL ELECTIONS for U.S. president. These elections have about 55% voter turnout.*

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

57	Always
14	Nearly always
8	Part of the time
7	Seldom
14	Never
1	No Answer

b. *PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTIONS, that is the elections where the parties choose their candidate for the general election. These elections have about 15% voter turnout.*

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

36	Always
19	Nearly always
12	Part of the time
10	Seldom
22	Never
1	No Answer

c. *LOCAL ELECTIONS, such as mayor or a school board. These elections have about 20% voter turnout.*

Jan 12-Feb 8

2016

N= 4,654

29	Always
22	Nearly always
17	Part of the time
12	Seldom
19	Never
1	No Answer