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Three Months In, Many Americans See Exaggeration, Conspiracy Theories and Partisanship in COVID-19 News

64% of U.S. adults say CDC mostly gets the facts about the outbreak right; 30% say the same about Trump and his administration

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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 COVID-19 pandemic.

For this analysis, we surveyed 9,654 U.S. adults between June 4-10, 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.

Three Months In, Many Americans See Exaggeration, Conspiracy Theories and Partisanship in COVID-19 News

64% of U.S. adults say CDC mostly gets the facts about the outbreak right; 30% say the same about Trump and his administration

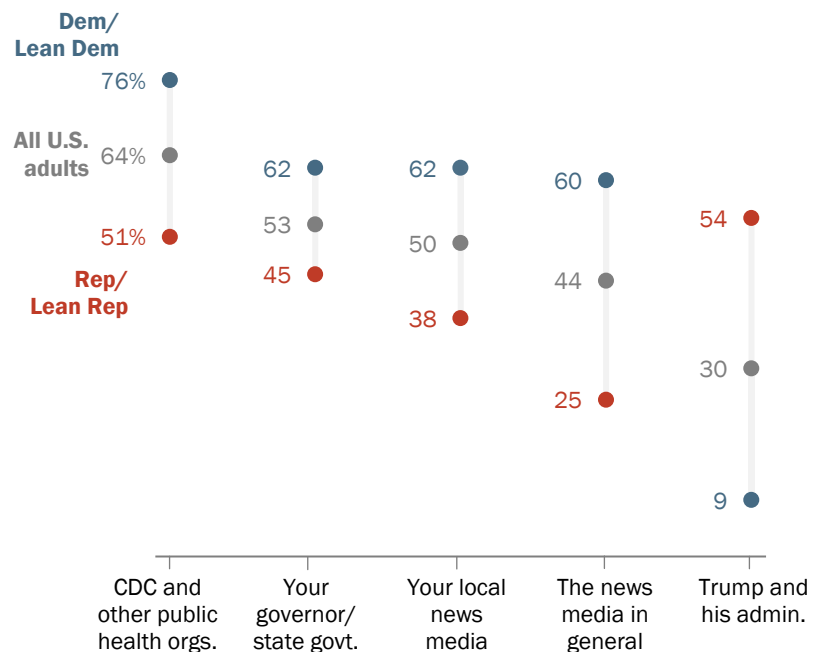
As Americans continue to process a steady flow of information about the [coronavirus outbreak](#) – from [changing infection and death rates](#) to [new testing protocols](#) and [evolving social distancing guidelines](#) – they give the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other public health organizations the highest rating when it comes to getting the facts right. And they give Donald Trump and his administration the lowest rating for “getting the facts right” among five key sources of COVID-19 information, according to a Pew Research Center survey of 9,654 U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020, as part of the [American News Pathways project](#).

Nearly two-thirds of U.S. adults (64%) say the CDC and other public health

organizations get the facts right “almost all” or “most” of the time when it comes to the coronavirus outbreak, while about half as many (30%) say the same about President Trump and his administration. Instead, a solid majority of Americans (65%) say the White House gets the facts right only “some of the time” (29%) or “hardly ever” (36%).

Americans give CDC highest marks, White House lowest on getting coronavirus facts right; wide partisan divides

% of U.S. adults who say each gets the facts right almost all or most of the time when it comes to the coronavirus outbreak



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

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Republicans and Democrats disagree sharply on how often each of these five sources for news and information gets the facts about the coronavirus outbreak right. Majorities of Democrats and independents who lean toward the Democratic Party say the CDC and other health groups (76%), governors and state governments (62%), local news media (62%) and the national news media (60%) usually get the facts right. Just 9% of Democrats say this about Trump and his administration. It's a different story among Republicans and Republican leaners: About half of Republicans (54%) say Trump and the White House get the facts right at least most of the time – about on par with how many say the same about the CDC (51%). Republicans are less likely to say the same of governors and state governments (45%), the local news media (38%) and the news media in general (25%).

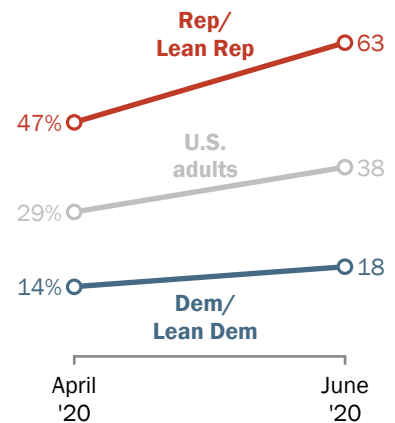
Increasing shares of Americans, led by Republicans, believe the outbreak has been overblown; level of attention to COVID-19 news has dropped

From late April, when the pandemic [dominated the national news conversation](#), to early June, when demonstrations to protest the death of George Floyd began [getting widespread attention](#), the share of Americans who say the coronavirus outbreak has been exaggerated – i.e., “has been made a bigger deal than it really is” – increased from about three-in-ten (29%) to nearly four-in-ten (38%).

The increase is particularly stark among Republicans: Just under half (47%) said this in late April, compared with nearly two-thirds (63%) in early June. The share of Democrats who say the outbreak has been overhyped increased just slightly, from 14% to 18%.

Growing share of Americans, particularly Republicans, say outbreak has been exaggerated

*% who say the coronavirus outbreak has been made a **bigger deal than it really is***



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

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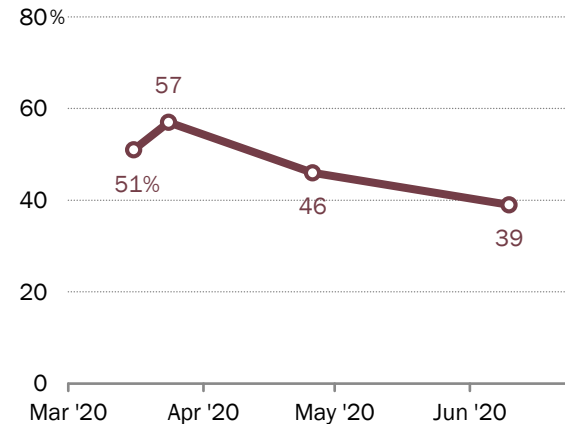
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In addition, as the outbreak grinds on, the share of Americans who say they are following the news about the coronavirus outbreak *very closely* continues to decline. Nearly six-in-ten (57%) were very closely following COVID-19 news in late March, but that figure has declined steadily since. As of early June, about four-in-ten (39%) say they are following this news story very closely – roughly the same percentage who said in that time period that they were [very closely following news of the protests following the killing of George Floyd](#), a Black man who was killed by a white police officer during an arrest.

Still, the overwhelming majority of Americans (86%) continue to follow news about the outbreak at least “fairly” closely, a figure that has remained largely stable since mid-March (when 89% said the same).

After three months, fewer Americans ‘very closely’ following COVID-19 news

% of U.S. adults who are following news about the coronavirus outbreak *very closely*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020. For specific dates of past surveys, see the topline. “Three Months In, Many Americans See Exaggeration, Conspiracy Theories and Partisanship in COVID-19 News”

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Compared with the first weeks of the outbreak, many Americans are seeing more partisan viewpoints and struggling to know what is true about COVID-19

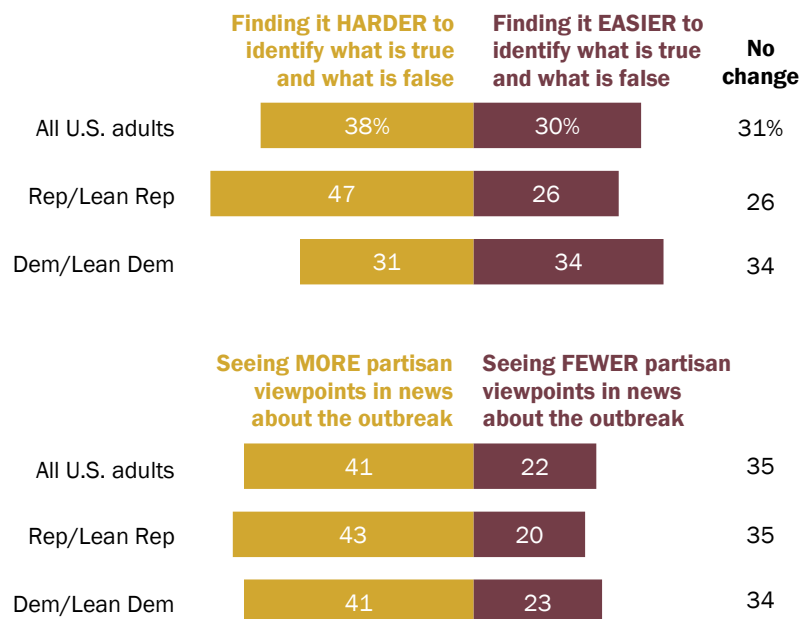
As the U.S. hits about three months since the first cities and states [ordered residents to stay at home](#) to help slow the spread of the coronavirus, many Americans are finding it more difficult to separate fact from fiction about the outbreak. A plurality (38%) say that, compared with the first couple of weeks of the outbreak, they now find it harder to identify what is true and what is false, while three-in-ten say they are finding this easier to do. Another 31% say the difficulty of parsing truth from fiction has not changed.

A greater share of Republicans (47%) than Democrats (31%) say it is now harder to tell what is true. Substantial – and roughly equal – shares of both parties, however, say they are now seeing more partisan viewpoints in news about the

outbreak than they were in the initial weeks (43% of Republicans and 41% of Democrats). Overall, about four-in-ten U.S. adults (41%) say news about the outbreak is now more partisan than at the start, while fewer say partisanship in coronavirus news has declined (22%).

Republicans more likely than Democrats to say discerning truth in COVID-19 news is becoming harder

% of U.S. adults who say, compared to the first couple of weeks of the coronavirus outbreak, they are ...



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

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Roughly one-third of Americans who have heard about it see truth in the conspiracy theory that the COVID-19 outbreak was intentionally planned by people in power

Amid the constantly evolving and sometimes partisan news environment around COVID-19, [one conspiracy theory](#) has broken through to a substantial portion of Americans: 71% of Americans say they have heard at least “a little” about a conspiracy theory that the coronavirus outbreak was intentionally planned by powerful people, including 19% who say they have heard “a lot” about this. Roughly three-in-ten (28%) say they have not heard about this unsubstantiated claim.

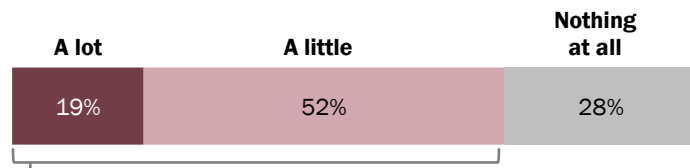
A sizable portion of Americans who have heard this conspiracy theory say it is likely true. Of those who have heard at least something about it, 36% say it is “definitely” or “probably” true – equivalent to a quarter of all U.S. adults. Most of these people, however, do not go so far as to say it is definitely true (8% of those who have heard about it, or 5% of all Americans).

About half of those who have heard about it say this conspiracy theory is “probably not” (28%) or “definitely not” true (23%), while an additional 13% say they are not sure.

Republicans and Democrats are about equally likely to have heard about the conspiracy theory that powerful people planned the pandemic, but Republicans are much more likely to see truth in it (see [Chapter 3](#)).

Most have heard at least a little about the conspiracy theory that COVID-19 outbreak was planned; in this group, 36% say the theory is probably or definitely true

% of U.S. adults who have heard ___ about the conspiracy theory that powerful people intentionally planned the coronavirus outbreak



Among those have heard of the conspiracy theory, % who say it is ...



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

“Three Months In, Many Americans See Exaggeration, Conspiracy Theories and Partisanship in COVID-19 News”

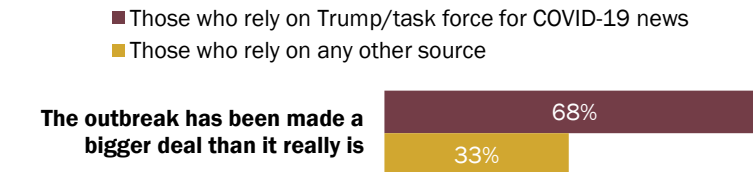
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Views of the outbreak vary based on the information streams people rely on most

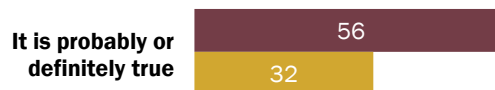
Among five sources examined here that respondents said they rely on most for COVID-19 news, the sense that the coronavirus outbreak has been exaggerated is particularly prevalent among those who say they rely most on Donald Trump and the White House task force for relevant news and information. (The five types of sources looked at here included national news outlets, public health organizations and officials, local news outlets, Donald Trump and the White House coronavirus task force, and state and local elected officials – to allow further analysis of those groups. See [here for more details](#).)

Americans who rely on Trump for COVID-19 news more likely to say COVID-19 has been exaggerated, find it difficult to determine what's true

% of U.S. adults who say ...



Among those who have heard of the conspiracy theory that the outbreak was planned, % who say ...



Note: Other sources asked about include national news outlets; public health organizations and officials; local news outlets; state and local elected officials; international news outlets; friends, family and neighbors; online forums or discussion groups; community newsletter or Listservs; and Biden and his campaign.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

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Of those who said they rely most on Trump and the White House for news about the outbreak, fully 68% say that the coronavirus has been “made a bigger deal than it really is.” No more than four-in-ten of those who rely on any of the other sources say the virus and its impact have been blown out of proportion.

Nearly all of those U.S. adults who say Trump is their primary information source are Republicans ([fully 92%](#)), yet even compared with others within their party, they stand out. Republicans who rely on the president for COVID-19 news are 11 percentage points more likely than Republicans who turn mostly to other sources to say the outbreak has been exaggerated (71% vs. 60%).

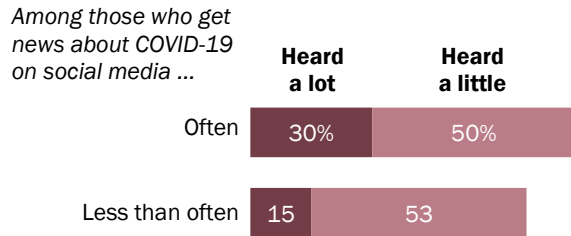
Among all U.S. adults, the group that relies most on Trump for COVID-19 news and information also stands out in its belief in the conspiracy theory that the outbreak was planned: 56% of those in this group who have heard about the theory say it is definitely or probably true. The share who think this conspiracy theory could be true is lower in all the other news consumption groups studied, including just a quarter or fewer among those who primarily rely on the CDC or national news outlets (among those who have heard about the theory; see [Chapter 3](#)).

Compared with other Americans, adults who “often” use social media to get news about COVID-19 report higher levels of exposure to the conspiracy theory that the pandemic was intentionally planned.

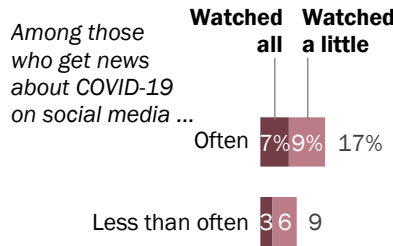
These social media users are more likely to both have heard at least a little about the conspiracy theory (80%, vs. 68% of those who use social media for COVID-19 news less often) and more likely to have watched all or part of the conspiracy [“Plandemic” video that went viral](#) in May. Nearly one-in-five of those who often rely on social media for coronavirus news (17%) say they watched at least part of it, compared with about one-in-ten among those who get COVID-19 news on social media less frequently (9%).

Americans who often get COVID-19 news from social media more likely to hear claim that outbreak was planned

% of U.S. adults who have ___ about the conspiracy theory that powerful people intentionally planned the coronavirus outbreak



% of U.S. adults who say they watched all or some of the “Plandemic” video



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020. “Three Months In, Many Americans See Exaggeration, Conspiracy Theories and Partisanship in COVID-19 News”

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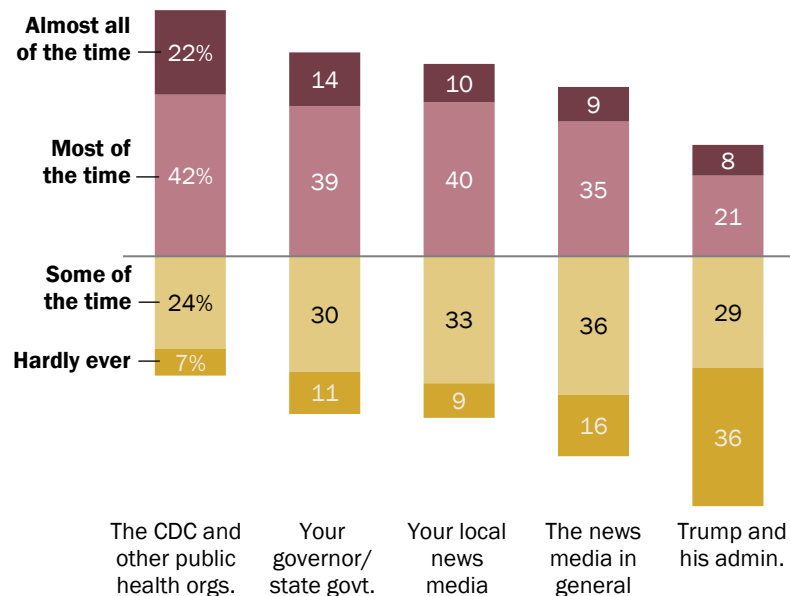
1. Americans rate CDC highly, Trump and his administration poorly on getting the facts right about COVID-19

Americans are skeptical about whether some key sources for news and information are getting the facts right about the coronavirus outbreak. Of five types of sources on the survey, only one garners a clear majority saying it gets the facts about the outbreak right at least most of the time.

Nearly two-thirds of U.S. adults (64%) say the CDC and other public health organizations get the facts right about the coronavirus outbreak “almost all” (22%) or “most” (42%) of the time. About half of Americans say the same of their governor and state government (53%) and of their local news media (50%), while 44% have such confidence in the news media in general.

Majority says CDC and public health organizations largely getting the facts right about coronavirus

% of U.S. adults who say each gets the facts right when it comes to the coronavirus outbreak ...



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

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Donald Trump and his administration get the lowest rating: Just three-in-ten Americans (30%) say the White House gets the facts right about the outbreak more often than not. Instead, about two-thirds of Americans (65%) say Trump and his administration get the facts right “some of the time” or “hardly ever.” The 36% who say the Trump administration “hardly ever” gets the facts right about the pandemic is more than double the share who say the same about any of the other sources, including the news media (16%). (These assessments generally match the public’s [overall ratings, in early May](#), of how well some of these groups were *responding* to the outbreak.)

Republicans and Democrats (each including independents who lean toward either party) disagree sharply over how frequently these sources of information get the facts right about the coronavirus outbreak, with a gap of at least 15 percentage points for each source.

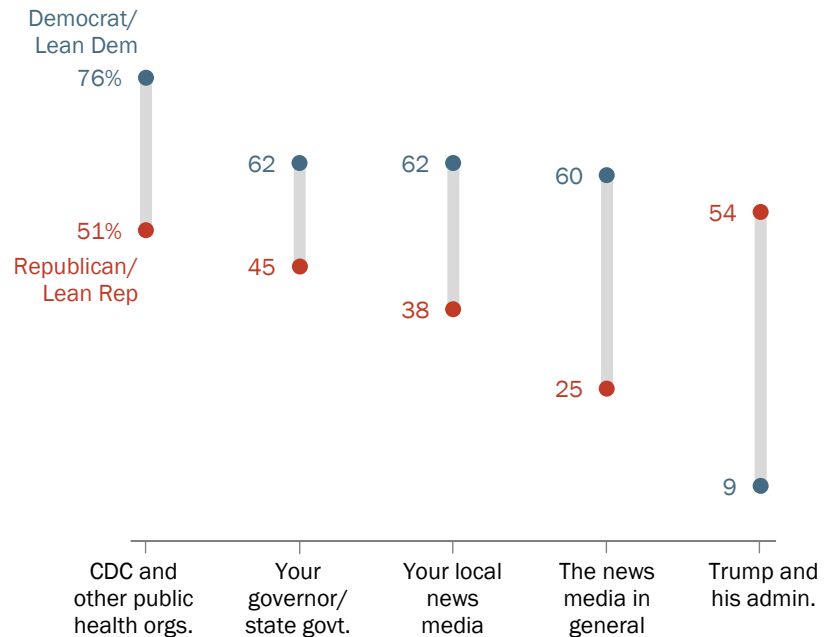
More Democrats than Republicans say the CDC (76% of Democrats vs. 51% of Republicans), their governor and state government (62% vs. 45%), their local news media (62% vs. 38%) and the news media in general (60% vs. 25%) get the facts right about coronavirus all or most of the time.

The only source that gets a higher rating among

Republicans than Democrats is Trump and his administration: 54% of Republicans say the White House gets the facts right at least most of the time, compared with only about one-in-ten Democrats (9%). The share of Republicans who trust the information they are getting from the administration is similar to the share in the GOP who say the same about the CDC and other public health organizations (51%).

Republicans and Democrats differ in which sources they trust for facts about coronavirus outbreak

% of U.S. adults who say each gets the facts right almost all or most of the time when it comes to the coronavirus outbreak



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

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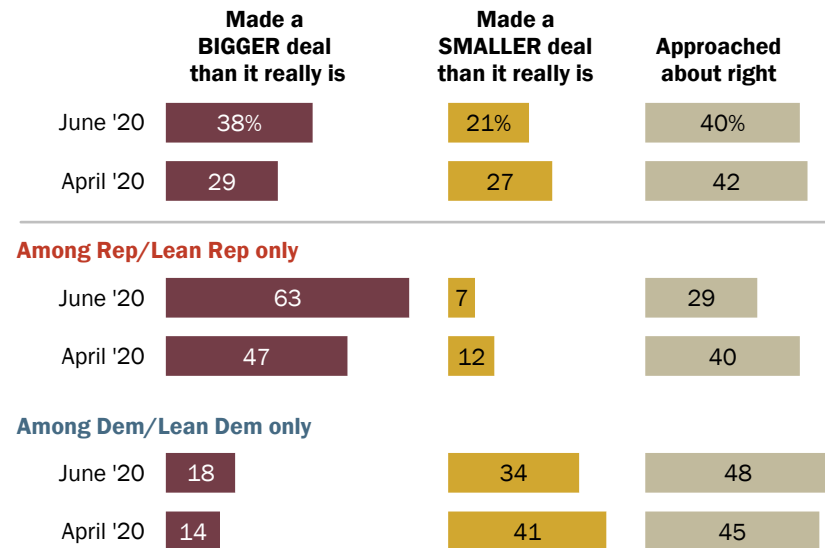
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A growing share of Americans say the outbreak has been overblown

Between late April, when the coronavirus outbreak dominated news coverage, and early June, when the news shifted some of its focus to the protests over the killing of George Floyd by a police officer during an arrest, the share of U.S. adults who say the coronavirus outbreak has been overblown – “made a *bigger* deal than it really is” – rose by 9 percentage points (from 29% to 38%). Meanwhile, the share saying the opposite – that the pandemic has been “made a *smaller* deal than it really is” – declined 6 points over the same period (from 27% to 21%). In both surveys, about four-in-ten Americans said it has been “approached about right” (42% in April and 40% in June).

Republicans increasingly likely to say outbreak has been exaggerated

% of U.S. adults who say the coronavirus outbreak has been ...



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

Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted April 20-26 and June 4-10, 2020.

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The biggest change occurred among Republicans and independents who lean Republican. The share of this group who say the outbreak has been exaggerated grew from 47% in late April to 63% in early June. Fewer Republicans, as of early June, say it has received about the right amount of attention (declining from 40% in April to 29% in June) or gotten *less* attention than it deserved (12% vs. 7%).

Views about the outbreak’s seriousness have shifted to a lesser degree among Democrats and Democratic leaners, although fewer Democrats now say the outbreak has been underplayed (41% in April vs. 34% in June), while slightly more say it has been overblown (14% in April to 18% in early June).

The sources people rely on most for news about the coronavirus outbreak are closely linked with their opinions about the severity of the outbreak.

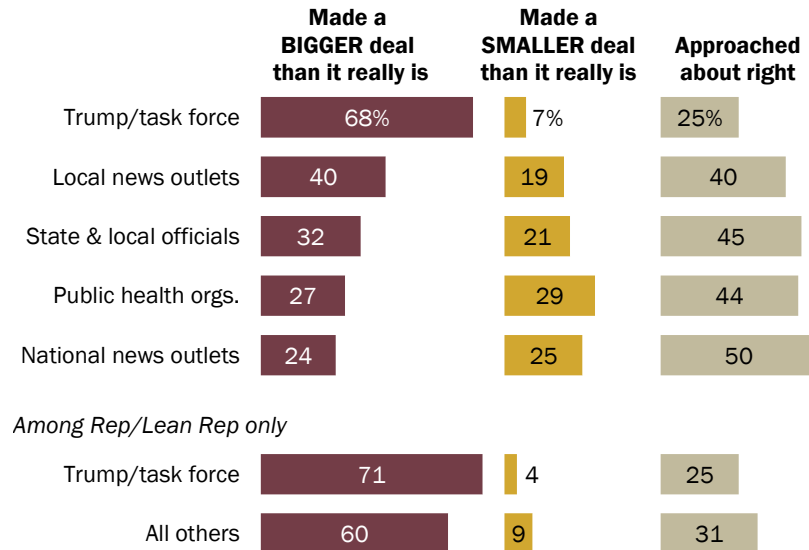
Those who mainly rely on Donald Trump and the White House task force for news about the outbreak are the most likely to say the outbreak has been exaggerated, with about two-thirds (68%) holding this view. Even among Republicans, those who rely most on Trump and his task force (32% of all Republicans, asked in April) stand out for believing the outbreak has been overhyped: 71% of Republicans who rely primarily on Trump and the task force say this, compared with 60% of Republicans who turn mostly to other sources.

Four-in-ten Americans who rely most on local news outlets for coronavirus news (40%) say too much has been made of the outbreak, followed by those most reliant on state and local officials (32%), public health organizations (27%) and national news outlets (24%). The shares who say it has received the proper amount of attention go in roughly the opposite direction, with those relying on national news (50%) the most likely to say this and those relying on Trump the least likely (25%).

Americans who turn to Trump and the White House task force also are the least likely to say the outbreak has been underplayed, with just 7% taking this view – compared with about one-in-five or more in each of the other groups. U.S. adults who look to public health organizations or the national news media for coronavirus news are just as likely to say the outbreak has received too little attention as they are to say it has gotten too much.

Americans who rely on Trump for COVID-19 news most likely to say the outbreak has been overhyped

Among U.S. adults who **rely on each source the most** for news about the coronavirus outbreak, % who say the outbreak has been ...



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

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2. Americans still follow COVID-19 news, though with less intensity; many say this news is becoming more political

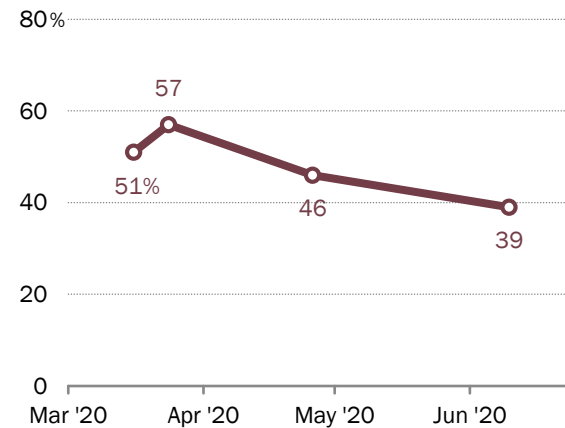
A large majority of Americans (86%) surveyed from June 4-10 say they are following news about the COVID-19 outbreak “very” or “fairly” closely. That portion is close to the share who said the same in March and April, when between 87% and 92% were following the outbreak very or fairly closely.

But the June survey, which took place as demonstrations following the killing of George Floyd were [dominating headlines](#), shows a decrease in those paying *very close* attention to the COVID-19 outbreak. The 39% of U.S. adults reporting this highest level of engagement is down from 46% in late April and 57% in late March, [when the outbreak was first forcing shutdowns around the country](#).

While Americans on both sides of the political aisle are about equally likely to be keeping up with coronavirus news at least fairly closely, Democrats and those who lean Democratic are somewhat more likely than Republicans and GOP leaners to be following it very closely (44% vs. 35%). The partisan gap on this question has widened slightly since March and April.

Fewer Americans now ‘very closely’ following COVID-19 news

% of U.S. adults who are following news about the coronavirus outbreak *very closely*



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020. For specific dates of past surveys, see the topline. “Three Months In, Many Americans See Exaggeration, Conspiracy Theories and Partisanship in COVID-19 News”

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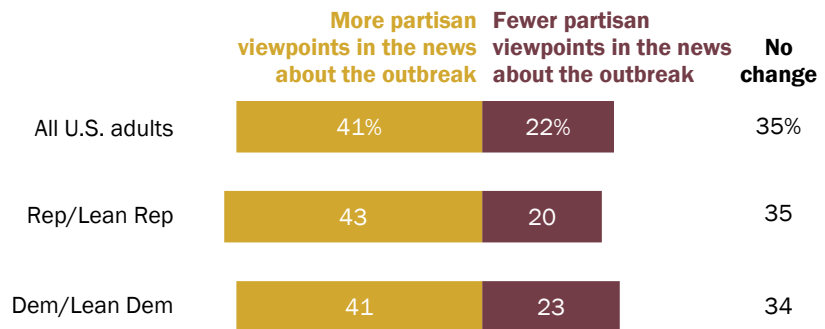
Americans say they are seeing more partisan views in coronavirus coverage, with a plurality becoming less certain about what is true

In following coronavirus news over the last several months, Americans sense that the news that they see has become more political – and, in some cases, that it has become harder to determine what is true and false.

Overall, about four-in-ten U.S. adults (41%) say they are now seeing more partisan viewpoints in the news about the outbreak compared with the first couple of weeks of the outbreak in the U.S. That is about twice the share who say they are seeing *less* partisanship in coronavirus coverage (22%). Roughly a third (35%) say they have not noticed a change in this area.

Both sides of the aisle seeing more partisan viewpoints in the news since early in the outbreak

% of U.S. adults who say, compared to the first couple of weeks of the outbreak, they are seeing ...



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

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In a rare instance of bipartisan agreement, Democrats and Republicans offer similar responses on this question, with about four-in-ten in each group saying they have seen a rise in partisan viewpoints in coronavirus news.

Americans who [rely most on local news outlets for COVID-19 news](#) are less likely than others to say they have seen a rise in partisanship (28%) and more likely to have seen no change (42%).

Along with the perceived rise in partisan views in coronavirus coverage, a plurality of Americans (38%) say that, compared with the first few weeks of the outbreak, it has become harder to identify what is true and false about the COVID-19 outbreak. That group is modestly larger than the 30% who say it has become easier over time, while a similar share (31%) say there has been no change in their ability to discern truth from falsehoods.

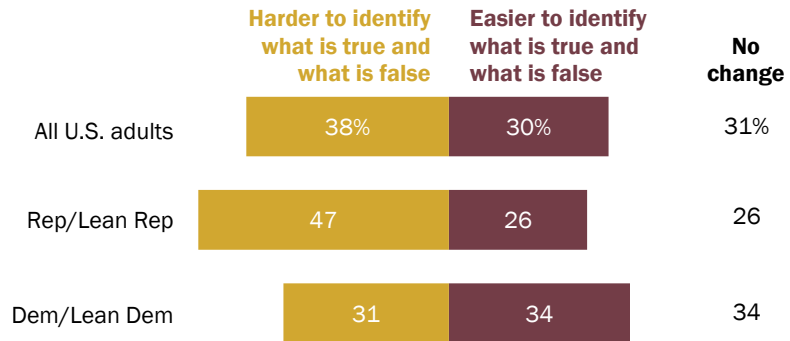
Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say it has

become harder to figure out what is true. Nearly half of all Republicans (47%) say they now find it harder to identify what is true and false about the outbreak – substantially exceeding the 26% who say it has become easier. In contrast, about a third of Democrats (31%) say that it has become harder to determine what is true about COVID-19, roughly on par with the 34% who say it has become easier.

Those who rely mainly on Trump and his task force for COVID-19 news are especially likely to say it has become harder to tell what is true and what is false, at 49%. Among those who rely most on the national media for COVID-19 news, meanwhile, fewer (30%) say it has become harder to tell fact from fiction.

About half of Republicans say they now find it harder to identify what is true about the outbreak

% of U.S. adults who say, compared to the first couple of weeks of the outbreak, they are finding it ___ about the outbreak



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

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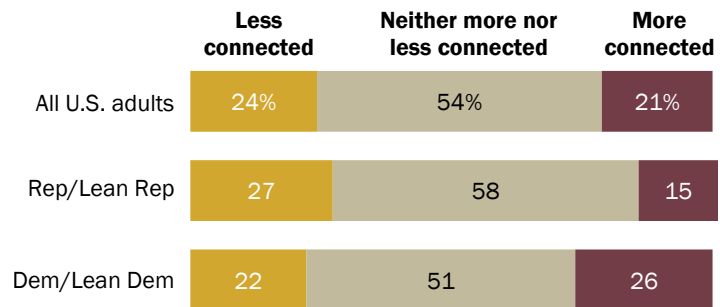
Following coronavirus news has not made Americans feel more connected to each other

The survey also asked respondents whether the news they are getting about the coronavirus makes them feel more connected or less connected to other Americans (or makes no difference either way). Just over half of those surveyed (54%) say it hasn't affected their feelings of interconnectedness, while the remainder are about equally likely to say COVID-19 coverage makes them feel more connected (21%) or less connected (24%) to others.

Democrats are somewhat more likely than Republicans to say coronavirus news is giving them a feeling of connection to other Americans (26% vs. 15%), but this is still a minority view among Democrats.

Keeping up with COVID-19 news has not left Americans feeling more connected

% of U.S. adults who say the news they get about the coronavirus makes them feel ____ to other Americans



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

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3. Most Americans have heard of the conspiracy theory that the COVID-19 outbreak was planned, and about one-third of those aware of it say it might be true

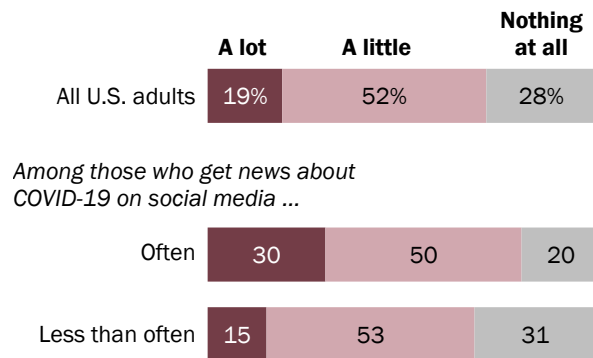
A [conspiracy theory video](#) suggesting, among other things, that the COVID-19 pandemic was planned received [national attention](#) in early May. While only one-in-ten Americans say they watched any of the video itself, far more have heard of the broader theory that powerful people intentionally planned the coronavirus outbreak.

A majority of U.S. adults (71%) say they have heard at least “a little” about the conspiracy theory that the COVID-19 outbreak was intentionally planned by powerful people, including 19% who say they have heard “a lot” about this theory. Those who frequently turn to social media for news about the outbreak are especially likely to be aware of the theory: 30% of those who often get COVID-19 news from social media say they have heard “a lot” about the theory that the outbreak was intentionally planned, compared with half as many (15%) among those who turn to social media for COVID-19 news less often.

Roughly equal shares of each party (72% of Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP and 70% of Democrats and Democratic leaners) say they have heard at least a little about the conspiracy theory.

Most Americans have heard at least a little about the conspiracy theory that the COVID-19 outbreak was planned

% who have heard ___ about the conspiracy theory that powerful people intentionally planned the coronavirus outbreak



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.
“Three Months In, Many Americans See Exaggeration, Conspiracy Theories and Partisanship in COVID-19 News”

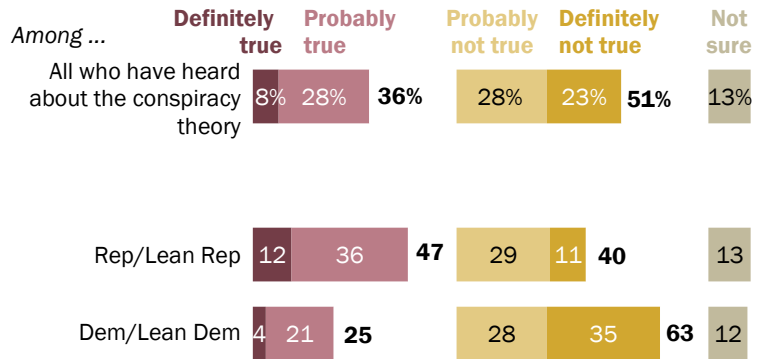
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Among those who are aware of the conspiracy theory, substantial portions give it some credence, though Americans overall are more likely to say it is probably or definitely not true.

About a third of those who have heard this claim (36%) – a quarter of all U.S. adults – say that they think it is “definitely” (8%) or “probably” (28%) true. Meanwhile, roughly half of those aware of the conspiracy theory (51%) say it is false, including 23% who say it is “definitely not true.” Another 13% of those who have heard of the claim that the pandemic was planned say that they are not sure whether it is true or not.

Among those aware of conspiracy theory that pandemic was planned, about one-third say it is probably or definitely true

Among U.S. adults *who have heard about the conspiracy theory that powerful people intentionally planned the coronavirus outbreak*, % who think that it is ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer not shown.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.
 “Three Months In, Many Americans See Exaggeration, Conspiracy Theories and Partisanship in COVID-19 News”

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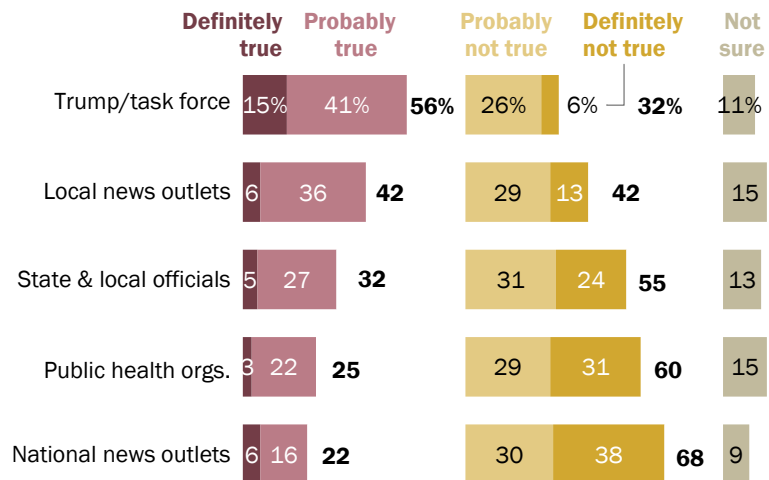
While Republicans and Democrats are about equally likely to have heard about the unsubstantiated theory, large partisan differences emerge when it comes to whether they think there is truth to it. About half (47%) of Republicans who have heard about the theory that the outbreak was intentionally planned (34% of *all* Republicans) say that it is definitely or probably true. Only about half as many Democrats who have heard of the conspiracy theory (25%) share this view. Conversely, close to two-thirds of Democrats who have heard of the claim (63%) say it is not true, including 35% who say it is definitely not true. Among Republicans aware of the claim, four-in-ten say it is probably or definitely not true, with only 11% saying it is definitely false.

Americans' assessments of this theory also differ substantially based on the [sources of information they turn to most for news about the outbreak](#).

Among Americans who have heard of the claim that powerful people planned the pandemic, a majority of those who mainly rely on Trump and the White House task force for COVID-19 news (56%) say the conspiracy theory is probably or definitely true. That outpaces those who rely most on local news outlets (42% who have heard of the theory think it is likely true), state and local officials (32%), public health organizations (25%) and national news outlets (22%). Those who rely mainly on national news outlets and are aware of the theory are most likely to say the theory is probably or definitely *not* true (68%).

Those who rely on Trump and task force for COVID-19 news more likely to give credence to the conspiracy theory that outbreak was planned by powerful people

Among U.S. adults who rely on each source the most for news about the coronavirus outbreak AND have heard about the conspiracy theory that powerful people intentionally planned the coronavirus outbreak, % who think the theory is ...



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

"Three Months In, Many Americans See Exaggeration, Conspiracy Theories and Partisanship in COVID-19 News"

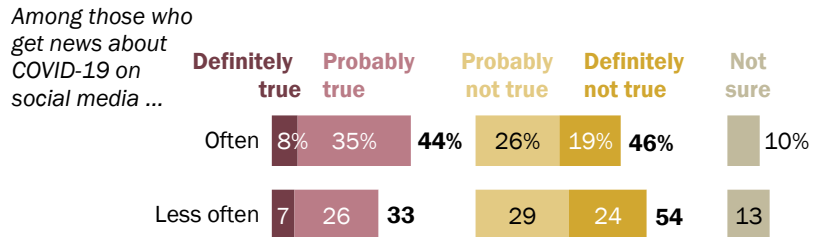
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Even among Republicans, those who rely on Trump and the task force for COVID-19 news stand out. Among Republicans who have heard about the conspiracy theory, 57% of those who look to Trump and the White House for COVID-19 news say that the theory is probably or definitely true, compared with 43% of Republicans who turn primarily to other sources.

Among U.S. adults who have heard about the theory, those who often look to social media for COVID-19 news also are more likely to say that the theory is at least probably true: 44%, versus 33% of those who get COVID-19 news on social media less frequently (or never).

Those who get COVID-19 news from social media often are more likely to give credence to conspiracy theory that pandemic was planned

Among U.S. adults *who have heard about the conspiracy theory that powerful people intentionally planned the coronavirus outbreak*, % who think that it is ...



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

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

"Three Months In, Many Americans See Exaggeration, Conspiracy Theories and Partisanship in COVID-19 News"

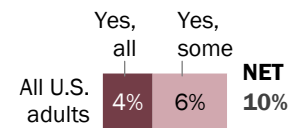
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The “[Plandemic](#)” video that went viral in early May, which specifically claimed that the COVID-19 outbreak was part of a scheme by global elites to profit off of infectious diseases, has had a far narrower reach than the more general conspiracy theory that the outbreak was planned by people in power. Just 10% of Americans say they have watched the video, including only 4% who say they have watched it in its entirety. Again, those who often turn to social media for news about the outbreak are more likely to have seen all or part of the video (17%), which is likely connected to the fact that much of the video’s viral spread occurred [on social media platforms](#).

While there is a partisan divide over the legitimacy of the theory in general, similar shares of both Republicans and Democrats say they have watched the video (11% and 10%, respectively).

One-in-ten have seen the conspiracy theory video ‘Plandemic’

% who say they watched all or some of the “Plandemic” video



Among those who get news about COVID-19 on social media ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 4-10, 2020.

“Three Months In, Many Americans See Exaggeration, Conspiracy Theories and Partisanship in COVID-19 News”

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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. 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. The panel is being managed by Ipsos.

Data in this report is drawn from the panel wave conducted June 4 to June 10, 2020. A total of 9,654 panelists responded out of 11,013 who were sampled, for a response rate of 88%. 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 4.7%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged on to the survey and completed at least one item is 1.6%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 9,654 respondents is plus or minus 1.6 percentage points.

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	2,308
Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015	Landline/ cell RDD	6,004	2,976	1,335
April 25 to June 4, 2017	Landline/ cell RDD	3,905	1,628	684
Aug. 8 to Oct. 31, 2018	ABS/web	9,396	8,778	6,407
Aug. 19 to Nov. 30, 2019	ABS/web	5,900	4,720	4,682
	Total	35,014	23,440	15,416

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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The subsample from the ATP consisted of 11,013 ATP members that responded to the Wave 57 survey and were still active.

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 which 9,942 agreed to participate.

In August 2018, the ATP switched from telephone to address-based recruitment. Invitations were sent to a random, address-based sample (ABS) of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File. 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. For a random half-sample of invitations, households without internet access were instructed to return a

postcard. These households were contacted by telephone and sent a tablet if they agreed to participate. A total of 9,396 were invited to join the panel, and 8,778 agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. The same recruitment procedure was carried out on August 19, 2019, from which a total of 5,900 were invited to join the panel and 4,720 agreed to join the panel

and completed an initial profile survey. Of the 23,440 individuals who have ever joined the ATP, 15,416 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.

Weighting

The ATP data was weighted in a multistep process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents’ original selection probability. The next step in the weighting uses an iterative technique that aligns the sample to population benchmarks on the dimensions listed in the accompanying table.

Sampling errors and test of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish.

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.

Weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Gender	2018 American Community Survey
Age	
Education	
Race/Hispanic origin	
Country of birth among Hispanics	
Years lived in the United States among Hispanics	
Home internet access	
Region x Metropolitan status	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.

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.

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¹ AAPOR Task Force on Address-based Sampling. 2016. “AAPOR Report: Address-based Sampling.” www.pewresearch.org

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	9,654	1.6 percentage points
White	6,602	1.8 percentage points
Black	737	5.3 percentage points
Hispanic	1,645	4.5 percentage points
Asian ²	278	8.2 percentage points
Republican/Lean Republican	3,944	2.4 percentage points
Democrat/Lean Democrat	5,439	2.2 percentage points
<i>Among white adults</i>		
Republican/Lean Republican	3,095	2.6 percentage points
Democrat/Lean Democrat	3,382	2.6 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

A note about the Asian American sample

This survey includes a total sample size of 278 Asian Americans. The sample includes English-speaking Asian Americans only and, therefore, may not be representative of the overall Asian American population (74% of our weighted Asian American sample was born in another country, compared with 77% of the Asian American adult population overall). Despite this limitation, it is important to report the views of Asian Americans on the topics in this study. As always, Asian Americans' responses are incorporated into the general population figures throughout this report. Because of the relatively small sample size and a reduction in precision due to weighting, we are not able to analyze Asian American respondents by demographic categories, such as gender, age or education.

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² Asian Americans were interviewed in English only.