



AMERICANS STRUGGLE WITH WHAT INFORMATION TO TRUST, BUT AGREE DATA, TRANSPARENCY ARE KEY

CHICAGO, Nov. 14, 2019 — Despite fundamental disagreements about which sources of information to trust, Americans overwhelmingly agree on what facts should be: accurate, transparent and based in data, according to a new national poll by [USAFacts](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#). The 2019 State of the Facts Poll examines Americans' perceptions of what constitutes a fact, their ability to understand facts, and their use and trust of government sources.

The public sees a challenging environment for finding facts. Sixty-four percent of Americans say they frequently come across sources that cover only one side of an issue, and 58% report receiving conflicting information from sources. Nearly 4 in 10 Americans believe the political divide in the United States is more due to individuals relying on different facts about major problems, than it is to having different beliefs about how to address those problems.

Party identification heavily influences where Americans turn for information and what sources they trust. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to trust the input of scientists (72% vs. 40%), academics (57% vs. 30%), and the media (23% vs. 11%). Democrats also are more likely to turn to and trust the national news media, while Republicans are more likely to rely on the president. About three-quarters of Republicans (76%) say the sources of information they come across are one-sided, compared with 59% of Democrats.

Still, this political division masks some significant areas of agreement. At least 8 in 10 Democrats and Republicans agree that facts must be accurate, complete, and transparent. And 6 in 10 or more of both groups say that facts must be based in data. Despite fundamental disagreements about who to trust, Americans overwhelmingly agree what facts should be.

“With 58% of Americans reporting receiving conflicting information from sources, our third annual State of the Facts Poll clearly identifies the danger to democracy if Americans feel what they are reading and hearing is not grounded in fact,” said [USAFacts](#) President Poppy MacDonald. “At USAFacts, we work every day to put government data in front of Americans in clear and compelling ways. In an era of fact-checkers versus those who say news is ‘fake,’ disinformation campaigns by foreign adversaries, and clickbait stories meant to drive ad revenue, Americans need all the help they can get to sort out the facts.”

“Democrats and Republicans agree on the value of data and transparency when it comes to facts,” said Trevor Tompson, senior vice president of Public Affairs and Media Research at NORC at the University of Chicago and director of [The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#). “But they fundamentally disagree on where to find that information and what to trust, with serious implications for our nation’s political discourse.”



Three Things You Should Know About the AP-NORC/USAFacts Poll of American Adults:

- Fifty-four percent of Americans say the president's political beliefs have a lot of influence on government information, while just 30% say the same about federal agency employees. Democrats and Republicans express very similar views on this question.
- Americans trust the federal government more on some topics than others: trust is highest on natural disasters (36%) and lowest on the environment (13%). Republicans are more likely than Democrats to trust government information on the economy (33% vs. 17%), immigration (25% vs. 14%), foreign affairs (22% vs. 13%), and infrastructure (21% vs 14%).
- More than half of Americans turn to social media at least once a day for information about the government, but 64% say they are skeptical of the information they receive there.

The nationwide survey of 1,032 adults was conducted using AmeriSpeak®, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Interviews were conducted between October 15 and 28, 2019, online and using landlines and cell phones. The margin of sampling error is +/- 4.2 percentage points.

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