



AMERICANS BELIEVE SPREAD OF MISINFORMATION TO BE A MAJOR PROBLEM, YET CONTINUE TO FREQUENT SOURCES THEY DON'T TRUST

The AP-NORC/USAFacts poll also finds a significant share of people think the candidates' campaign messages are rarely or never based in fact.

CHICAGO, Oct. 21, 2020 — More than 8 in 10 Americans believe the spread of misinformation is a major problem in today's society, yet many people frequently visit certain sources of information they do not trust, according to a national poll by [USAFacts](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#).

The survey reveals that most Americans agree that disinformation is rampant, but when it comes to getting analysis they trust, many remain highly skeptical of certain sources. In fact, about 4 in 10 Americans get information about the government from local television, national television networks, cable news, and social media, yet none of those sources are trusted by more than 25%. For instance, 37% get their information from social media, but only 7% trust it.

In the midst of the 2020 presidential campaign, most find it easy to find factual information about how to register to vote and how to cast their ballot, but 40% struggle to know if what the candidates are saying is true or not, and 38% feel the same about information about the election generally. Many are skeptical that what the candidates say is based in fact – 51% think that Donald Trump's campaign messages are rarely or never based in fact, and 39% think the same about Joe Biden.

When determining whether information about the election is true, just 15% trust the federal government a great deal or quite a bit. Instead they first look to an internet search (35%) or cable news (13%), even while few say they trust these sources.

“Americans are expressing a strong desire for factual information on a range of topics, including elections and government outcomes, and they want that information to be data-driven,” said [USAFacts](#) President Poppy MacDonald. “Instead, they often get rhetoric and statements from sources they don't necessarily trust and therefore have difficulty knowing what to believe. USAFacts takes nonpartisan data straight from trusted government sources and makes it accessible to all Americans so they can cut through the disinformation.”

Other key findings from the study include:



- Majorities feel it is easy to find factual information about how to register to vote (68%) and how to cast their ballot (61%), but fewer say the same about knowing if election information (38%) or what the candidates are saying (35%) is true.
- 59% of Americans feel the political beliefs of the president have a lot of influence on the information provided by the government.
- Nearly three-quarters are at least somewhat concerned about foreign governments interfering in the 2020 election, either by influencing news Americans see or tampering with voting systems.
- When it comes to how they get daily information about the government, local (44%), national (42%), and cable TV news (40%) top the list, but few trust these sources.
- 66% say they have used federal government websites like the Centers for Disease Control to look up information, an increase compared to 2019 (58%).
- People's values (78%), data (73%), and personal experience (68%) top the list when it comes to how people say they form opinions on issues.
- Americans are most likely to consider information factual if it is based in data (66%) or verified by scientists (63%), and more Americans say so for each compared to 2019 (61% and 55%, respectively).

“Heading into the election this year, most find it difficult to know if campaign information is true and they are unable to determine trusted sources to turn to for help,” said Trevor Tompson, director of [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#). “But the good news is, many Americans have found it easy to find out how to register to vote or cast their ballot.”

The 2020 State of the Facts Poll also examines what Americans think about information related to the COVID-19 pandemic. *For more information, see the first release of the [AP-NORC/USAFacts The State of the Facts Poll 2020](#).*

The nationwide survey of 1,043 adults was conducted using AmeriSpeak®, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago, and was funded by USAFacts. Interviews were conducted between September 15 and 25, 2020, online and using landlines and cell phones. The margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points.

About USAFacts

USAFacts is a not-for-profit, nonpartisan civic initiative providing the most comprehensive and understandable single source of government data. www.usafacts.org

About The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

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About NORC at the University of Chicago

NORC at the University of Chicago is an objective, non-partisan research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions. Since 1941, NORC has conducted groundbreaking studies, created and applied innovative methods and tools, and advanced principles of scientific integrity and collaboration. Today, government, corporate, and nonprofit clients around the world partner with NORC to transform increasingly complex information into useful knowledge.

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The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.

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