



New AP-NORC, USAFacts study finds Americans' trust in government information has declined since 2024

Less than half of U.S. adults trust information from government agencies, with pronounced shifts along party lines driving changes over the last two years.

Chicago, IL, September 9, 2026 – A new study from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and USAFacts finds that public trust in information from the federal government has declined across a range of major issues compared with 2024. The share of Americans expressing a great deal or quite a bit of trust in federal government information about inflation and the cost of living has dropped from 26% to 18%, while trust in information about health care has declined from 26% to 16%. Trust also fell for information about jobs and unemployment, the environment, and the federal budget. Democrats report particularly sharp drops in confidence.

Just 44% of adults overall trust information from federal agencies at least a moderate amount, though trust has shifted sharply along partisan lines since before the presidential election in 2024. The share of Republicans who express at least a moderate amount of trust in information from federal agencies increased from 26% in 2024 to 49% in 2026, while the share of Democrats expressing the same level of trust declined from 72% to 41% during the same period.

Few Americans believe factual information is consistently driving public discourse or decision-making. Just 10% say decisions made by policymakers are always or often based on factual information. About the same share say debates between political candidates (10%), Democratic Party campaign messages (12%), and Republican Party campaign messages (12%) are regularly grounded in facts.

While most Americans say they can distinguish fact from opinion, fewer say it is easy to determine whether the information they encounter is true. Just 37% say it is easy to know if information is true, while 62% say it is easy to tell the difference between fact and opinion. About half (49%) say it is easy to find factual information. These views have changed little since 2024.

“Trust in information is low and declining, yet Americans still value facts and data — they're just uncertain how to determine what they can trust,” said Lauren Woodman, President of USAFacts.

“Without transparency about where information comes from and how it's gathered, we risk more Americans being unable to engage in civic conversation because they're working from different sets of facts.”

Concerns about the reliability of information are especially relevant when it comes to the upcoming 2026 midterm elections. About half of adults think campaign messages from both the Republican Party (53%) and Democratic Party (47%) are rarely or never based on facts. Thirty-four percent trust government certifications of election results a great deal or quite a bit to provide accurate information about the outcome of the 2026 midterm elections, while 33% have moderate trust and 32% have little or no trust in them.

Finding election information has also become more difficult since 2024. The share of adults who say it is easy to find information about how to register to vote has fallen from 71% to 63%, while the share who say it is easy to find information about how to cast a ballot has declined from 63% to 54%. Additionally, 46% are extremely or very concerned about the federal government publicly discrediting election results, and the same share are concerned about the government directly tampering with election outcomes.

The survey also finds continued public skepticism about artificial intelligence, even as AI tools become more common sources of information. Daily use of AI chatbots nearly doubled, from 6% in 2024 to 11% in 2026, while use of AI-powered search results increased from 7% to 15%. At the same time, about half of adults believe AI will do more harm than good for society over the next decade (52%), compared with 14% who think it will do more good than harm.

Although confidence in AI-generated information has improved somewhat since 2024, many remain wary. About half of adults (49%) are not very or not at all confident that information from AI chatbots or search results is reliable and factual. Americans are divided about AI's effect on truthfulness in the information environment: 34% think AI will make it harder to know what information about the government is true, while 22% think it will make it easier. Still, many see potential benefits, with 46% saying AI will make it easier to understand complicated information or problems.

"Americans are increasingly using AI as part of their information diet, but widespread skepticism remains," said Dan Malato, Senior Research Director at The AP-NORC Center. "The public appears to recognize AI's potential to help make complex information more accessible, but they continue to question its accuracy, trustworthiness, and broader impact on the information landscape."

About the Study

This survey, funded by USAFacts, was conducted by The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Staff from The AP-NORC Center and USAFacts collaborated on all aspects of the study.

The nationwide poll was conducted by The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research from July 29 to August 10, 2026, using AmeriSpeak®, NORC's probability-based panel. Online and telephone interviews were conducted with adults age 18 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. 1,036 completed the survey—1,017 via the web and 19 by telephone.

The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points.

A full description of the study methodology, as well as detailed survey findings, can be found at www.apnorc.org.

About The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

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- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest and most respected, independent research institutions in the world. www.norc.org

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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About USAFacts

USAFacts is a not-for-profit, nonpartisan civic organization making source data easy for all Americans to access and understand. USAFacts provides an online resource of well-visualized data and trends on the most pressing issues to help ground public debate in facts. Learn more at usafacts.org.

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