Pew Research Center

The Case of Pew Research Center

How Public Opinion Research Organizations Work

Scott Keeter
Senior Survey Advisor

Rachel Weisel
Senior Communications Manager

“Surveys produce just what democracy is supposed to produce — equal representation of all citizens. The sample survey is rigorously egalitarian; it is designed so that each citizen has an equal chance to participate and an equal voice when participating. Here is where science and political representation meet.”

Sidney Verba, presidential address
American Political Science Association, 1995

The roadmap

Who polls?

Who pays for it?

How do the topics get chosen?

How are the polls actually conducted?

- Who is polled and how?
- What are they asked?
- How is the data analyzed?

How do we communicate findings?

- Who is our intended audience?
- How do we reach them?
- How do we assess our effectiveness?

What questions do you have?

Public vs private polling

Public pollsters conduct their work and make it public

Private pollsters conduct similar work but do it for private clients who may or may not make it public. Clients wanting private polling include political candidates and parties, other political organizations, advocacy groups, businesses and nonprofits.

Some organizations **do both public and private polling**

A sampling of organizations conducting public polls

Pew Research Center

Siena College Research Institute

New York Times

Reuters

Ipsos

NBC News

Kaiser Family Foundation

Quinnipiac University Poll

Wall Street Journal

CBS

YouGov

NORC

PPIC

Monmouth University Poll

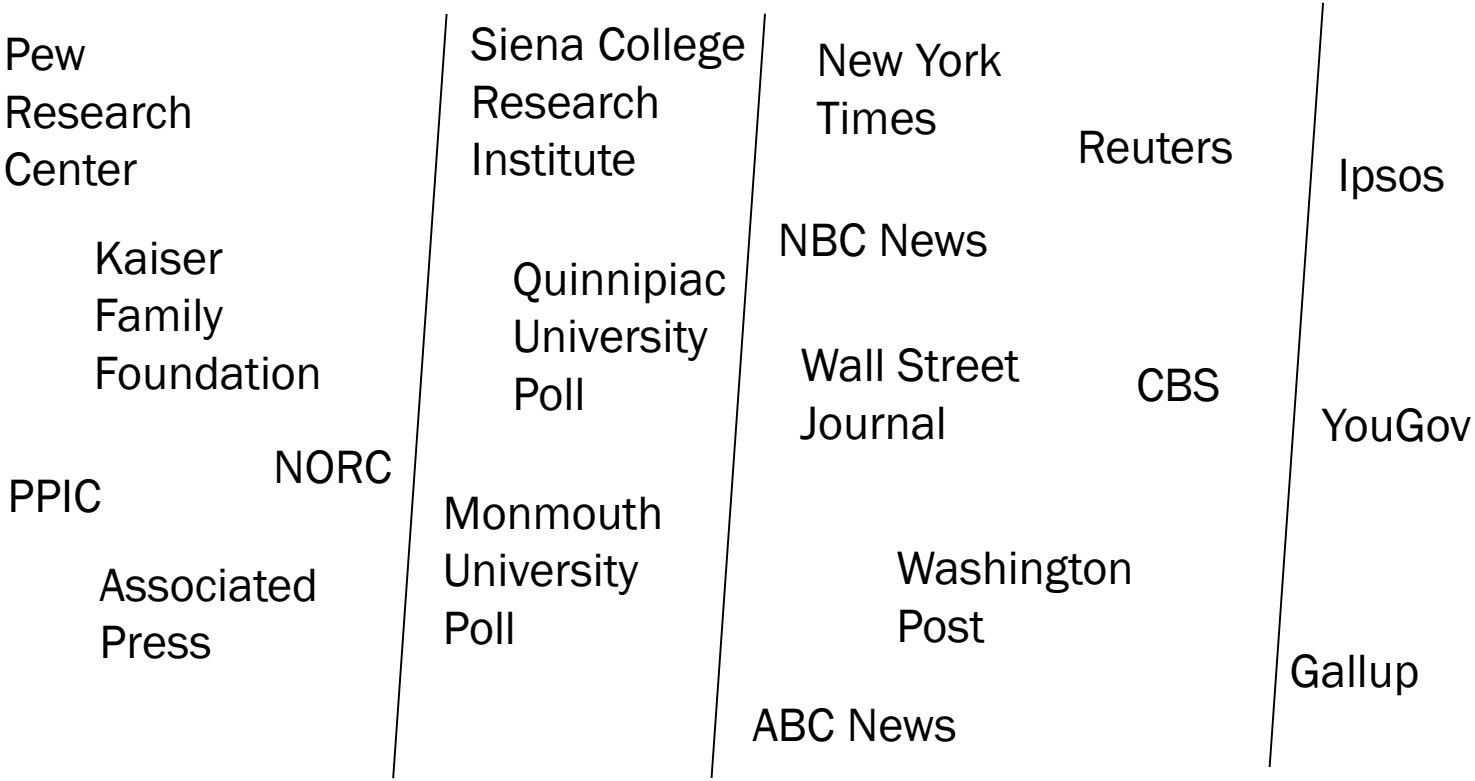
Washington Post

Associated Press

Gallup

ABC News

A sampling of organizations conducting public polls



A sampling of organizations conducting public polls

Pew Research Center: Who we are

- A “fact tank” that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world.
- **Nonpartisan** and **non-advocacy**, meaning we do not take policy positions or make recommendations.
- A subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, our primary funder.
  - We don’t do reports for hire.
  - We have full editorial control over our work.

Pew Research Center

Pew Research Center: What We Do

Mission: Generate a foundation of facts that enriches the public dialogue and supports sound decision-making.

Methods: We conduct public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis, computational social science and other data-driven social science research.

Major research areas:

U.S. politics
Religion
Migration
Media & news
Internet and tech
Methods
Social trends
Science

Pew Research Center:
Melding journalism and social science

Michael Dimock, president
Formerly at N.C. State University

Claudia Deane, vice president for research
Formerly at The Washington Post

Conventions of journalism that we prize

- News judgment
- Timeliness and topicality
- Sense that you are being told a coherent story in which one episode flows into another
- Readability
- Lack of jargon
- Not being overwhelmed by numbers/ selective use of numbers.
- Clarity
- Concision

Conventions of social science that we prize

- Using best methodology for the task
- Remaining true to methodological limitations of the data
- Taking great care on “causality” – when we suggest it that data has to be there to back it up
- Adhering to high standards of transparency
- Writing defensively, being aware of what other people are writing, “writing cautiously”

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Funding

Polling is expensive. Finding adequate funding is a constant challenge for pollsters

Main models

- Sponsoring organization includes polling in budget
- Organizations obtain funding from public, private and nonprofit funders
- Organizations generate revenues and use profits to subsidize public polling

Funding

Funding also can bring obligations and the appearance of obligation. Control of the organization's agenda can be affected

For Pew Research Center, we are fortunate in having a major funder. But even for them, the rules we apply to the financial relationships are the same as for other potential funders

- Accept funding only if it aligns with our research goals – no commissioned research projects
- Complete transparency with respect to funding as well as methodology
- Always retain full editorial control
- Rarely do partnerships and collaborations but carefully consider reputational risk when doing so

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Setting the agenda

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA-NC

Public's policy priorities: 2010-2018

% who say ____ is a top priority for the president and Congress

	8 years ago Jan 2010	4 years ago Jan 2014	1 year ago Jan 2017	Now Jan 2018	8-year chg '10-'18	1-year chg '17-'18
	%	%	%	%		
Defending against terrorism	80	73	76	73	-7	-3
Improving education	65	69	69	72	+7	+3
Strengthening nation's economy	83	80	73	71	-12	-2
Reducing health care costs	57	59	66	68	+11	+2
Securing Social Security	66	66	60	67	+1	+7
Securing Medicare	63	61	59	66	+3	+7
Protecting environment	44	49	55	62	+18	+7
Improving job situation	81	74	68	62	-19	-6
Problems of poor and needy	53	49	56	58	+5	+2
Reducing crime	49	55	56	56	+7	0
Addressing race relations	--	--	56	52	--	-4
Improving transportation	--	39	36	49	--	+13
Dealing with drug addiction	--	--	36	49	--	+13
Reducing budget deficit	60	63	52	48	-12	-4
Dealing with immigration	40	40	43	47	+7	+4
Reducing lobbyist influence	36	42	43	47	+11	+4

Some work continues long-standing research interests and trend measures…

Some work fits with large cross-organization initiatives…

...While some attempts to be timely and topical

OCTOBER 10, 2019

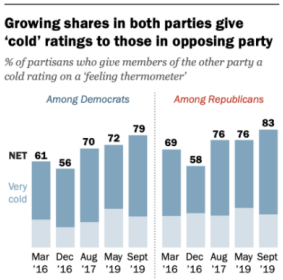
Partisan Antipathy: More Intense, More Personal

Majority of Republicans say Democrats are 'more unpatriotic' than other Americans

Three years ago, Pew Research Center found that the 2016 presidential campaign was "unfolding against a backdrop of intense partisan division and animosity." Today, the level of division and animosity – including negative sentiments among partisans toward the members of the opposing party – has only deepened.

The share of Republicans who give Democrats a "cold" rating on a 0-100 thermometer has risen 14 percentage points since 2016 – with virtually all of the increase coming in "very cold" ratings (0-24). Democrats' views of Republicans have followed a similar trajectory: 57% give Republicans a very cold rating, up from 41% three years ago.

The survey by Pew Research Center was conducted Sept. 3-15 among 9,895 adults (it



MARCH 28, 2019

Majority Says Trump Has Done 'Too Little' to Distance Himself From White Nationalists

Wide partisan gap in Pelosi's early job rating

The public's views of Donald Trump have changed little over the course of his presidency – and this is the case for opinions about whether Trump has done enough to distance himself from white nationalist groups.

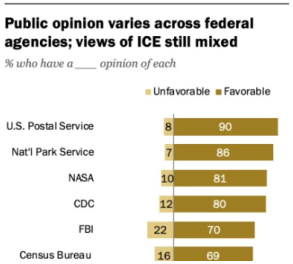
In a new survey, a 56% majority says Trump has done too little to distance himself from

OCTOBER 1, 2019

Public Expresses Favorable Views of a Number of Federal Agencies

FBI viewed more positively; deep partisan divide over ICE

Despite historically low levels of public trust in the federal government, Americans across the political spectrum continue to overwhelmingly express favorable opinions of a number of individual federal agencies, including the Postal Service, the National Park Service, NASA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). And majorities of both Republicans and Democrats now express favorable views of the FBI, reflecting a rebound in GOP



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Choosing a research design

Most organizations have a standard research design and data collection methodology, for example…

- Cross-sectional (or “one-off”) survey
- Telephone (dual frame RDD with landlines and cellphones)
- 1,500 live interviews with general public

But field is in a period of transition and costs of traditional methods are becoming unsustainable. This is especially true for telephone surveys, due to declining productivity

And sometimes we want to do a study that is very complicated, e.g. a rare population

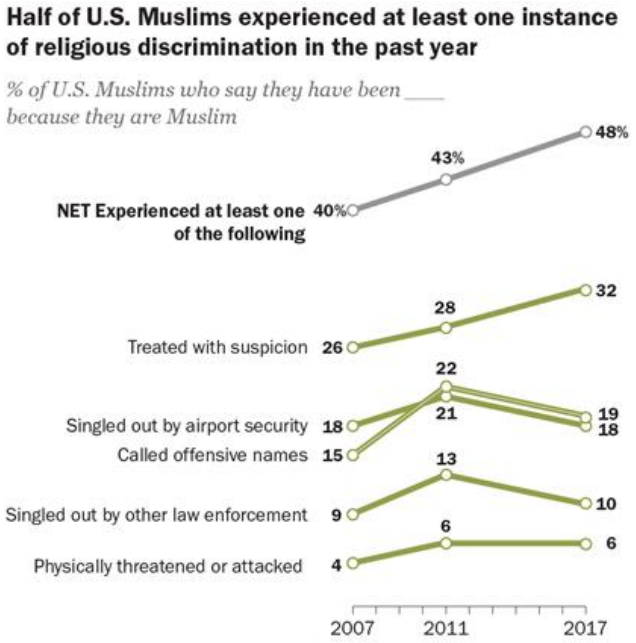
Surveys of rare populations

Rare populations we've studied

- Muslim Americans
- Jewish Americans
- Asian Americans
- Police officers
- People of mixed race

Special challenges

- Low incidence
- Sampling frames
- Special languages



Survey methods group

Mode of administration

Internet

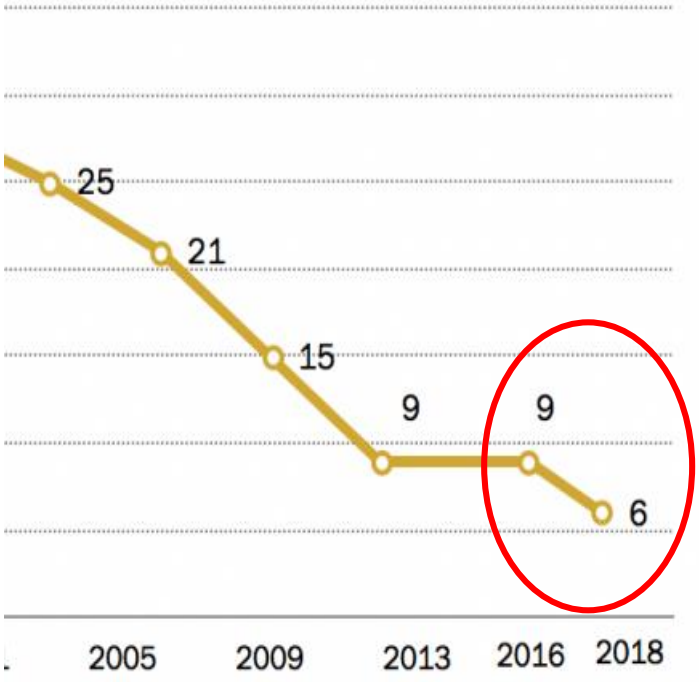
Mail

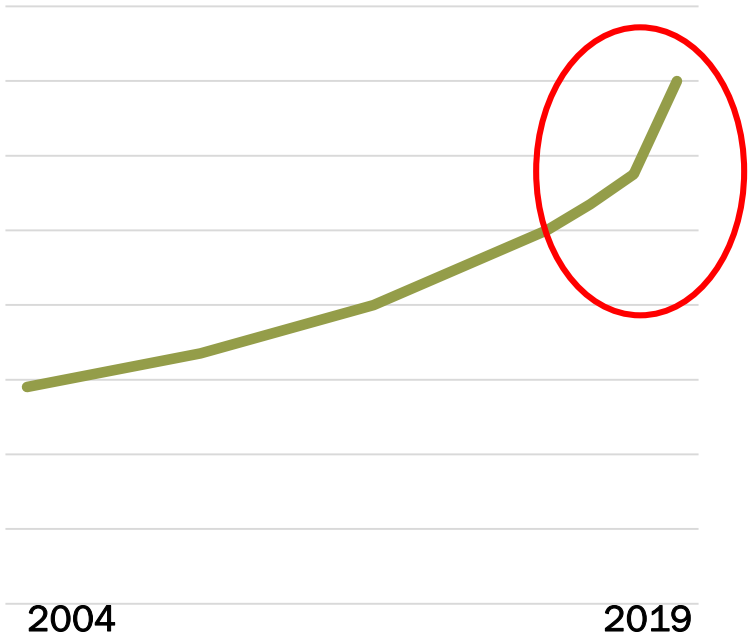
Live interviewer on telephone

Internet and phone

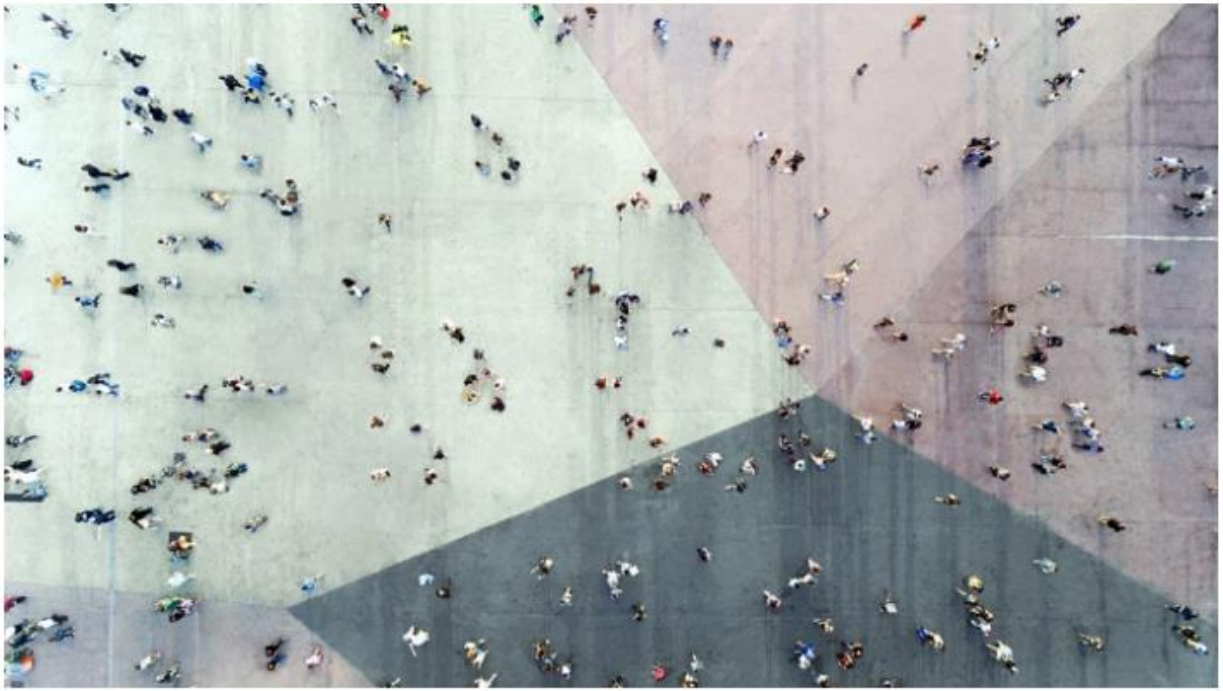
... and what kind of sample will we use?

Telephone response rates drop and costs go way up





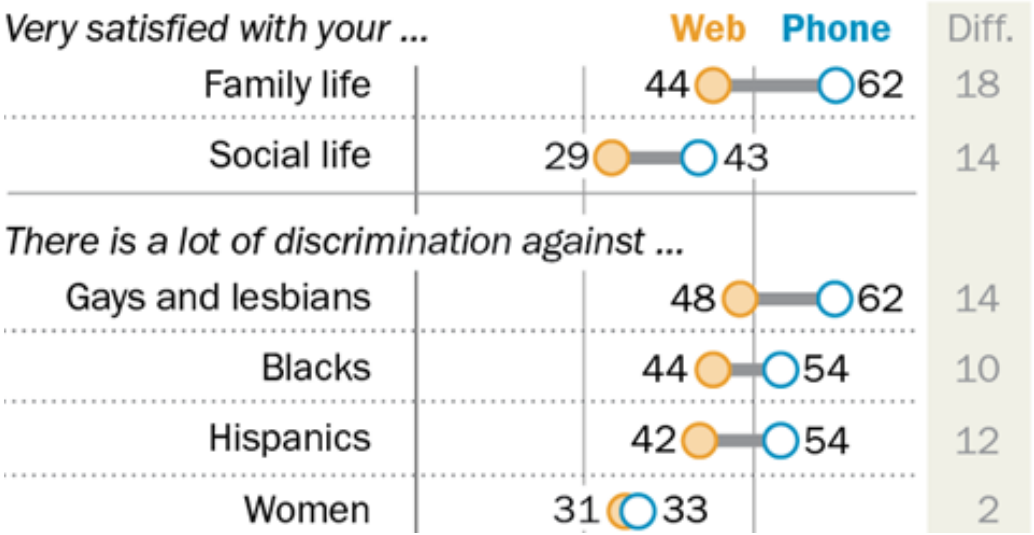
The American Trends Panel: our probability-based online panel



(Photo by Orbon Alija/Getty Images)

Different Answers on Web & Phone

% giving answer in each survey mode



FEBRUARY 27, 2019

What our transition to online polling means for decades of phone survey trends

BY COURTNEY KENNEDY AND CLAUDIA DEANE

From the 1980s until relatively recently, most national polling organizations conducted surveys by telephone, relying on live interviewers to call randomly selected Americans across the country. Then came the internet.

It has taken survey researchers some time to adapt to the idea of online surveys, but a quick look at the public polls on an issue like presidential approval reveals a landscape now dominated by online polls rather than phone polls. Pew Research Center itself now conducts the majority of its U.S. polling online, primarily through its American Trends

Alternatives and supplements to surveys

APRIL 24, 2019

Sizing Up Twitter Users

U.S. adult Twitter users are younger and more likely to be Democrats than the general public. Most users rarely tweet, but the most prolific 10% create 80% of tweets from adult U.S. users

BY STEFAN WOJCIK AND ADAM HUGHES

AUGUST 9, 2018

Trust, Facts and Democracy

FOR MOST TRUMP VOTERS, 'VERY WARM' FEELINGS FOR HIM ENDURED

An examination of the 2016 electorate, based on validated voters

One of the biggest challenges facing those who seek to understand U.S. elections is establishing an accurate portrait of the American electorate and the choices made by

…oted is difficult for a

JULY 18, 2018

'Anger' topped 'love' when Facebook users reacted to lawmakers' posts after 2016 election

BY ADAM HUGHES AND PATRICK VAN KESSEL

After the 2016 presidential election, Facebook users began using the "angry" button much more often when reacting to posts created by members of Congress.

Between Feb. 24, 2016 – when Facebook first gave its users the option of clicking on the "angry" reaction, as well as the emotional reactions "love," "sad," "haha" and "wow" – and Election Day, the

Volume of angry reactions to congressional posts shows largest increase after 2016 election

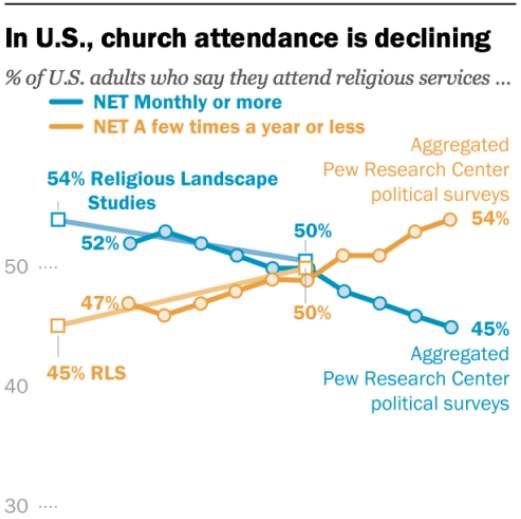
Total number of ___ reactions to Facebook posts by members of Congress, in millions

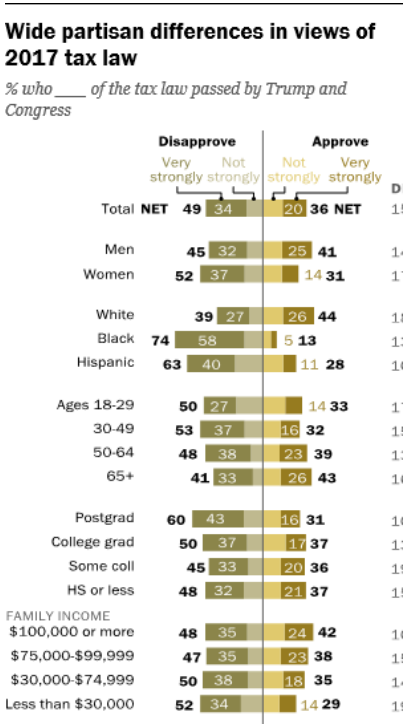
Creating a questionnaire and writing questions

What's the goal of the study? Cover a lot of topics or go deep on a particular issue?

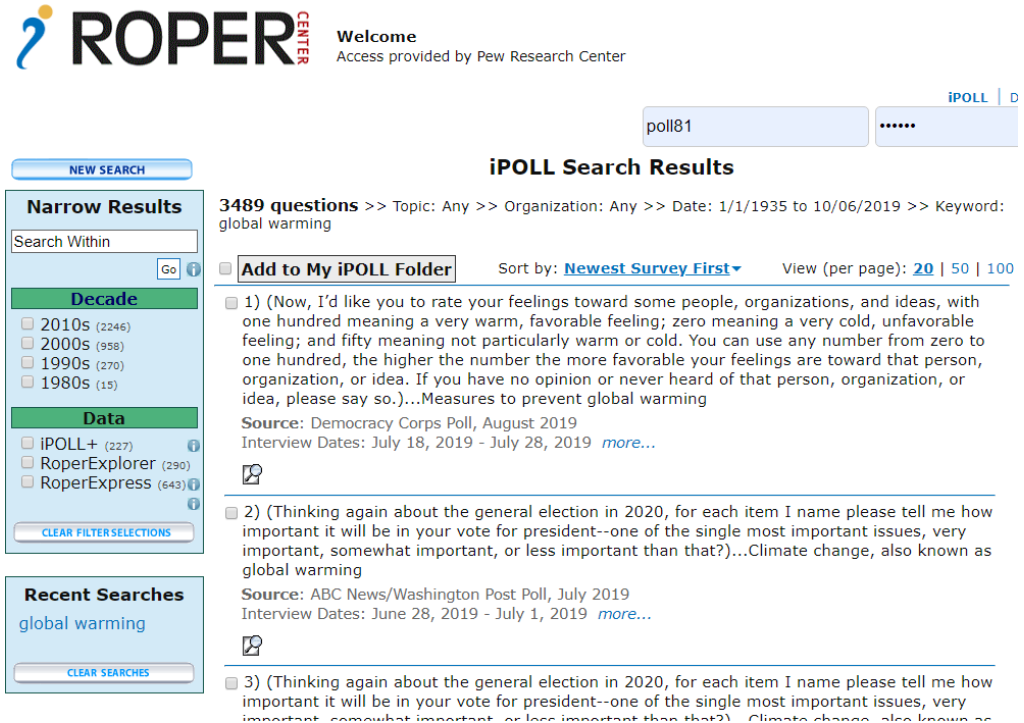
Important to establish comparisons that give context to the results. Numbers alone don't make meaning: Big compared with what? Growing from what baseline?

- Across groups in the population
- Over time
- Across alternative measures





Where to find survey questions and data?



Where to find survey questions and data?

Question development

Pilot testing

In your view, how many medical scientists researching vaccines… **[RANDOMIZE ITEMS WITH ITEM G ALWAYS LAST]**

ASK ALL:
Q1A Do a good job conducting research about the health effects of vaccines **[REQUIRED ANSWER]**

New four-point		Four-point		Five-point	
46	All or most of them	12	All of them	41	Almost all of them
43	Some of them	63	Most of them	37	More than half of them
6	Only a few of them	21	Only some of them	12	About half of them
5	None of them	4	None of them	7	Fewer than half of them
				2	Almost none of them

ASK ALL:
Q1B Effectively use the resources available to them in their work **[REQUIRED ANSWER]**

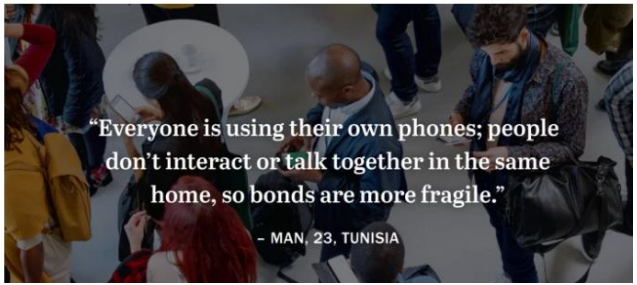
New four-point		Four-point		Five-point	
45	All or most of them	18	All of them	44	Almost all of them
48	Some of them	59	Most of them	34	More than half of them
4	Only a few of them	23	Only some of them	11	About half of them
4	None of them	1	None of them	7	Fewer than half of them
				4	Almost none of them

Focus groups

MARCH 15, 2019

How focus groups helped inform our survey about technology use in emerging economies

BY LAURA SILVER



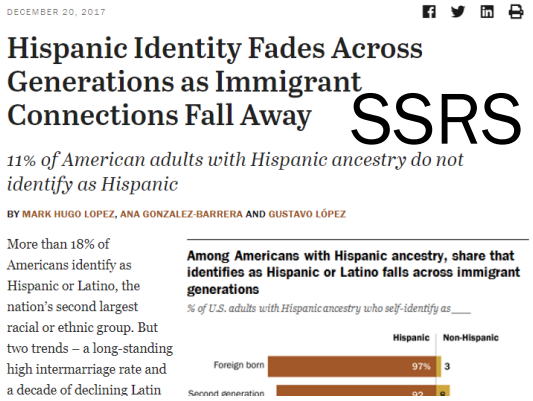
Data collection

The survey methods team works with a variety of vendors

Ipsos

Abt Associates

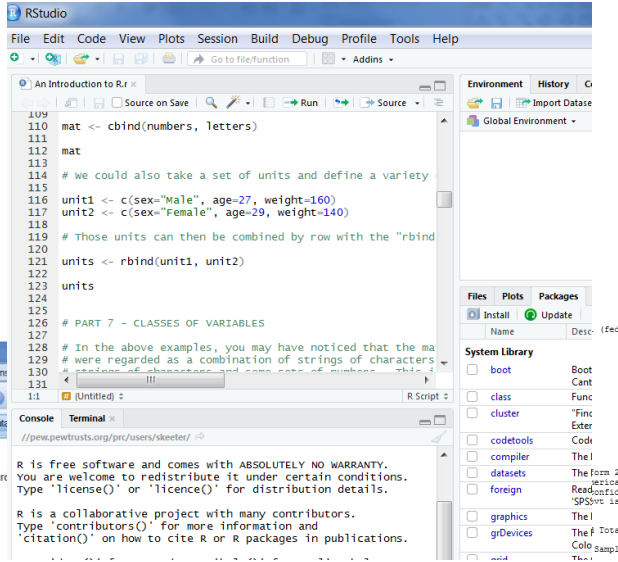
NORC

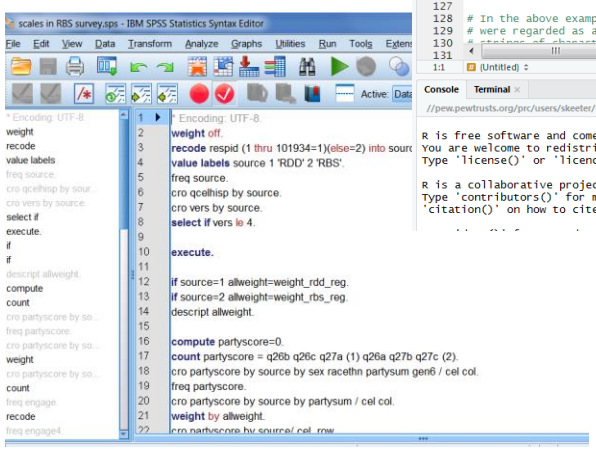


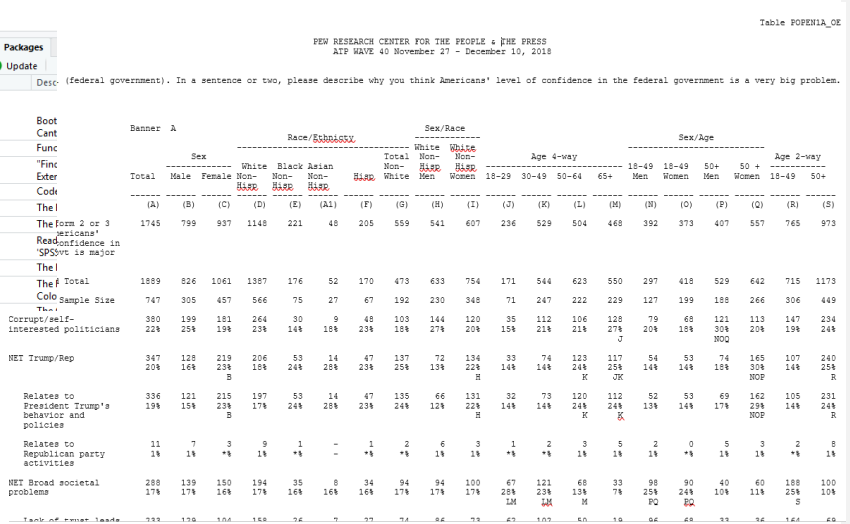
SSRS

Data analysis and report writing

SPSS
Stata
R
Wincross







Writing style guidance

Singular or plural?

In general, percentages and fractions take a plural verb when standing alone or when a plural word is followed by an "of" construction with a plural object (*of Americans*). They take a singular verb when followed by an "of" construction with a singular object (*of the public*).

Percentages

When the word *percentage* is the subject of a sentence, use a singular verb.

25% *say* ...
25% of Americans *say* ...
25% of the public *says* ...
25% of the public *says* it has improved, but 50% *say* ...
The percentage of Americans who *say* it has improved *is* higher than the percentage that *says* ...

Fractions

One-third *think* ...
One-third of Americans *think* ...
One-third of the public *thinks* ...
One-third of the public *thinks* it has improved, while two-thirds *think* ...

Majority, *minority*, *plurality* and *share* take a singular verb when standing alone or when followed by an "of" construction with a singular object (*of the public*). They take a plural verb when followed by an "of" construction with a plural object (*of Americans*). Also consider the function of the verb: If it conveys the opinion or response of those within the majority (*say*, *disagree*), follow the rules above, but if it describes a trend or change in the majority, it takes a singular (*has decreased*, *is growing*).

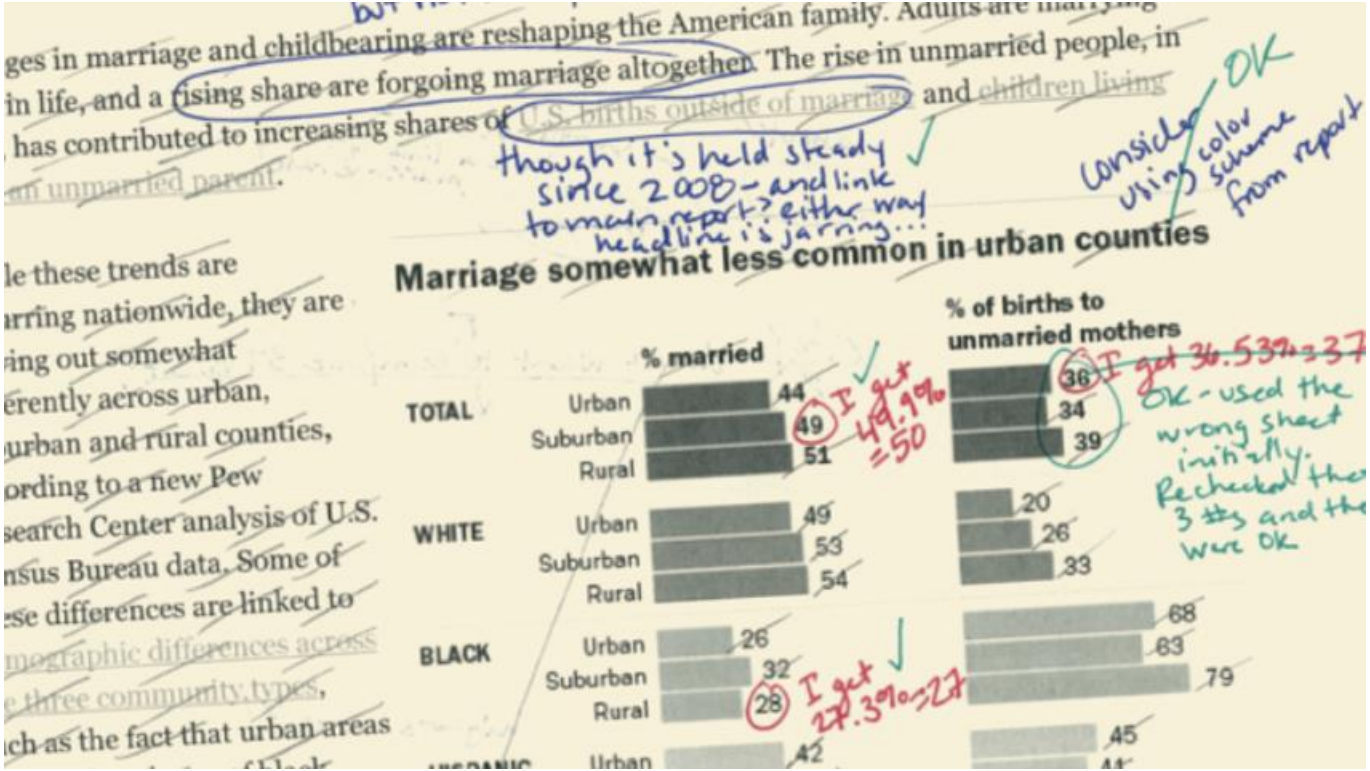
Majority/minority/plurality

A majority *thinks* ...
A majority of the public *thinks* ...
A plurality of Americans (42%) *think* ...
A majority of Americans *think* things have improved, while a minority *thinks* ...
The already-small minority of Americans who vote in primaries *is shrinking*.

Share

A growing share *says* ...
A growing share of the public *says* ...
A growing share of Americans *say* ...
A growing share of women who have children *say* this has improved, while a similar share *says* ...
The share of women who have children *has increased* ...

The number checking process



AAPOR Code of Ethics

(Revised November 2015) Download PDF

We—the members of the American Association for Public
affiliated chapters—subscribe to the principles expressed
Professional Ethics and Practices ("the Code"). Our goals a
ethical practice in the conduct of public opinion and surv
and appropriate use of research results.

The Code is based in fundamental ethical principles that
regardless of an individual's membership in AAPOR or an
principles and actions set out in the Code is expected of a
researchers.

As AAPOR members, we pledge to maintain the highest s
integrity, accountability, and transparency in
designing, conducting, analyzing, and reporting our work,
participants, clients, and the users of our research.
We pledge to act in accordance with principles of basic hu
pledge to reject all tasks or assignments that would requi
principles of this Code.

The Code sets the standard for the ethical conduct of pub

AAPOR Transparency Initiative
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

Ethics and transparency

Avoid harm to respondents
Participation in surveys is voluntary
Avoid misrepresenting our research
Make no false claims about sponsorship or purpose
Prevent unintended disclosure of PII
Exercise due care in designing research
Be mindful of limitations of our methods
Disclose methods and procedures in appropriate detail
Correct errors

Dissemination

Our Mission

*We generate a **foundation of facts** that **enriches the public dialogue** and **supports sound decision-making.***

Core Audiences

- Media
- Policymakers

Thread throughout: The informed public

What Does Comms Do?

Strategic Planning

- Devise comms strategies to promote the Center's work to key audiences

Outreach/Promote Experts

- Pitch media
- Offer briefings to all relevant stakeholders
- Conference placement
- Event planning

Internal Reporting

- Track and report on our work using a variety of metrics
- Draft communications for The Pew Charitable Trusts on our upcoming work and past successes

Provide Support

- Provide researchers with communications guidance and media training
- Answer calls and emails from reporters and general public

Bolster the Pew Research Center Brand

- Monitor citations; respond in situations where our reputation or methods are questioned
- Ensure how we produce and communicate our work is in line with our mission

Comms Strategy

- Identifies core audiences
- Sets plan for outreach
- Allows for handling incoming inquiries (reactive), while also leaving room for pitching our work and our experts (proactive)
- Includes metrics for success

Outreach

- Maps to our target audiences
  - Eg., press releases for media, briefing offers for policymakers, videos for the informed public

Outreach Tool: Press Releases

Pew Research Center

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Media contact: Nida Asheer, 202-419-4372, nasheer@pewresearch.org

Partisan Antipathy: More Intense, More Personal

Majority of Republicans say Democrats are 'more unpatriotic' than other Americans

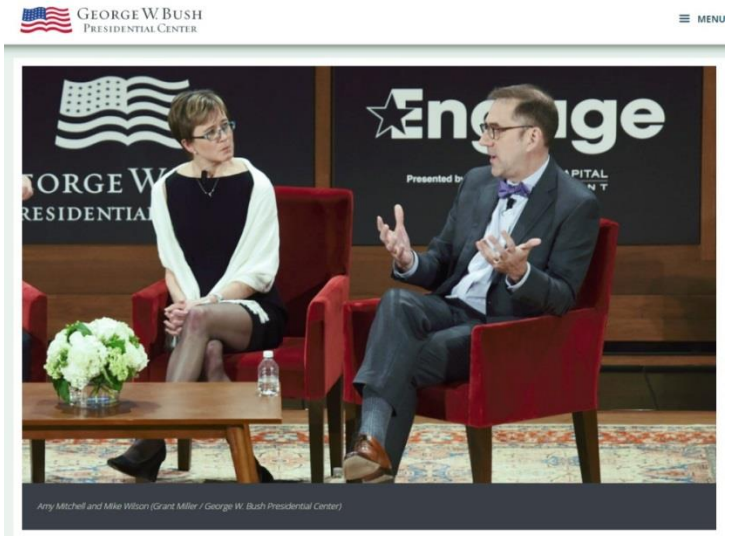
WASHINGTON, D.C. (Oct. 10, 2019) – Three years ago, Pew Research Center found that the 2016 presidential campaign was "unfolding against a backdrop of intense partisan division and animosity." Today, the level of division and animosity has only deepened, according to a new Pew Research Center survey.

The share of Republicans who give Democrats a "cold" rating on a 0-100 thermometer has risen 14 percentage points since 2016 – with virtually all of the increase coming in "very cold" ratings (0-24). Democrats' views of Republicans have followed a similar trajectory: 57% give Republicans a very cold rating, up from 41% three years ago.

The survey was conducted Sept. 3-15 among 9,895 U.S. adults. (**Note: This survey was conducted before the September 24 announcement of an impeachment inquiry by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.**) It finds that both Republicans and Democrats express negative views about several traits and characteristics of those in the opposing party, and in some cases these opinions have grown more negative since 2016.

For example, 55% of Republicans say Democrats are "more immoral" when compared with other Americans; 47% of Democrats say the same about Republicans. Three years ago, 47% of Republicans and 35% of

Outreach Tool: Briefings, Speaking Engagements



Outreach Tool: Events

Outreach Tool: Social Media

SOCIAL MEDIA

Twitter

@PewResearch

@FactTank

@PewGlobal

@PewHispanic

@PewInternet

@PewJournalism

@PewMethods

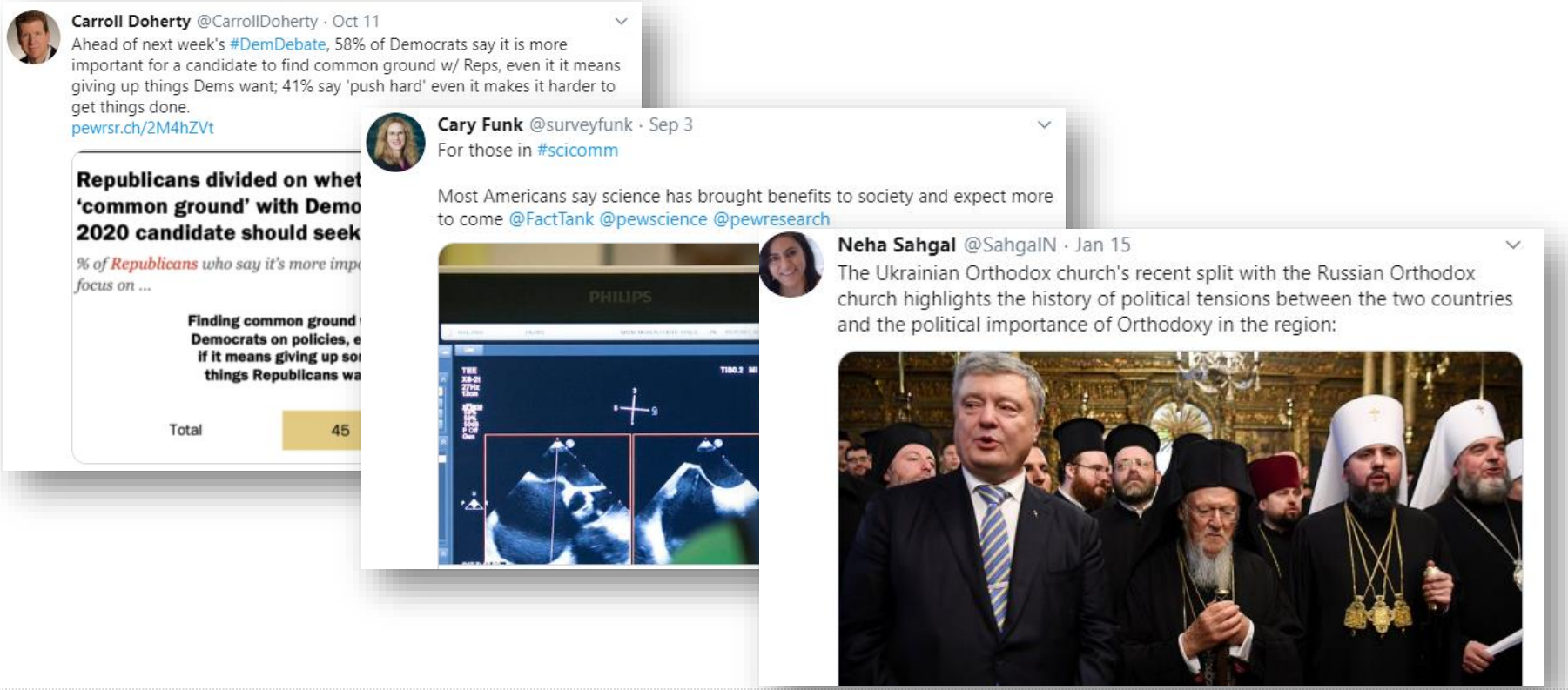
@PewReligion

@PewScience

@AllThingsCensus

Use this list to find our experts and researchers on Twitter.

Tactic: Experts on Social Media



Outreach Tool: Video

How can a survey of 1,000 people tell you what the whole U.S. thinks?

BY COURTNEY KENNEDY

Here at Pew Research Center, we are often asked about how we conduct our research. We work hard to make our methodologies transparent and understandable, but we also know that survey mode effects and data weighting aren't on everyone's short list of water-cooler conversation topics.

That's why we're launching *Methods 101*, a new occasional video series dedicated to explaining and educating the public about the basic methods we use to conduct our survey research. We hope this effort will make survey methods more accessible, even if you're not a statistician or pollster. We also hope it will help give our audience the confidence to be savvy consumers of all polls.

Bots in the Twittersphere

An estimated two-thirds of tweeted links to popular websites are posted by automated accounts – not human beings

BY STEFAN WOJCIK, SOLOMON MESSING, AARON SMITH AND LEE RAINIE

Outreach Tool: Video

Video: How Pew Research Center Conducted Its 2017 Survey of Muslim Americans

In this short video, Pew Research Center researchers explain how they overcame several methodological obstacles to produce the Center's wide-ranging new survey of 1,001 American Muslims. Please view the online report for full survey results and more details on the methodology.

Outreach Tool: Newsletters

Test your digital knowledge with our new quiz

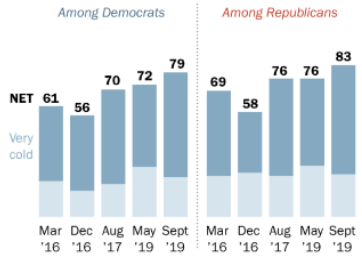
Is this email not displaying correctly? View it in your browser.

Pew Research Center

October 12, 2019

Growing shares in both parties give 'cold' ratings to those in opposing party

% of partisans who give members of the other party a cold rating on a 'feeling thermometer'



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 3-15, 2019.

Pew Research Center

Partisan antipathy: More intense, more personal

Partisan division and animosity has deepened in the U.S. since the 2016 presidential campaign. Not only do more Republicans and Democrats view members of the opposing party "coldly," they have also grown more likely to say they are more "immoral" and "closed-minded" than other Americans. Majorities of Americans now describe both political parties as "too extreme."

NEWSLETTERS

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- Biweekly newsletter

Internet, Science & Tech

- Monthly newsletter

Media & News

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- Monthly newsletter

Religion & Public Life

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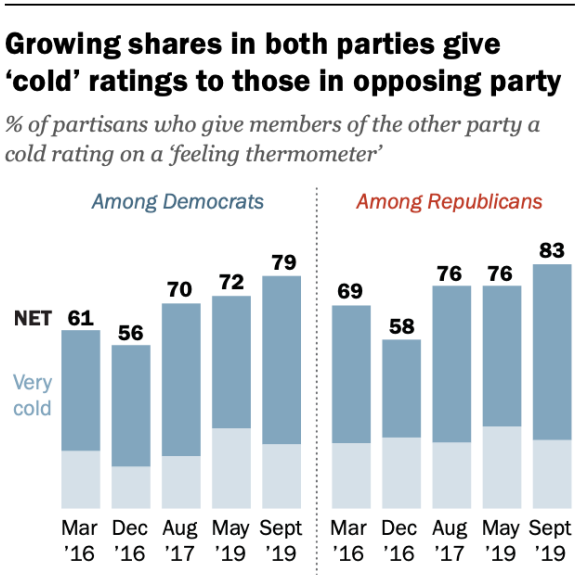
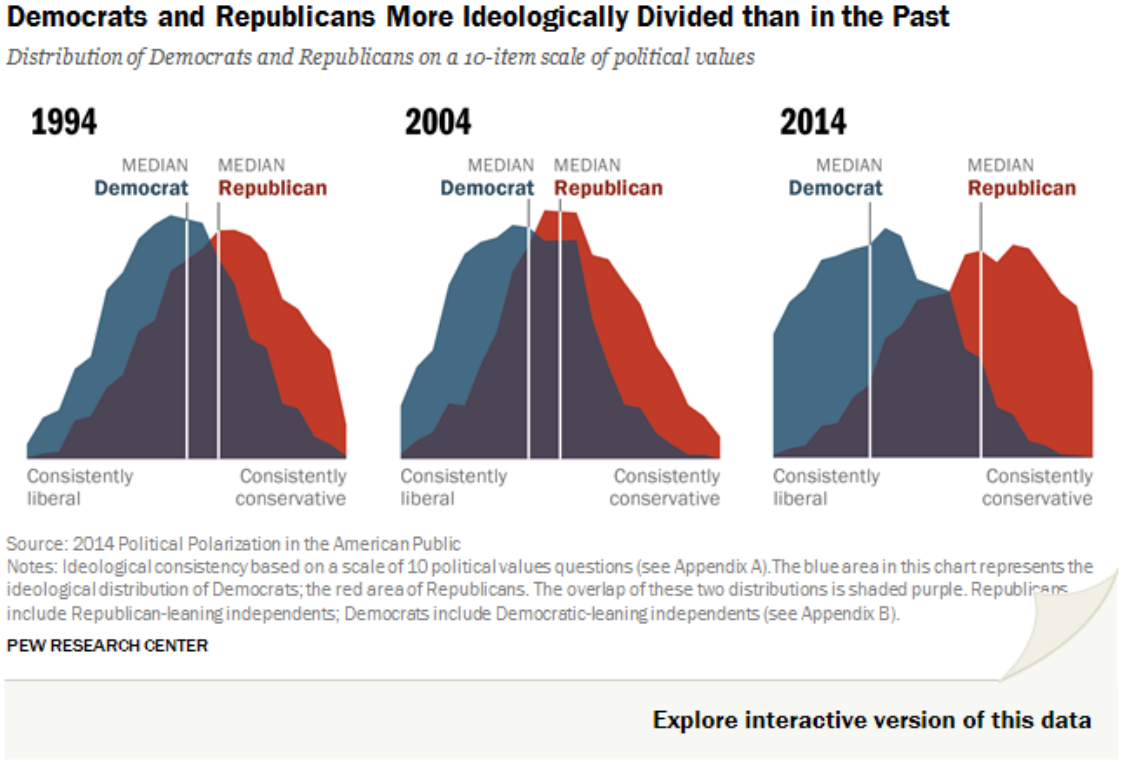
Outreach Tool: Graphics

Growing shares in both parties give 'cold' ratings to those in opposing party





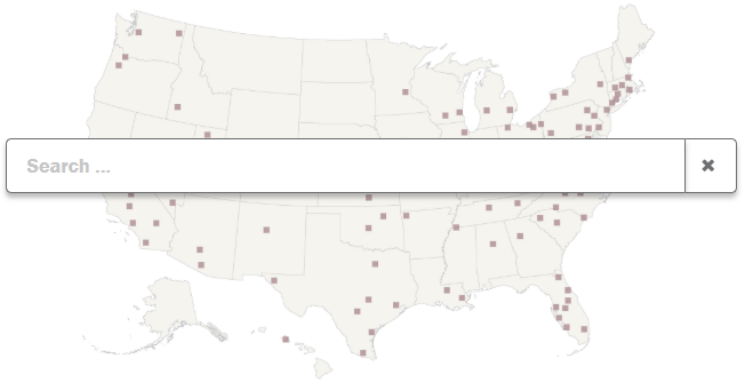
Outreach Tool: Interactives

What are the local news dynamics in your city?

Every day, Americans turn to their local news media to learn about the news in their communities. But how they get the news, which topics they prioritize and how they evaluate their local outlets can vary from one community to the next. To better understand these differences, Pew Research Center surveyed about 35,000 U.S. adults, allowing for local news profiles of individual communities.

Local results are available for 99 large CBSAs, which are geographic areas that include at least one urban center (see the Methodology). Results for smaller CBSAs are grouped together based on their similarity across factors such as income, race and ethnicity, and voter turnout.

To see a profile of your area, begin typing the name of your city in the search bar below.



Are you in the American middle class? Find out with our income calculator

BY RICHARD FRY AND RAKESH KOCHHAR

About half of American adults lived in middle-income households in 2016, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of government data. In percentage terms, 52% of adults lived in middle-income households, 29% in lower-income households and 19% in upper-income households.

Our calculator below, updated with 2016 data, lets you find out which group you are in – first compared with other adults in your metropolitan area and among American adults overall, and then compared with other adults in the United States similar to you in education, age, race or ethnicity, and marital status.

STEP 1: See where you are in the distribution of Americans by income tier. Enter the location that best describes where you live, your household income and the number of people in your household. The calculator adjusts for the cost of living in your area.

State: Select a state

Metropolitan area: Metro area

Household income before taxes: $

People in my household: #

Calculate

SHARE OF AMERICAN ADULTS IN EACH INCOME TIER

Upper	19%
Middle	52%
Lower	29%

Measuring Impact

- Setting project-specific goals
- What does success look like?
- Did our research resonate with key audiences?

Media Mentions

Press Clips

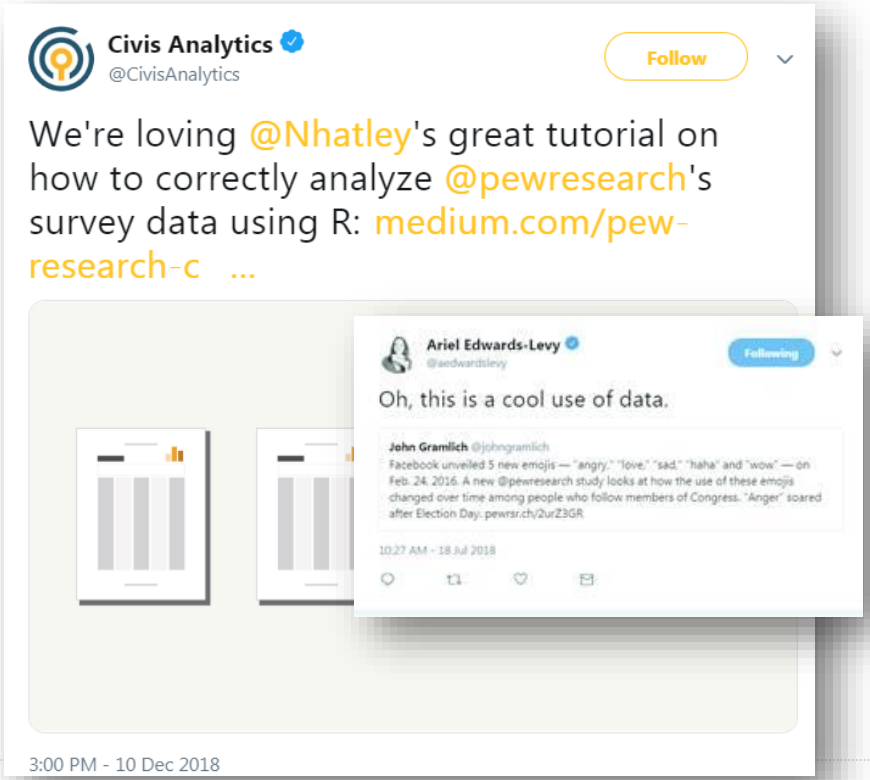
Pew Research Center Press Clips
October 11, 2019

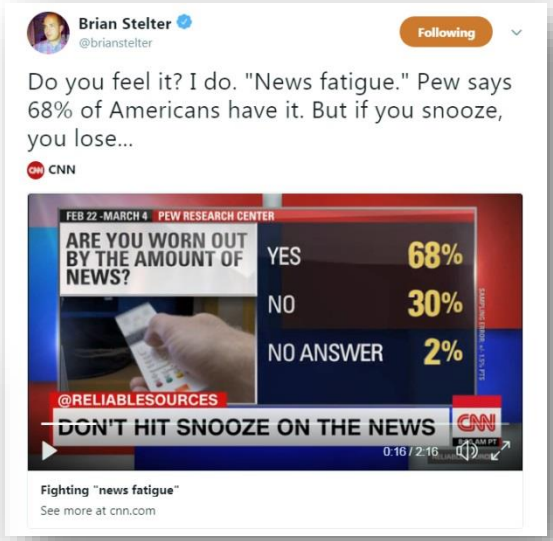
Highlights: Yesterday's report on partisan antipathy received coverage from NBC News, the Hill, Newsweek, Newsmax, Inquisitr, Courthouse News Service, Drudge Report and USA Today; Host of NBC's program "Meet the Press" Chuck Todd and NBC Senior Political Editor Mark Murray cited the data in an article about the upcoming primary election for Louisiana Governor for NBC News. Wednesday's report on digital knowledge continues to receive coverage from CNBC, Asian News International TechTimes, Android Authority, Naked Security and Ascential. CEO of Simulmedia, a company centered around data-optimized audience targeting for national TV advertising, cited Center data on the percentage of Americans with broadband internet in an opinion piece for MediaPost.

Social Trends

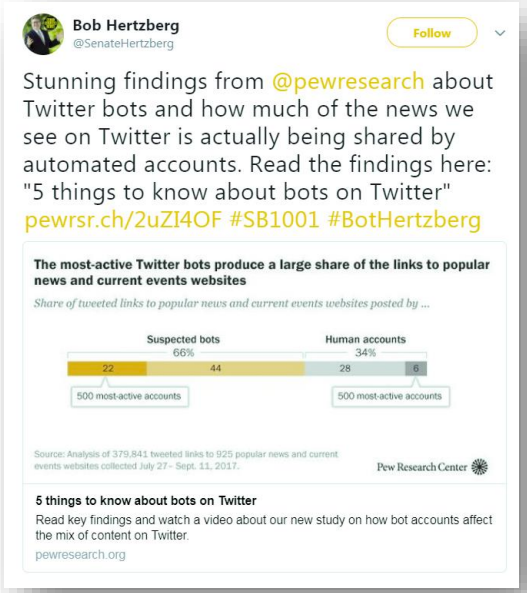
CNBC: 66% of millennials think they will be 'wealthy'—here's how much they're worth today
Houston Chronicle: The worst part about getting sick isn't medical bills
Atlantic: How America Lost Dinner
Parade: Oprah Winfrey's Admission That She Has No Regrets About Not Having Kids or Getting Married Is Something Many Women Need to Hear
HR Dive: Half of working parents say they can't give 100% on the job
Bustle: How To Support Girls' Education Around The World On International Day Of The Girl
Sport Journal: How Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) Can Benefit From E-Sports While Adding Diversity into the Gaming Industry
Ahwatukee Foothills News: Mountain View Lutheran hosts Asian ministry
Reform Austin: Texas cities and residents struggle with income inequality
PressFrom: A professor spoke about whiteness at Georgia Southern University. Students burned her book.
BisNow: Bringing #MeToo 'Out Of The Darkness': Why CREW Chapters Are Courting Men

Tweets by Important Stakeholders





Policymaker Citations



Stakeholder Action

ProPublica
@ProPublica
Following

Pew Research estimated a 35% drop in journalists working in state capital bureaus from 2003 to 2014.

We value local reporting so we're doubling the size of our Local Reporting Network next year. And we'll be choosing projects focused on state government.

ProPublica to Expand Local Reporting Network to Focus on State Governme...
ProPublica is an independent, non-profit newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest.
propublica.org

Opinion: NPR Needs Better Labeling Of Opinion Content On Social Media

June 28, 2018 · 3:36 PM ET

ELIZABETH JENSEN

Update: *Four days after this column was published, NPR changed its policy. According to a July 2 memo from Sara Goo, an NPR managing editor who oversees digital content, to the newsroom, "opinion content published on NPR.org must now include 'Opinion:' as the first word of the headline."*

She wrote: "Our content published on NPR.org is distributed beyond the site to third parties, such as Apple News, Flipboard and station websites that may not be able to display the 'Opinion' label that appears on NPR.org story pages. In addition, social media allow people to share headlines without context or the 'Opinion' label."

The new headline policy, she said, will remain in place until NPR can address those issues.

As public trust in media outlets has been taking a worrying drop in recent years, researchers have been trying to figure out the causes. One element they've zeroed in on: Many Americans have a hard time distinguishing between factual reporting and opinion pieces, as the Pew Research Center has found.

Web Traffic

- Page views
- Visits
- Unique visitors

Team(s) Effort

- Communications
- Digital
- Copy Editors
- Social Media
- Blog
- Video

Questions?

- Access our research and datasets at www.pewresearch.org.
- Follow us: @pewresearch and @facttank
- Email us:
  - Rachel: rweisel@pewresearch.org
  - Scott: skeeter@pewresearch.org