State of the Facts 2020: Elections & Information Trends
Key Findings

State of the Facts Poll 2020: Elections

- 48% pay close attention to information on elections and politics, but they are often unsure where to go for information they trust.
- 40% find it difficult to know if what the candidates in the upcoming presidential election are saying is true or not.
- 51% feel Trump’s campaign messages are rarely or never based in facts, compared to 39% who feel the same about the Biden campaign.
- 11% are having a difficult time finding factual information on how to register to vote, and 16% say the same about how to cast their ballot this year.
- Nearly three-quarters are at least somewhat concerned about foreign interference in the November election.
Key Findings

State of the Facts Poll 2020: Information Trends

- Compared to 2019, more Americans now believe a reliance on different facts is a cause of political division in the country.
- 83% consider the spread of misinformation a major problem.
- Americans are getting information about the government from a variety of sources. Daily use of social media as a source decreased considerably since 2019 (37% 2020 vs. 54% 2019).
- Trust in government information on most topics remains low.
- 59% feel the political beliefs of the president have a lot of influence on the information provided by the government.
- When it comes to forming opinions on an issue, people’s values (78%), data (73%), and personal experience (68%) top the list of important factors.
The State of the Facts
Americans say it is easier for them to determine fact from opinion, find factual information, and know if information is true compared to 2019.

How easy or difficult is it for you to…

Understand the difference between fact and opinion
- 2019: 31% easy, 22% neither, 47% difficult
- 2020: 41% easy, 30% neither, 30% difficult

Find factual information on the subjects you are interested in
- 2019: 44% easy, 24% neither, 32% difficult
- 2020: 54% easy, 26% neither, 21% difficult

Know if information is true or not
- 2019: 50% easy, 20% neither, 29% difficult
- 2020: 65% easy, 21% neither, 14% difficult

Next, these days, how easy or difficult is it for you to …

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts polls conducted October 15-28, 2019, with 1,032 adults and September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.
About two-thirds of Americans get conflicting information from different sources and come across lopsided sources when gathering information.

How often do you feel like you…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: AP-NORC/USAfacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Independents</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get conflicting information from different sources</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come across sources that include only one side</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most Americans say the spread of misinformation is a major problem, but those age 18-44 are less likely to think so.

When it comes to getting information about the government, do you think the spread of misinformation is a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem at all?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults
Compared to 2019, more Americans now believe a reliance on different facts is a cause of political division in the country.

Which comes closest to your view?

![Bar chart showing the percentage of respondents in 2019 and 2020 who believe political division in the United States is more a result of Americans having different beliefs about how to address major problems facing the country or relying on different facts about major problems facing the country.]

Source: AP-NORC/USAFACTS polls conducted October 15-28, 2019, with 1,032 adults and September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.

Which of the following statements comes closest to your view, even if neither is exactly right? Political division in the United States is more a result of Americans …
Facts in the 2020 Election
About half of Americans closely follow elections and politics, with Democrats, Republicans, and older Americans most likely to do so.

How closely do you pay attention to elections and politics?

Next, how closely do you pay attention to information about each of the following topics? [Elections and politics]

Source: AP-NORC/USAfacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults
When it comes to election information, about 4 in 10 find it difficult to know what the candidates are saying or if information is true.

When it comes to information about the upcoming presidential election, how easy or difficult is it for you to…?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Very/somewhat easy</th>
<th>Neither easy nor difficult</th>
<th>Very/somewhat difficult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Know if what candidates are saying is true or not</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know if information is true or not</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find factual information about the candidates and their positions</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand the difference between fact and opinion</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find factual information about how to cast your ballot</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find factual information about how to register to vote</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults
A majority of Americans overall feel President Trump’s campaign messages are not grounded in facts.

How often do you think each of the following are based on factual information?

- Donald Trump’s campaign messages: 51% rarely or never based on factual information
- Political candidates’ campaign messages: 47%
- Joe Biden’s campaign messages: 39%
- Reporting from the media: 36%
- Decisions made by policymakers: 32%
- Voting choices made by Americans: 31%
- Debates between political candidates: 39%

When it comes to information about the upcoming presidential election, how easy or difficult is it for you …

Source: AP-NORC/USAfacts polls conducted October 15-28, 2019, with 1,032 adults and September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults
More Democrats say Joe Biden’s campaign messages are always or often grounded in facts compared to how Republicans feel about Donald Trump.

How often do you think each of the following are based on factual information?

When it comes to information about the upcoming presidential election, how easy or difficult is it for you …

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults
When trying to determine if news about the election is true, an internet search is the most common approach.

**Where do you generally go first to check if news about the election is true or not?**

- An internet search: 35%
- Cable news networks such as CNN, Fox News, or MSNBC: 13%
- National TV news networks such as ABC, CBS, or NBC: 8%
- Public TV or radio such as PBS or NPR: 7%
- A friend or family member: 6%
- Your local TV news networks: 6%
- Social media: 5%
- A candidate’s website: 4%
- An online-only news site: 3%
- A federal government agency: 3%
- A national newspaper: 3%
- YouTube or other online video-sharing platforms: 2%
- Your local newspaper: 2%

*Source: AP-NORC/USAFACTS poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults*
However, few trust information from the federal government on elections. Political independents are least trusting.

How much do you trust information from the federal government about elections and politics?

How much do you trust information from the federal government about the following topics? [Elections and politics]

Source: AP-NORC/USAfacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults
Concerns about foreign government interference in the 2020 election are high.

How concerned are you about foreign governments interfering with the election by...

- Tampering with voting systems or election results:
  - Extremely/very concerned: 44%
  - Somewhat concerned: 24%
  - Not very/not at all concerned: 31%

- Influencing the news and information Americans see:
  - Extremely/very concerned: 45%
  - Somewhat concerned: 29%
  - Not very/not at all concerned: 26%

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults
Democrats are more concerned than Republicans or independents about foreign interference in the election.

How concerned are you about foreign governments interfering with the election by…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent extremely or very concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influencing the news</td>
<td>Overall: 45, Democrats: 64, Independents: 32, Republicans: 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and information Americans see</td>
<td>Overall: 44, Democrats: 61, Independents: 37, Republicans: 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tampering with voting</td>
<td>Overall: 44, Democrats: 61, Independents: 37, Republicans: 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>systems or election</td>
<td>results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults

How concerned are you about foreign governments interfering with the 2020 presidential election by …
How Americans make sense of the information
Americans are most likely to consider information factual if it is based in data and verified by scientists.

How likely are you to consider information factual if…

- It is based in data: 66%
- It is verified by scientists: 63%
- It is verified by an academic institution: 43%
- It comes from a non-partisan source: 40%
- You have seen a photograph or video of it: 34%
- It is verified by federal government agencies: 26%
- It comes from someone you agree with politically: 18%
- It is verified by the media: 18%
- It is verified by a business: 12%
- Your friends and family think that it is true: 11%
- Most people think that it is true: 9%

Source: AP-NORC/USAfacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.
Since last year, more Americans consider information factual when it’s based in data, is verified by scientists, or comes from non-partisan sources.

How likely are you to consider information factual if…

- It is based in data: 2019 - 61%, 2020 - 66%
- It is verified by scientists: 2019 - 55%, 2020 - 63%
- It comes from a non-partisan source: 2019 - 34%, 2020 - 40%
- Most people think that it is true: 2019 - 14%, 2020 - 9%

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults.
Democrats are more likely than Republicans and independents to say verification from scientists, academics, and the media, and being based in data are important.

How likely are you to consider information factual if…

How likely are you to consider information factual if it has each of the following characteristics?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults
Accuracy and completeness of information matter most in assessing factual information.

Thinking about information you consider factual, how important is each of the following factors?

- It is accurate: 85%
- It provides all relevant information: 80%
- It explains the way the information was gathered: 77%
- It provides more than one viewpoint on the subject: 64%
- It does not include opinions: 59%
- It has a high quality presentation: 38%
- It includes information I agree with: 21%

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults
More Americans now think presenting multiple viewpoints and avoiding opinion are important to what they consider factual information.

Thinking about information you consider factual, how important is each of the following factors?

- It provides more than one viewpoint on the subject:
  - 2019: 59%
  - 2020: 64%

- It does not include opinions:
  - 2019: 54%
  - 2020: 59%

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults.
How Americans get information
Americans are getting information about the government from a variety of sources. Daily use of social media decreased considerably since 2019.

How often do you get information about the government from…

- Local TV news: 52% (2020) vs 44% (2019)
- National TV news networks: 50% (2020) vs 42% (2019)
- Cable news networks: 47% (2020) vs 40% (2019)
- Social media: 54% (2020) vs 37% (2019)
- Public TV or radio: 28% (2020) vs 22% (2019)
- The president: 25% (2020) vs 19% (2019)
- Online-only news sites: 19% (2020) vs 16% (2019)
- YouTube or other online video-sharing platforms: 19% (2020) vs 15% (2019)
- Local newspapers: 23% (2020) vs 16% (2019)
- National newspapers: 19% (2020) vs 15% (2019)
- Your state government: 14% (2020) vs 14% (2019)
- Federal government agencies: 12% (2020) vs 10% (2019)
- Businesses: 16% (2020) vs 10% (2019)
- Members of Congress: 14% (2020) vs 9% (2019)

Thinking about some of the ways you get information about the government these days, how often, if at all, do you get information from …

Source: AP-NORC/USAFACTS poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults.
Public, local, and national TV news continue to be the most trusted sources of information about the government, but levels are still low.

How much do you trust information about the government from…

- Public TV or radio: 31% (2020), 27% (2019)
- Local TV news: 27% (2020), 25% (2019)
- National TV news networks: 24% (2020)
- The president: 20% (2020), 19% (2019)
- Cable news networks: 23% (2020)
- Local newspapers: 20% (2020), 19% (2019)
- National newspapers: 19% (2020)
- Federal government agencies: 14% (2019)
- Members of Congress: 10% (2020), 9% (2019)
- Businesses: 8% (2020)
- Online-only news sites: 7% (2020)
- YouTube or other online video-sharing platforms: 7% (2020)
- Social media: 11% (2020), 7% (2019)

Percent a great deal or quite a bit

Regardless of how often you get information from these sources, how much do you trust information from them about the government?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults
Even the most used sources are not highly trusted. Social media in particular is used often but few trust it.

**Comparing usage and trust...**

Thinking about some of the ways you get information about the government these days, how often, if at all, do you get information from …/Regardless of how often you get information from these sources, how much do you trust information from them about the government?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFACTS poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults
More Americans, especially those with a college degree, are using federal government websites to look up information.

Have you used federal government websites like the CDC to look up information?

- 2020 - All Americans: 66%
- 2019 - All Americans: 58%
- 2020 - No college degree: 61%
- 2020 - College degree: 76%

Source: AP-NORC/USAfacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults.
But trust in government information on most topics remains low.

How much do you trust information from the federal government about the following topics?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults.
A majority feel the political beliefs of the president have a lot of influence over the information provided by the government.

How much do the political beliefs of the president influence information provided by the government?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The president</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of Congress</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees in federal agencies</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How much influence do you think the political beliefs of each of the following have over information provided by the federal government?

Source: AP-NORC/USAfacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults.
Values, seeing data on an issue, and experiences are most important for forming opinions on issues.

How important is each of the following in helping you form opinions on an issue?

- Your values: 78% extremely/very important, 16% somewhat important, 6% not too/not at all important.
- Seeing data about the issue: 73% extremely/very important, 21% somewhat important, 6% not too/not at all important.
- Your personal experiences: 68% extremely/very important, 25% somewhat important, 6% not too/not at all important.
- Participating in a conversation about the issues with a person you respect: 48% extremely/very important, 40% somewhat important, 11% not too/not at all important.
- When a public figure you trust expresses a point of view about it: 37% extremely/very important, 44% somewhat important, 18% not too/not at all important.
- Learning about the issue in school: 33% extremely/very important, 41% somewhat important, 25% not too/not at all important.
- Seeing or hearing a story in the news: 28% extremely/very important, 50% somewhat important, 22% not too/not at all important.
- Participating in a discussion about the issue on social media: 11% extremely/very important, 26% somewhat important, 62% not too/not at all important.

Source: AP-NORC/USAfacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.
Americans rely more on facts than values when thinking about COVID-19, climate change, the economy, health care, policing, and immigration.

Which comes closer to how you think about each of the following issues?

- Climate change: 79% rely on facts more than values, 20% rely on values more than facts
- COVID-19: 79% rely on facts more than values, 20% rely on values more than facts
- The economy: 78% rely on facts more than values, 21% rely on values more than facts
- Health care: 70% rely on facts more than values, 30% rely on values more than facts
- Policing and the criminal justice system: 64% rely on facts more than values, 34% rely on values more than facts
- Immigration: 59% rely on facts more than values, 41% rely on values more than facts
- Abortion: 36% rely on facts more than values, 63% rely on values more than facts
- Same-sex marriage: 33% rely on facts more than values, 66% rely on values more than facts

Source: AP-NORC/USAfacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults
Methodology

State of the Facts Poll 2020

- Poll conducted by The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and funded by USAFacts.
- Nationwide poll of 1,043 adults conducted September 15-25 using the AmeriSpeak Panel®.
  - AmeriSpeak is NORC’s probability based panel designed to be representative of all US households.
  - 966 via the web and 77 via telephone
  - Interviews conducted in English and Spanish
- Margin of error +/- 4.1 percentage points
- AAPOR Response Rate 3 of 5.4%