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The 2016 Presidential Campaign – a News Event That’s Hard to Miss

About nine-in-ten Americans learn about the election in a given week, but they are divided over the most helpful type of source

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The 2016 presidential election – a news event that’s hard to miss

About nine-in-ten Americans learn about the election in a given week, but they are divided over the most helpful type of source

News and information about the contentious 2016 presidential election is permeating the American public, according to a new survey of 3,760 U.S. adults by Pew Research Center. About nine-in-ten U.S. adults (91%) learned about the election in the past week from at least one of 11 types of sources asked about, ranging from television to digital to radio to print.

This is true even among younger Americans, as 83% of 18- to 29-year-olds report learning about the presidential election from at least one stream of information, according to the survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016, using Pew Research Center’s American Trends Panel.

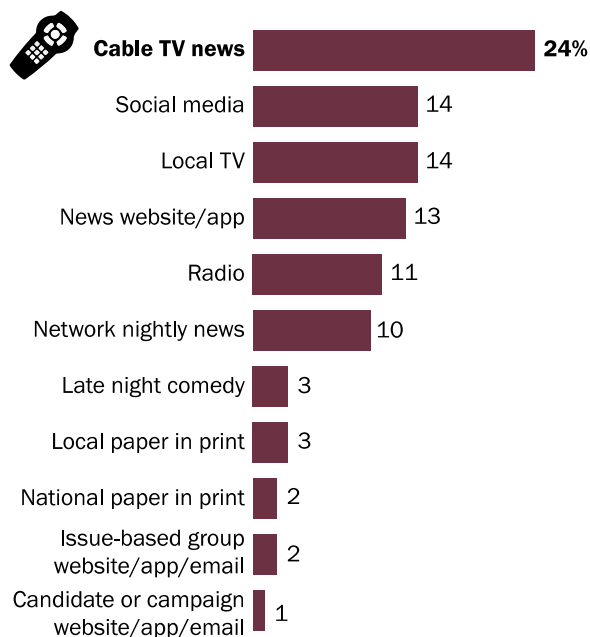
This high level of learning about the 2016 presidential candidates and campaigns is consistent with recent research that has shown [strong interest in this election](#), even more so than at the same point in the previous two presidential elections.¹

Americans are divided, though, in the type of sources they find most helpful for that news and information.

Vast majority of Americans learning about 2016 presidential election; cable news seen as most helpful source type

91% of U.S. adults learned about the 2016 presidential election in the past week

Among those who learned about the election, % who name each source type as **most helpful**



Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016

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¹ Though this is the first time this question has been asked, [a similar question was asked in presidential cycles from 2000 to 2012](#). This similar question provided a series of source types and asked, “How often, if ever, do you learn something about the presidential campaign or the candidates from this source.” The percentage saying “regularly” about at least one source was 83% in January 2000, 75% in January 2004, 81% in December 2007, and 76% in January 2012. Note: source types differed each year.

When asked if they got news and information about the election from 11 different source types, and then asked which they found most helpful, Americans were split: None of the source types asked about in the survey was deemed most helpful by more than a quarter of U.S. adults.

At the top of the list is cable news, named as most helpful by 24% of those who learned about the election in the past week. That is at least 10 percentage points higher than any other source type. [Our past research](#) indicates though, that the 24% is likely divided ideologically in the specific network they watch and trust.

After cable, five source types are named as most helpful by between 10% and 14% of those who got news about the election: Local TV and social networking sites, each at 14%, news websites and apps at 13%, news radio at 11% and national nightly network television news at 10%.

In the bottom tier are five source types named by no more than 3% of Americans who learned about the election. This includes print versions of both local and national newspapers, named by 3% and 2% respectively. It also includes late night comedy shows (3%) as well as the websites, apps or emails of the candidates or campaigns (1%) and of issue-based groups (2%).

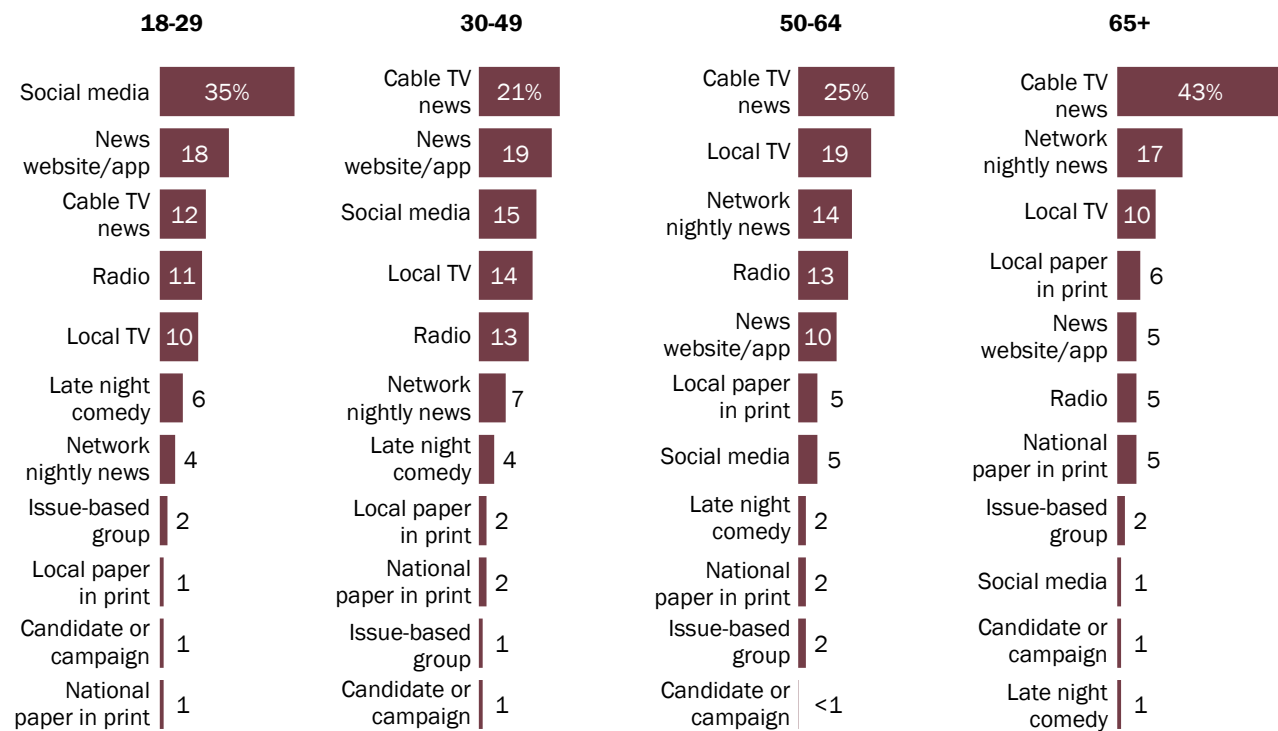
As a platform, television and the Web – and even radio to a lesser degree – strongly appeal to certain parts of the public, while print sits squarely at the bottom. As many people name late night comedy shows as most helpful as do a print newspaper.

Age, education level and political party account for some of the differences here. Cable television's overall popularity is pronounced among those who are 65 and older and also among Republicans, while social media is the clear favorite among the youngest age group, 18- to 29-year-olds.

About four-in-ten (43%) of those 65 or older who learned about the election in the past week say cable television news is most helpful, 26 percentage points higher than any other source type and much higher than any other age cohort. In fact, only 12% of 18- to 29-year-olds who learned about the election say that cable news is the most helpful.

About a third of 18- to 29-year-olds name social media as most helpful type of source for learning about the 2016 presidential election

Among those who learned about the 2016 presidential election in the past week, % who say the most helpful type of source is ...



Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016

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Instead, about a third (35%) of 18- to 29-year-olds name a social networking site as their most helpful source type for learning about the presidential election in the past week. This is about twice that of the next nearest type – news websites and apps (18%), another digital stream of information. Social media drops off sharply for older age groups, with 15% of 30 to 49-year-olds, 5% of 50 to 64-year-olds, and just 1% of those 65 years and older saying the same. This is consistent with our previous research, which has shown that [social media is the most prominent way that Millennials get political news](#), more so than any other generation.

The data also reveal the weight network television news and local TV news still carry among those 50 or older. Radio, though, shows consistent appeal across most age groups. Between 11% and 13% of those ages 18-29, 30-49 and 50-64 name radio as most helpful (a figure that falls to 5% among those 65+).

The area of difference that stands out most prominently along party lines is cable news. Republicans are almost twice as likely to say cable news is the most helpful than are Democrats (34% vs. 19%, and 24% among independents). Democrats are slightly more likely to name local TV news, but the gap is much smaller (18%, compared with 12% for both Republicans and independents).

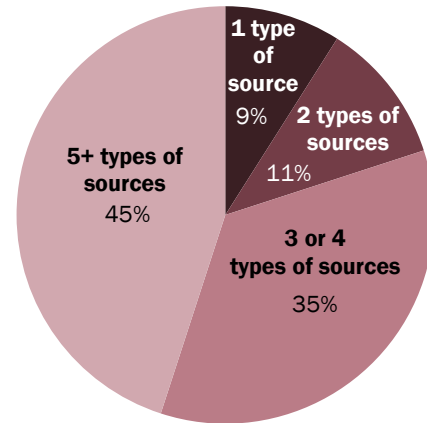
Finally, those with a college degree are more likely than those with some college and those with a high school diploma or less to name radio, national papers in print, and news websites or apps as the most helpful type of source. Those who do not have a college degree are tied more closely to a preference for cable and local TV news.

Beyond what is most helpful, the majority of the public learns about the election from several types of sources

Even as U.S. adults find one type of source most helpful, the majority still get election news in a given week from multiple different source types. Indeed, of those who learned about the presidential election in the past week, just 9% learned from just one stream of information. In fact, almost half (45%) learned from five or more information streams.

Almost half of those who learn about the presidential election get news & information from five or more source types

Among those who learned about the 2016 presidential election in the past week, % who learned from ...



Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016

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Television sources again rise to the top. About three-quarters of U.S. adults (78%) learned about the election from at least one of the four TV-based source types asked about. Local TV and cable news reach the greatest percentages overall (57% and 54% respectively).

This was followed not by another traditional platform, but instead by digital. About two-thirds (65%) of U.S. adults learned about the 2016 election in the past week from digital source types, which includes social networking sites and news websites, as well as digital communication from issue-based groups and the candidates.

Coming in last: print versions of newspapers. Only about one-in-three (36%) U.S. adults learned about the campaign in the past week from either a local or national newspaper in print. The survey specifically asked about the print version of the paper and does not include the representation of newspapers in the digital space (48% of Americans got election news and information from news websites or apps in past week). This is an important distinction, as newspaper properties make up [three of the top 10 digital news entities](#), according to comScore data compiled for our [annual State of the News Media report](#). But it does speak to the precipitous decline of print as a mode of news – even as [print-only consumers remain a key part of newspapers' audiences](#).

TV most common for learning about the presidential election

% of U.S. adults who learned about the 2016 presidential election in the past week from ...

	%
Television	78
Local TV news	57
Cable TV news	54
National nightly network TV news	49
Late night comedy shows	25
Digital	65
News websites or apps	48
Social networking site	44
Issue-based group websites, apps or emails	23
Candidate or campaign group websites, apps or emails	20
Radio	44
Print newspaper	36
Local daily newspaper in print	29
National newspapers in print	23

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016

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In fact, more Americans cite radio as a source of election information in the past week (44%) than cite a print newspaper. And U.S. adults are roughly as likely to learn about the presidential election from an issue-based group's website, app, or email (23%) or from late night comedy shows (25%) as from a national print newspaper (23%). And they are only slightly more likely to learn from their local print paper (29%).

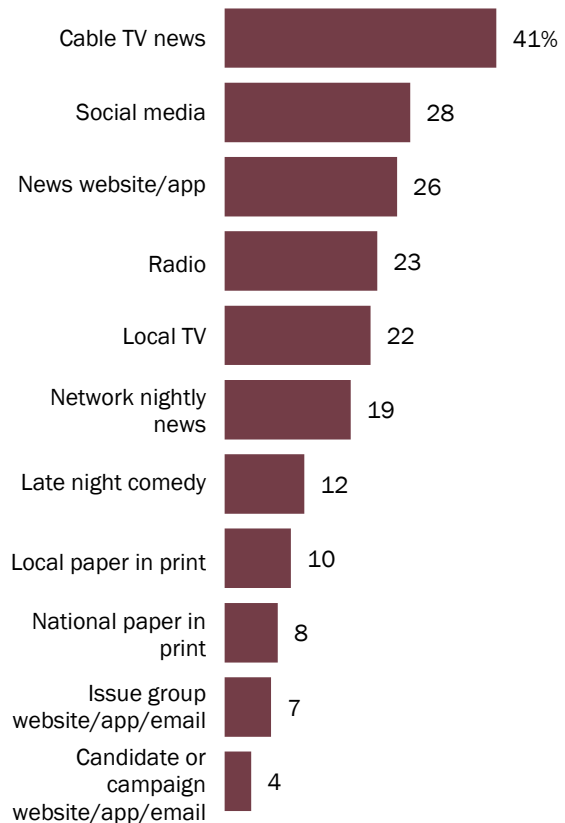
While few Americans say issue-based groups or the campaigns themselves are most helpful, their presence as a direct source of information in the digital space comes through in these findings. At least two-in-ten U.S. adults learn about the presidential election directly from the websites, apps or emails of campaign and issue-based groups.

Level of usage differed notably by political party identification for late night comedy shows. They are a source for three-in-ten Democrats, but only 16% of Republicans and a quarter of independents. About a third of those ages 18-29 (34%) learned about the campaigns and candidates from late night comedy shows, higher than any other age group.

Another way to understand the dynamics of these different types of sources is by examining the portion of adults who learn from a type of source who also find that source most helpful. While local and cable TV news are cited at roughly the same rates overall, for example, cable news is far more likely to be named as the *most helpful* source. About four-in-ten (41%) U.S. adults who say they learned about the election from cable TV news in the past week name it as the most helpful type of source, while this is true of only 22% of those who got news about the presidential election from local TV. Local TV news, then, may be a common, but not crucial source for viewers. (This mirrors past findings that [local TV news is the single most common source of political information in the U.S.](#))

More of those who learned from cable news find it most helpful than users of any other type of source

Of those who learned about the 2016 presidential election from each type of source in the past week, % who said it was also the most helpful



Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016

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Sharing about the election on social networking sites is much less common than getting news there

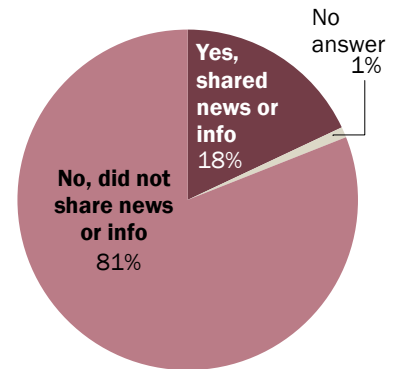
As we have seen in the past, getting news from social media is far more common than sharing news on social media. About half (51%) of social networking users learned about the presidential election from these sites. But only about one-in-five social networking users (18%) actually share election-related information on social media, whether by posting about it or by replying to or commenting on a post. That amounts to 15% of U.S. adults overall.

Those who learn from more source types are also more likely to share news and information, as are those for whom social media was most helpful for learning about the election. Almost three-in-ten of social media users who learn from 5 or more source types share something related to the presidential election on social media (29%), compared with no more than 12% of those who learned from fewer source types. And a third of those who name social media as their most helpful source (33%) share news and information about the election on these sites. Comparatively, this is true of only 20% of those who name cable news as their most helpful source type and a mere 8% who name local TV news.

Finally, while [those with higher incomes are more likely to use social networking sites in general](#), it is lower income users who are more likely to share election-related content: About 20% of social networking users with household incomes under \$75,000, compared with 14% of those with incomes of \$75,000 or more.

Few share news or info about the election on social networking sites

% of social networking users who share news or information about the election on a social media site



Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016

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Though it is common to learn about the election on at least one social networking site, Facebook is far and away the site where that is most likely to happen. This is not surprising, given that [Facebook is the social networking site used by the most Americans](#), and is [an increasingly common news destination, especially for Millennials](#). As we have seen before, there is also evidence that getting news from multiple social networking platforms is common: 41% of those who learn about the election on social media get election information from more than one social networking site.

Beyond Facebook, small portions of the public learn about the elections on social media

% of U.S. adults who learned about the 2016 presidential election in the past week from ...

	%
Facebook	37
YouTube	11
Twitter	9
Google Plus	6
reddit	3
Instagram	3
Snapchat	2
LinkedIn	2
Tumblr	1
Vine	1

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016

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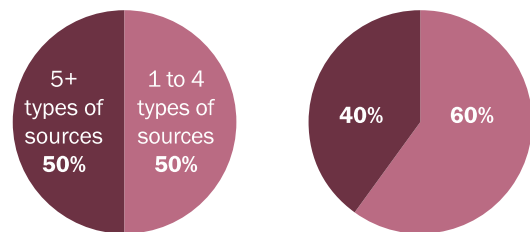
Likely primary voters tend to have wider mix of source types

There are a number of ways that the election news habits of Americans who are most likely to participate in the upcoming presidential primaries and caucuses stand apart from those who are less likely to participate.

Overall, those who say they are very likely to participate in their state's primary or caucus are more likely to learn about the election from multiple source types. Half of those who said they are very likely to participate learned from five or more source types, compared with 40% of those who are less likely to participate.

Those most likely to be primary voters learn from more types of sources and are more likely to share on social media

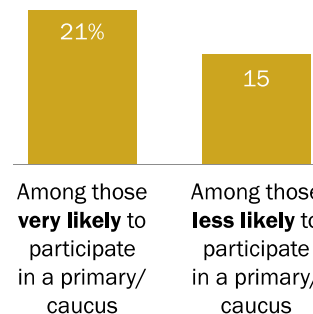
Among those who learned about the 2016 presidential election in the past week, % who got news and information from ...



Among those **very likely** to participate in a primary/caucus

Among those **less likely** to participate in a primary/caucus

% of social networking site users who shared election information in the past week



Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016

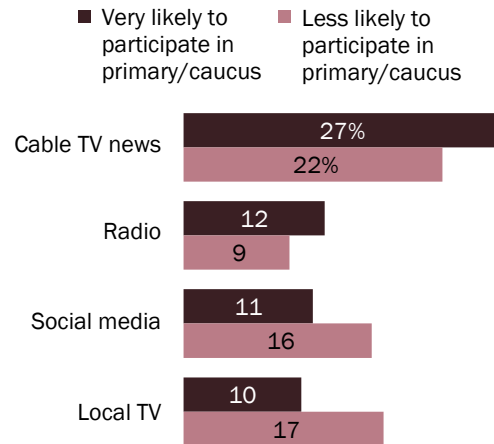
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Within this mix of information streams, there are also differences between the two groups in the source types deemed most helpful. While cable ranks first among both groups, those who are very likely to participate show somewhat greater tendency to name both cable (27% vs. 22%) and radio (12% vs. 9%) as most helpful. Conversely, they have a lower tendency to name local TV news (10% vs. 17%) and social media (11% vs. 16%) as most helpful than those who are less likely to participate in their state's primary or caucus.

Even though those who say they are very likely to participate in their state's primary or caucus are less likely to name social media as their most helpful source type, they seem to be more engaged in that space: 21% share information about the election on social media, through original posts or replies to content posted by others, compared with 15% of those less likely to participate.

Cable TV is a more prominent source type for likely primary voters

Among those who learned about the 2016 presidential election in the past week, % who say the most helpful source type is ...



Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016

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Acknowledgments

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals.

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Jeff Gottfried, *Research Associate*

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Methodology

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults living in households. Respondents who self-identify as internet users and who provided an email address participate in the panel via monthly self-administered Web surveys, and those who do not use the internet or decline to provide an email address participate via the mail. The panel is being managed by Abt SRBI.

Data in this report are drawn from the early respondents to the January 2016 wave of the panel, which began fieldwork on Jan. 12, 2016. The 3,760 respondents consisted of 3,661 Web panelists who had completed the survey by January 27 and 99 mail panelists whose responses had been received by January 22. Panelists who have access to the internet but take surveys by mail were not sampled in this wave (i.e. mail respondents to this wave are all non-Internet users). The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 3,760 respondents is plus or minus 2.3 percentage points.

Members of the American Trends Panel were recruited from two large, national landline and cellphone random digit dial (RDD) surveys conducted in English and Spanish. At the end of each survey, respondents were invited to join the panel. The first group of panelists was recruited from the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey, conducted Jan. 23 to March 16th, 2014. Of the 10,013 adults interviewed, 9,809 were invited to take part in the panel and a total of 5,338 agreed to participate.² The second group of panelists was recruited from the 2015 Survey on Government, conducted Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015. Of the 6,004 adults interviewed, all were invited to join the panel, and 2,976 agreed to participate.³

Participating panelists provided either a mailing address or an email address to which a welcome packet, a monetary incentive and future survey invitations could be sent. Panelists also receive a small monetary incentive after participating in each wave of the survey.

The ATP data were weighted in a multi-step process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents' original survey selection probability and the fact that in 2014 some panelists were subsampled for invitation to the panel. Next, an adjustment was made for the fact that the

² When data collection for the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey began, non-internet users were subsampled at a rate of 25%, but a decision was made shortly thereafter to invite all non-internet users to join. In total, 83% of non-internet users were invited to join the panel.

³ Respondents to the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey who indicated that they are internet users but refused to provide an email address were initially permitted to participate in the American Trends Panel by mail, but were no longer permitted to join the panel after February 6, 2014. Internet users from the 2015 Survey on Government who refused to provide an email address were not permitted to join the panel.

propensity to join the panel and remain an active panelist varied across different groups in the sample. The final step in the weighting uses an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, and Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014 American Community Survey. Population density is weighted to match the 2010 U.S. Decennial Census. Telephone service is weighted to estimates of telephone coverage for 2016 that were projected from the January-June 2015 National Health Interview Survey. It also adjusts for party affiliation using an average of the three most recent Pew Research Center general public telephone surveys, and for internet use using as a parameter measure from the 2015 Survey on Government. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish, but the Hispanic sample in the American Trends Panel is predominantly native born and English speaking.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	3,760	2.3%
Learned from at least one source type	3,557	2.3%

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The Web component of the January 2016 wave had a response rate of 58.1% (3,661 responses among 6,301 Web-based individuals in the panel); the mail component had a response rate of 20.9% (99 responses among 474 non-Internet users in the panel). Taking account of the combined, weighted response rate for the recruitment surveys (10.0%) and attrition from panel members who were removed at their request or for inactivity, the cumulative response rate for the January 2016 ATP wave is 2.5%.⁴

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⁴ Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves are removed from the panel. These cases are counted in the denominator of cumulative response rates.

Appendix A: Detailed tables

Number of source types for election news and information, by demographics

Among those who learned about the 2016 presidential election in the past week, % who learned from each number of source types ...

	1 Source Type %	2 Source Types %	3-4 Source Types %	5-11 Source Types %
Total	9	11	35	45
Male	7	12	34	47
Female	10	11	36	44
18-29	15	13	26	46
30-49	8	13	35	43
50-64	7	11	37	45
65+	5	7	39	48
College grad	8	11	35	47
Some college	9	12	33	45
High school or less	9	11	36	44
Republicans	8	13	32	47
Democrats	8	9	35	49
Independents	8	10	37	44
White non-Hispanic	8	11	36	44
Black non-Hispanic	6	13	32	49
Hispanic	9	11	32	48

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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Type of sources turned to for election news and information, by demographics

% who learned about the 2016 presidential election in the past week from ...

	Local TV news	Cable TV news	Network news	News websites or apps	Radio	Social media	Local print newspaper	Late night comedy	National print newspapers	Issue-based groups	Candidates or campaigns
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	57	54	49	48	44	44	29	25	23	23	20
Male	56	58	48	55	51	47	29	25	25	25	21
Female	58	51	49	41	39	41	28	25	22	22	19
18-29	35	41	33	53	38	61	17	34	19	28	23
30-49	54	51	40	57	47	51	20	25	17	24	20
50-64	67	59	58	43	51	35	34	22	27	21	17
65+	74	72	70	30	38	23	51	18	34	18	18
College grad	45	51	42	64	54	47	29	25	26	27	22
Some college	57	53	48	48	45	49	27	26	21	22	20
High school or less	65	59	55	35	36	38	30	24	23	21	17
Republicans	58	62	50	49	46	41	31	16	20	22	21
Democrats	61	54	53	47	44	44	33	30	28	26	21
Independents	57	56	49	49	46	48	26	25	22	23	20
White, non-Hispanic	55	53	49	48	46	42	28	23	22	22	18
Black, non-Hispanic	69	60	53	40	37	47	36	28	29	26	21
Hispanic	60	56	50	43	43	48	28	31	21	23	24

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016

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Most helpful source type by demographics

% who learned the most about the 2016 presidential election in the past week from...

	Cable TV news	Social media	Local TV news	News websites	Radio news	Network TV news	Late night comedy	Local paper	National paper	Issue- based groups	Candidates or campaigns	No ans.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	24	14	14	13	11	10	3	3	2	2	1	3
Male	24	16	10	17	12	9	3	3	2	2	1	3
Female	24	12	18	10	10	11	4	4	2	2	1	3
18-29	12	35	10	18	11	4	6	1	1	2	1	*
30-49	21	15	14	19	13	7	4	2	2	1	1	1
50-64	25	5	19	10	13	14	2	5	2	2	*	4
65+	43	1	10	5	5	17	1	6	5	2	1	6
College grad	21	12	5	21	16	10	3	3	4	3	1	1
Some college	23	17	13	13	11	10	4	2	2	2	1	2
High school or less	28	12	21	8	7	10	3	4	*	1	1	5
Republicans	34	9	12	13	11	10	1	3	2	2	1	2
Democrats	19	13	18	13	9	12	4	3	3	1	1	5
Independents	24	14	12	14	12	10	4	3	2	2	1	2
White non- Hispanic	25	12	10	14	13	11	4	3	2	2	1	3
Black non- Hispanic	27	19	23	9	4	7	2	4	*	1	1	3
Hispanic	18	15	23	13	6	11	3	1	2	2	1	3

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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Appendix B: Topline Questionnaire

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER
AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL WAVE 14 EARLY RELEASE
TOPLINE
JANUARY 12-27, 2016
N=3,760**

SNS HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK IF AT LEAST YES TO 1 ITEM SNSA-J; SHOW ONLY THOSE SITES USED (SNSA-J=1):

SNSELECT In the past week, did you learn something about the presidential campaign or candidates from each of the following sites?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No answer</u>
BASED ON FACEBOOK USERS			
a. Facebook Jan. 12-27, 2016 [N=2,706]	52	48	*
BASED ON TWITTER USERS			
b. Twitter Jan. 12-27, 2016 [N=754]	43	57	1
BASED ON GOOGLE PLUS USERS			
c. Google Plus Jan. 12-27, 2016 [N=744]	25	73	1
BASED ON LINKEDIN USERS			
d. LinkedIn Jan. 12-27, 2016 [N=1,149]	7	92	*
BASED ON INSTAGRAM USERS			
e. Instagram Jan. 12-27, 2016 [N=751]	13	85	2
BASED ON VINE USERS			
f. Vine Jan. 12-27, 2016 [N=98]	18	82	0
BASED ON TUMBLR USERS			
g. Tumblr Jan. 12-27, 2016 [N=160]	26	73	1
BASED ON YOUTUBE USERS			
h. YouTube Jan. 12-27, 2016 [N=2,127]	19	80	1
BASED ON REDDIT USERS			
i. reddit Jan. 12-27, 2016 [N=243]	45	55	*
BASED ON SNAPCHAT USERS			
j. Snapchat Jan. 12-27, 2016 [N=341]	17	82	*

ASK ALL:

PLATFORMELECT

Now, in the past week did you learn something about the presidential campaign or candidates from each of the following sources? **[RANDOMIZE]**

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No answer</u>
a. Cable television news (such as CNN, the Fox News cable channel or MSNBC) Jan. 12-27, 2016	54	45	1
b. Local TV news Jan. 12-27, 2016	57	42	1
c. National nightly network television news Jan. 12-27, 2016	49	50	1
d. News websites or apps Jan. 12-27, 2016	48	43	1
e. Your local daily newspaper in print Jan. 12-27, 2016	29	70	1
f. News on the radio Jan. 12-27, 2016	44	54	2
g. National newspapers in print Jan. 12-27, 2016	23	76	1
h. Late night comedy shows Jan. 12-27, 2016	25	74	1
i. Candidate or campaign websites, apps or emails Jan. 12-27, 2016	20	71	1
j. Issue-based group websites, apps or emails Jan. 12-27, 2016	23	67	1

ASK IF ANSWERED YES TO 2 OR MORE SITES AND/OR SOURCES FROM Q3/Q4 (Q3A-J/Q4A-J=1):

LEARNSELECTTOP Of all the places you learned something about the presidential campaign or candidates in the past week, which one would you say has been most helpful to you?

Jan. 12-27,
2016

Based on
those who
learned from
at least one
source
[N=3,557]

24	Cable television news (such as CNN, the Fox News cable channel or MSNBC)
14	Local TV news
13	News websites or apps
11	News on the radio
10	National nightly network television news
9	Facebook
3	Late night comedy shows
3	Your local daily newspaper in print
2	National newspapers in print
2	Issue-based group websites, apps or emails
1	Twitter
1	reddit
1	YouTube
1	Candidate or campaign websites, apps or emails
1	Snapchat
*	Google Plus
*	Tumblr
*	Instagram
*	Vine
0	LinkedIn
3	No answer

ASK IF AT LEAST YES TO 1 ITEM FROM Q1A-K [N=843]:

ELECTPOST In the past week, did you yourself use a social networking site to share news or information about the presidential campaign or candidates, such as by posting or replying to or commenting on a post?

Jan. 12-27,
2016

Based on SNS
users
[N=3361]

18	Yes
81	No
1	No answer