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# Cell Phones, Social Media and Campaign 2014

*28% of registered voters use their cell phone to follow political news, and 16% follow political figures on social media*

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION  
ON THIS REPORT:**

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## Key Findings

Cell phones and social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are playing an increasingly prominent role in how voters get political information and follow election news, according to a new national survey by the Pew Research Center.

The proportion of Americans who use their cell phones to track political news or campaign coverage has doubled compared with the most recent midterm election: 28% of registered voters have used their cell phone in this way during the 2014 campaign, up from 13% in 2010. Further, the number of Americans who follow candidates or other political figures on social media has also risen sharply: 16% of registered voters now do this, up from 6% in 2010.

Voters of all ages are more likely to take part in these behaviors than in the previous midterm race, but that growth has been especially pronounced among 30-49 year olds. Some 40% of voters ages 30-49 have used their cell phone to follow this year's election campaign (up from 15% in 2010) and 21% follow political figures on social media (up from just 6% in 2010). Voters in this age group now take part in each of these behaviors at rates nearly identical to 18-29 year olds.

Participation in the digital campaign does not have a clear partisan slant. Republicans and Democrats engage in each of these behaviors at similar rates. At the same time, when asked about some reasons why they might follow political figures on social media, Republicans and Republican-leaning independents express a greater desire to be the first to find out about breaking political news, and to say that they use social media to get political information that has not passed through the traditional media "filter." Voters from both parties place a similar emphasis on the deeper connections that social media allows them to form with the candidates they support.

Digital politics also goes hand in hand with other types of campaign engagement. In particular, the 16% of registered voters who follow political figures on social media participate in various traditional campaign activities at high rates—from volunteering and donating money, to encouraging others to get out and support their preferred candidates and causes.

This report is based on a national survey conducted October 15-20 among 2,003 adults (including 1,494 registered voters). Among the main findings:

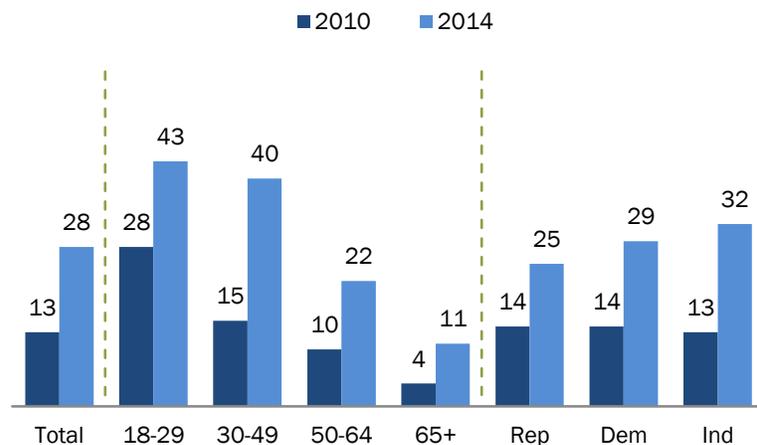
## One quarter of registered voters now get political news on their cell phones

As [smartphone ownership](#) has increased dramatically in recent years, more and more Americans are using their mobile devices to keep tabs on political events. Some 28% of registered voters have used their cell phone this year to keep up with news relating to the election or political events, which represents a two-fold increase compared with the most recent midterm election cycle. In a survey conducted at the end of the 2010 election campaign, just 13% of registered voters said that they had used their cell phones to keep up with election coverage.

Registered voters of both parties are equally likely to use their phones to keep up with election news, as 25% of Republicans and 29% of Democrats report doing so this campaign season. And while voters of all ages are more likely to use their cell phones for political and election news than was the case during the 2010 midterms, this increase has been especially pronounced among voters in their 30s and 40s. Some 40% of registered voters ages 30-49 have used their cell phones to track election coverage this year, up from just 15% who did so during the previous midterm campaign.

### More voters are using their cell phones to keep up with election news, large increase among 30-49 year olds

*% of registered voters who use their cell phone to keep up with news related to the election or politics*



Survey conducted Oct. 15-20, 2014. Based on registered voters.

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These “mobile election news consumers” are more active than other Americans when it comes to certain campaign activities, although in other ways they are similar to the voter pool as a whole. They are more likely to have encouraged people they know to vote or support a particular candidate (58% have done this, compared with 37% of registered voters who do not get campaign news on their cell phone) and to have attended a campaign event (11% vs. 6%). On the other hand, they are no more likely than other voters to make campaign contributions, or to volunteer their time to help a candidate or campaign.

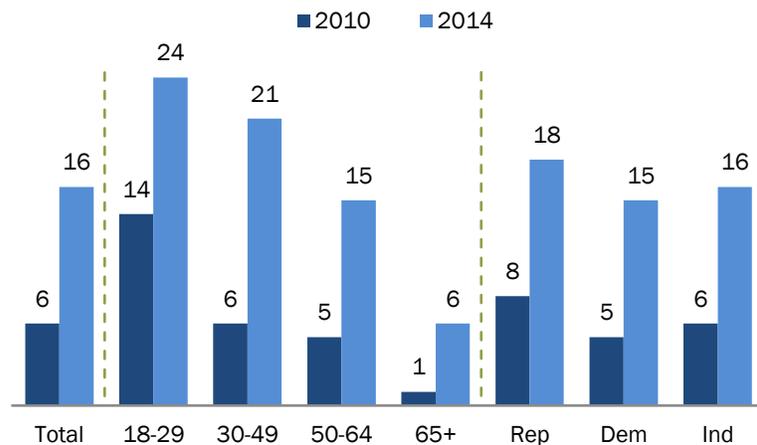
## More than twice as many Americans are following political candidates on social media as was the case during the 2010 midterms

A substantial majority of Americans [use social networking sites](#) like Facebook and Twitter, and 16% of registered voters now use these sites to follow candidates for office, political parties, or elected officials. This represents a more than two-fold increase from the previous midterm election in 2010, when just 6% of registered voters followed political candidates or groups on social media.<sup>1</sup>

Supporters of both parties are equally likely to follow political figures on social media, with 18% of Republicans and 15% of Democrats doing so. And as was the case with mobile political activity, voters in their 30s and 40s have experienced a particularly substantial increase in this behavior. Some 21% of voters ages 30-49 follow political figures on social media, a more than three-fold increase from the previous midterm cycle.

### More voters following political figures on social media, large increases among 30-49 and 50-64 year olds

*% of registered voters who follow candidates for office, political parties, or elected officials on social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter*



Survey conducted Oct. 15-20, 2014. Based on registered voters.

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Americans who follow political figures on social media also

tend to be highly engaged with various aspects of the election campaign. Among other things, they are more likely than voters who do not follow political figures via social media to volunteer their time to a candidate or campaign (11% vs. 4%); to make a campaign contribution (21% vs. 11%); to attend a campaign event (13% vs. 6%); and to encourage their friends to support a candidate or issue at the polls (62% vs. 39%). They are also more likely to say that they regularly follow

<sup>1</sup> Our questions about following candidates on social media have changed slightly over time. In 2010, we asked two separate questions: "Did you sign up on a social networking site as a 'friend' of a candidate, or a group involved in the campaign such as a political party or interest group?" and "Did you follow a candidate, or a group involved in the campaign such as a political party or interest group on Twitter?". In 2014, we asked a single question: "Do you currently follow any candidates for office, political parties, or elected officials on social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter?"

government and public affairs, and to say that they have given quite a lot of thought to this year's elections.

### **Increasing numbers of Americans are following political figures on social media in order to be first to hear about the political news of the day**

As political behavior on social media has grown more prevalent, the reasons voters give for following political figures in these spaces have also shifted somewhat compared with the previous midterm election. When presented with a list of reasons why they might choose to follow political candidates or groups on social media:

- 41% say that *finding out about political news before other people do* is a “major reason” why they follow political figures on social media. In 2010, just 22% said that this was a major reason.
- 35% say that *feeling more personally connected to political candidates or groups* is a “major reason” why they follow political figures on social media. This is unchanged from the 36% who cited this as a major factor in 2010.
- 26% say that *getting more reliable information than what is available from traditional news organizations* is a “major reason” why they follow political figures on social media. This is also statistically indistinguishable from the 21% who cited this as a major factor in 2010.

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#### **Reasons for following political figures on social media**

	2010	2014	Change
<i>Helps me find out about political news before others do</i>			
Major reason	22	41	+19
Minor reason	43	28	-15
Not a reason	34	30	-4
<i>Makes me feel more personally connected to the political candidates or groups I follow</i>			
Major reason	36	35	-1
Minor reason	35	36	+1
Not a reason	30	28	-2
<i>The information I get on these sites is more reliable than the information I get from traditional news organizations</i>			
Major reason	21	26	+5
Minor reason	32	32	0
Not a reason	47	40	-7

Survey conducted Oct. 15-20, 2014. Based on registered voters who follow candidates for office, political parties, or elected officials on social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter.

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When it comes to political affiliation, Republican and Republican-leaning independents tend to place a greater emphasis on finding out about news quickly and on getting what they perceive as being more reliable information than is available from traditional news organizations. Some 50% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents who follow political figures on social media

say that getting news quickly is a “major reason” for doing so (compared with 35% of Democratic and Democratic-leaning independents), while 33% say that getting more reliable information than what is available from the traditional news media is a “major reason” (compared with 20% of Democrats). Republicans and Democrats are equally likely to say that feeling more personally connected to the candidates and groups that they support is a “major reason” for following those figures on social media.

Along with these shifts in the reasons people cite for following political figures on social media, there has also been a slight change in the way they think about the relevance of political content. Some 78% of Americans who follow political figures on social media say that the content posted by those figures is mostly interesting and relevant, while 20% say that the content is mostly *uninteresting* and *not* relevant to them. When we asked this question during the 2010 campaign, 67% said that this information was interesting and relevant, while 32% said that it was not interesting or relevant.

## About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted October 15-20, 2014 among a national sample of 2,003 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (802 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 1,201 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 677 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity and region to parameters from the 2012 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status (landline only, cell phone only, or both landline and cell phone), based on extrapolations from the 2013 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting.

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:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus...</b>
Total Sample	2,003	2.5 percentage points
Registered voters	1,494	2.9 percentage points
Republican RVs	446	5.4 percentage points
Democratic RVs	522	4.9 percentage points
Independent RVs	481	5.2 percentage points
Follow political figures on social media	223	7.6 percentage points

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.

## Survey questions

Q.34 Now, here is a list of different ways that people can get involved in the election campaigns. So far THIS year, have you... [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE ITEMS a-d], or not?

### BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS [N=1,494]

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>
a. Volunteered your time to help one of the candidates or campaigns			
Oct 15-20, 2014	5	95	0
Oct 13-18, 2010	7	93	*
Late October, 2006 <sup>2</sup>	5	95	*
b. Contributed money to any of the candidates or campaigns			
Oct 15-20, 2014	13	87	*
Oct 13-18, 2010	14	86	*
Late October, 2006 <sup>3</sup>	10	90	*
c. Attended a campaign event			
Oct 15-20, 2014	7	93	*
Oct 13-18, 2010	11	89	0
d. Used your cell phone to keep up with news related to the election or politics			
Oct 15-20, 2014	28	71	*
Nov 3-24, 2010 <sup>4</sup>	13	87	*

<sup>2</sup> In late October, 2006 question was not part of a list and was worded: "Have you, yourself, volunteered any of your time to help one of the election campaigns this fall or not?"

<sup>3</sup> In late October, 2006 question was not part of a list and was worded: "Have you, yourself, contributed money to a campaign in support of a candidate in the elections this fall, or not?"

<sup>4</sup> The Pew Research Center's Internet Project's Post-Election Tracking Survey from 2010 introduced this question as a list with the following stem: "We're interested in how people used their cell phones during the recent political campaign, in addition to talking to others on your phone. Again thinking about just your cell phone, in the months leading up to the election, did you use your cell phone to [*keep up with news related to the election or politics*], or did you not do this?" Question in 2010 was asked of cell phone owners, results have been recalculated based on all registered voters.

**Q.34 continued...**

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>
e. Encouraged people you know to vote this fall or support a particular candidate, party, or issue			
Oct 15-20, 2014	43	56	1

Q.37 Do you currently follow any candidates for office, political parties, or elected officials on social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter?

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS [N=1,494]:**

16	Yes
84	No
*	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

Q.38 People follow political candidates or organizations on social networking sites for a number of reasons. Please tell me if each of the following is a MAJOR reason why you follow political candidates or organizations on these sites, a MINOR reason, or not a reason at all for you. (First/Next) [INSERT; RANDOMIZE] [READ FOR FIRST ITEM AND AS NECESSARY: ... is this a MAJOR reason why you follow political candidates or organizations on social networking sites, a MINOR reason, or not a reason at all for you?]

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS WHO FOLLOW A CANDIDATE OR GROUP ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE [N=223]:**

	<u>Major Reason</u>	<u>Minor Reason</u>	<u>Not a Reason</u>	<u>(VOL.) DK/Ref</u>
a. It helps me find out about political news before other people do				
Oct 15-20, 2014	41	28	30	1
Nov 3-24, 2010	22	43	34	*

Q.38 continued...

		Major	Minor	Not a	(VOL.)
		<u>Reason</u>	<u>Reason</u>	<u>Reason</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>
b.	It makes me feel more personally connected to the political candidates or groups that I follow				
	Oct 15-20, 2014	35	36	28	*
	Nov 3-24, 2010	36	35	30	0
c.	The information I get on these sites is more reliable than the information I get from traditional news organizations				
	Oct 15-20, 2014	26	32	40	2
	Nov 3-24, 2010	21	32	47	0

Q.39 Thinking about the information that is posted by the political candidates or groups you follow, would you say that most of it is interesting and relevant to you, or is most of it irrelevant and uninteresting?

**BASED ON REGISTERED VOTERS WHO FOLLOW A CANDIDATE OR GROUP ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE [N=223]:**

	Oct 15-20	Nov 3-24
	<u>2014</u>	<u>2010</u>
78	Mostly interesting and relevant	67
20	Mostly uninteresting and irrelevant	32
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	2