

Changing social media profile pictures: Methodology and topline

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 January wave of the panel, conducted Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016, among 4,654 respondents (4,339 by web and 315 by mail). The January wave of the panel was conducted by Pew Research Center in association with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. 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 4,654 respondents is plus or minus 2 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 16, 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.¹ 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.²

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 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, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the U.S.

¹ 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.

² 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.

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 a 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	4,654	2.0%
Users of any SNS	4,002	2.1%
Those who changed their profile picture	686	5.1%

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 wave had a response rate of 69% (4,339 responses among 6,301 web-based individuals in the panel); the mail component had a response rate of 67% (315 responses among 474 non-web individuals 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 ATP wave is 2.9%³.

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³ 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.

2016 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL
WAVE 14 January
TOPLINE
Jan. 12–Feb. 8, 2016
TOTAL N=4,654
WEB RESPONDENTS N=4,339
MAIL RESPONDENTS N=315¹

ASK IF AT LEAST YES TO 1 ITEM SNS (SNSA-K=1):

SNS2g Now, thinking specifically about posts and activities on social media related to politics, do you ever use social networking sites to...Change your profile picture to draw attention to an issue or event

Jan 12-Feb 8	
2016	
N=4,002	
18	Yes
81	No
1	No answer

ASK IF CHANGED PICTURE (SNS2g=1):

SNSPICTURE What issues or events did you change your profile picture for?

Jan 12-Feb 8	
<u>2016</u>	
N=686	
42	Paris attacks
21	LGBT rights
16	Other social/policy issues
7	Disease awareness/research
7	Other terrorist attacks/general terrorism
6	Elections
5	Other tragedies
4	Sports/Entertainment/Celebrities
4	Black Lives Matter/Police Brutality
3	Other international crises and conflicts
1	Politics/Political events
3	General patriotism
2	Family/Personal
1	Local events
6	Other
15	NET Refused/Don't Know

¹ Question wording in this topline is that from the web version of the survey. Question wording and format was adapted for the paper questionnaire delivered by mail; this questionnaire is available on request. All questions asked in both modes unless noted.