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Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News

The politically aware, digitally savvy and those more trusting of the news media fare better; Republicans and Democrats both influenced by political appeal of statements

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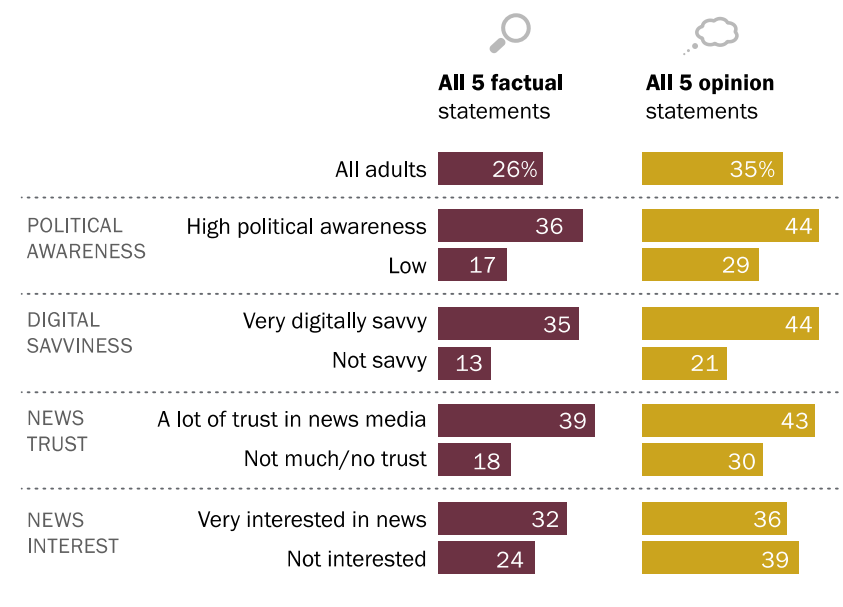
In today's fast-paced and complex information environment, news consumers must make rapid-fire judgments about how to internalize news-related statements – statements that often come in snippets and through pathways that provide little context. A new Pew Research Center survey of 5,035 U.S. adults examines a basic step in that process: whether members of the public can recognize news as factual – something that's capable of being proved or disproved by objective evidence – or as an opinion that reflects the beliefs and values of whoever expressed it.

The findings from the survey, conducted between Feb. 22 and March 8, 2018, reveal that even this basic task presents a challenge. The main portion of the study, which measured the public's ability to distinguish between five factual statements and five opinion statements, found that a majority of Americans correctly identified at least three of the five statements in each set. But this result is only a little better than random guesses. Far fewer Americans got all five correct, and

Political awareness, digital savviness and trust in the media all play large roles in the ability to distinguish between factual and opinion news statements

% of U.S. adults who correctly classified ...
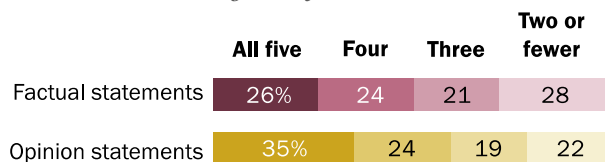
	All 5 factual statements	All 5 opinion statements
All adults	26%	35%
POLITICAL AWARENESS High political awareness	36	44
Low	17	29
DIGITAL SAVVINESS Very digitally savvy	35	44
Not savvy	13	21
NEWS TRUST A lot of trust in news media	39	43
Not much/no trust	18	30
NEWS INTEREST Very interested in news	32	36
Not interested	24	39

% of U.S. adults who correctly classified ...

	All five	Four	Three	Two or fewer
Factual statements	26%	24	21	28
Opinion statements	35%	24	19	22

Note: Skipping a statement was counted as not correctly identifying it as factual or as opinion.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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roughly a quarter got most or all wrong. Even more revealing is that certain Americans do far better at parsing through this content than others. Those with high political awareness, those who are very digitally savvy and those who place high levels of trust in the news media are better able than others to accurately identify news-related statements as factual or opinion.

For example, 36% of Americans with high levels of political awareness (those who are knowledgeable about politics and regularly get political news) correctly identified all five factual news statements, compared with about half as many (17%) of those with low political awareness. Similarly, 44% of the very digitally savvy (those who are highly confident in using digital devices and regularly use the internet) identified all five opinion statements correctly versus 21% of those who are not as technologically savvy. And though political awareness and digital savviness are related to education in predictable ways, these relationships persist even when accounting for an individual's education level.

Trust in those who do the reporting also matters in how that statement is interpreted. Almost four-in-ten Americans who have a lot of trust in the information from national news organizations (39%) correctly identified all five factual statements, compared with 18% of those who have not much or no trust. However, one other trait related to news habits – the public's level of interest in news – does not show much difference.

In addition to political awareness, party identification plays a role in how Americans differentiate between factual and opinion news statements. Both Republicans and Democrats show a propensity to be influenced by which side of the aisle a statement appeals to most. For example, members of each political party were more likely to label both factual and opinion statements as factual when they appealed more to their political side.

At this point, then, the U.S. is not completely detached from what is factual and what is not. But with the vast majority of Americans getting at least some news online, gaps across population groups in the ability to sort news correctly raise caution. Amid the massive array of content that flows through the digital space hourly, the brief dips into and out of news and the country's heightened political divisiveness, the ability and motivation to quickly sort news correctly is all the more critical.

The differentiation between factual and opinion statements used in this study – the capacity to be proved *or disproved* by objective evidence – is commonly used by others as well, but may vary somewhat from how "facts" are sometimes discussed in debates – as *statements that are true*.[1] While Americans' sense of what is true and false is important, this study was not intended as a

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[1] For example, fact-checking organizations have used this differentiation of a statement's capacity to be proved or disproved as a way to determine whether a claim can be fact-checked and schools have used this approach to teach students to differentiate facts from opinions.

knowledge quiz of news content. Instead, this study was intended to explore whether the public sees distinctions between news that is based upon objective evidence and news that is not.

To accomplish this, respondents were shown a series of news-related statements in the main portion of the study: five factual statements, five opinions and two statements that don't fit clearly into either the factual or opinion buckets – termed here as "borderline" statements. Respondents were asked to determine if each was a factual statement (whether accurate or not) or an opinion statement (whether agreed with or not). For more information on how statements were selected for the study, see below.

How the study asked Americans to classify factual versus opinion-based news statements

In the survey, respondents read a series of news statements and were asked to put each statement in one of two categories:

1. **A factual statement**, regardless of whether it was accurate or inaccurate. In other words, they were to choose this classification if they thought that the statement could be proved or disproved based on objective evidence.

2. **An opinion statement**, regardless of whether they agreed with the statement or not. In other words, they were to choose this classification if they thought that it was based on the values and beliefs of the journalist or the source making the statement, and could not definitively be proved or disproved based on objective evidence.

In the initial set, five statements were factual, five were opinion and two were in an ambiguous space between factual and opinion – referred to here as "borderline" statements. (All of the factual statements were accurate.) The statements were written and classified in consultation with experts both inside and outside Pew Research Center. The goal was to include an equal number of statements that would more likely appeal to the political right or to the political left, with an overall balance across statements. All of the statements related to policy issues and current events. The individual statements are listed in an expandable box at the end of this section, and the complete methodology, including further information on statement selection, classification, and political appeal, can be found here.

How the study asked Americans to classify factual and opinion news statements

In this survey, U.S. adults were shown images of news statements like the one below:

Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget.

They were asked:

You will now be shown a series of statements that have been taken from news stories. Regardless of how knowledgeable you are about the topic, would you consider this statement to be a …

a **FACTUAL** statement
(whether you think it is accurate or not)

OR

an **OPINION** statement
(whether you agree with it or not)

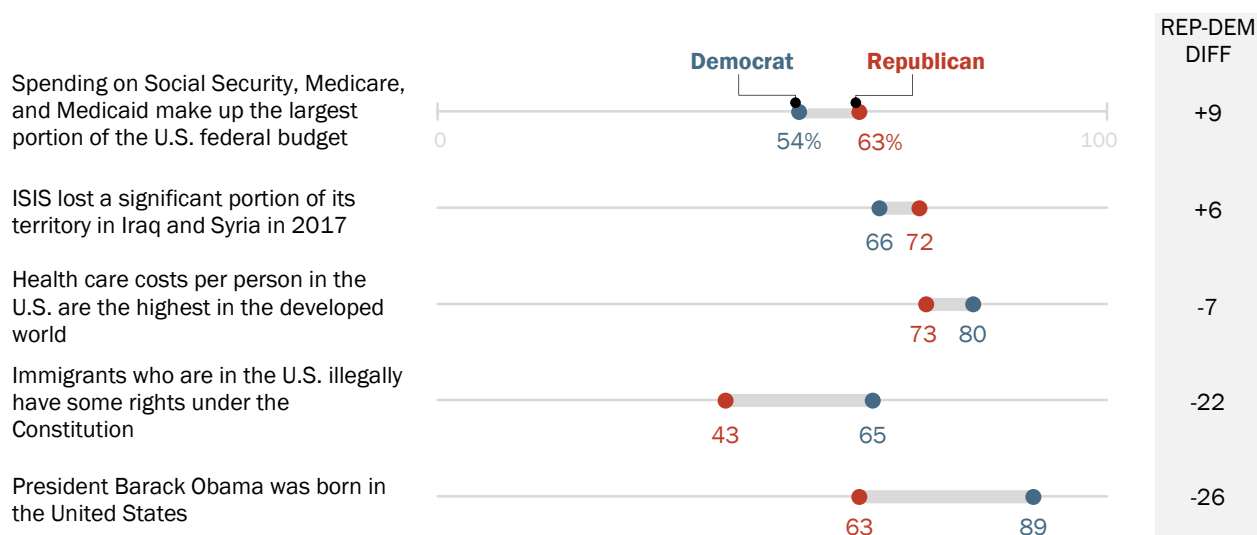"Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News"

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Republicans and Democrats are more likely to think news statements are factual when they appeal to their side – even if they are opinions

It's important to explore what role political identification plays in how Americans decipher factual news statements from opinion news statements. To analyze this, the study aimed to include an equal number of statements that played to the sensitivities of each side, maintaining an overall

Republicans and Democrats more likely to see factual and opinion news statements as factual when they favor their side

*% who classified each **factual statement** as **factual***

REP-DEM
DIFF

Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget
Democrat 54% Republican 63%
+9

ISIS lost a significant portion of its territory in Iraq and Syria in 2017
66 72
+6

Health care costs per person in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world
73 80
-7

Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally have some rights under the Constitution
43 65
-22

President Barack Obama was born in the United States
63 89
-26

*% who classified each **opinion statement** as **factual***

Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally are a very big problem for the country today
19 50
+31

Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient
24 33
+9

Democracy is the greatest form of government
33 35
-2

Abortion should be legal in most cases
12 25
-13

Increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour is essential for the health of the U.S. economy
17 37
-20

Note: Independents not shown. Republicans and Democrats significantly differ on all statements except for "Democracy is the greatest form of government."
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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ideological balance across statements.[2]

Overall, Republicans and Democrats were more likely to classify both factual *and* opinion statements as factual when they appealed most to their side. Consider, for example, the factual statement "President Barack Obama was born in the United States" – one that may be perceived as more congenial to the political left and less so to the political right. Nearly nine-in-ten Democrats (89%) correctly identified it as a factual statement, compared with 63% of Republicans. On the other hand, almost four-in-ten Democrats (37%) *incorrectly* classified the left-appealing opinion statement "Increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour is essential for the health of the U.S. economy" as factual, compared with about half as many Republicans (17%).[3]

[2] A statement was considered to appeal to the left or the right based on whether it lent support to political views held by more on one side of the ideological spectrum than the other. Various sources were used to determine the appeal of each statement, including news stories, statements by elected officials, and recent polling.

[3] The findings in this study do not necessarily imply that one party is better able to correctly classify news statements as factual or opinion-based. Even though there were some differences between the parties (for instance, 78% of Democrats compared with 68% of Republicans who correctly classified at least three of five factual statements), the more meaningful finding is the tendency among both to be influenced by the possible political appeal of statements.

News brand labels in this study had a modest impact on separating factual statements from opinion

In a separate part of the study, respondents were shown eight different statements. But this time, most saw statements attributed to one of three specific news outlets: one with a left-leaning audience (The New York Times), one with a right-leaning audience (Fox News Channel) and one with a more mixed audience (USA Today).[4]

Overall, attributing the statements to news outlets had a limited impact on statement classification, except for one case: Republicans were modestly more likely than Democrats to accurately classify the three factual statements in this second set when they

Republicans modestly more likely to correctly identify factual statements when attributed to Fox News

% of the time Republicans and Democrats correctly classified a __factual statement as factual__ when it was attributed to each outlet
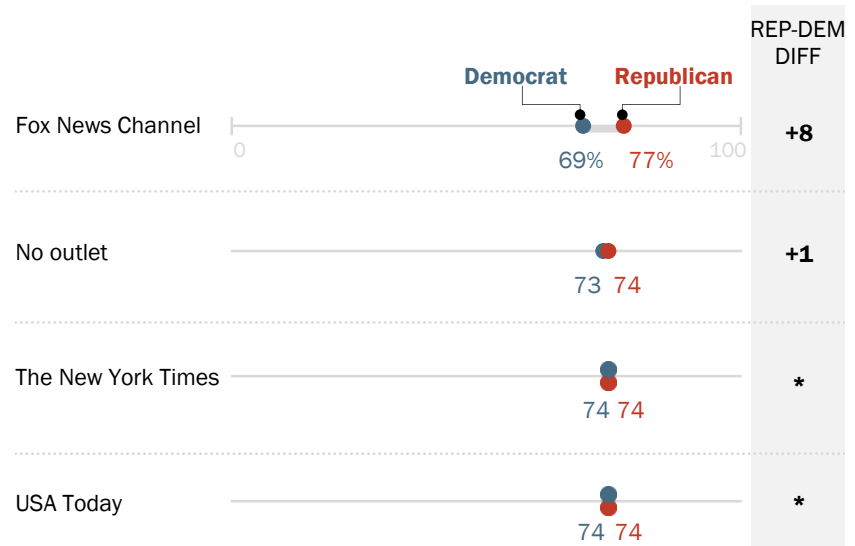
Note: Skipping a statement was counted as not correctly identifying it as factual or as opinion. Independents not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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were attributed to Fox News – and correspondingly, Democrats were modestly less likely than Republicans to do so. Republicans correctly classified them 77% of the time when attributed to Fox News, 8 percentage points higher than Democrats, who did so 69% of the time.[5] Members of the two parties were as likely as each other to correctly classify the factual statements when no source was attributed or when USA Today or The New York Times was attributed. Labeling statements with a news outlet had no impact on how Republicans or Democrats classified the opinion statements. And, overall, the same general findings about differences based on political awareness, digital savviness and trust also held true for this second set of statements.

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[4] The classification of these three outlets' audiences is based on previously reported survey data, the same data that was used to classify audiences for a recent study about coverage of the Trump administration. For more detail on the classification of the three news outlets, as well as the selection and analysis of this second set of statements, see the Methodology. At the end of the survey, respondents who saw news statements attributed to the news outlets were told, "Please note that the statements that you were shown in this survey were part of an experiment and did not actually appear in news articles of the news organizations."

[5] This analysis grouped together all of the times the 5,035 respondents saw a statement attributed to each of the outlets or no outlet at all. The results, then, are given as the "percent of the time" that respondents classified statements a given way when attributed to each outlet. For more details on what "percent of the time" means, see the Methodology.

When Americans call a statement factual they overwhelmingly also think it is accurate; they tend to disagree with factual statements they incorrectly label as opinions

The study probed one step further for the initial set of 12 statements. If respondents identified a statement as factual, they were then asked if they thought it was accurate or inaccurate. If they identified a statement to be an opinion, they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with it.

When Americans see a news statement as factual, they overwhelmingly also believe it to be accurate. This is true for both statements they correctly and incorrectly identified as factual, though small portions of the public did call statements both factual and inaccurate.

When Americans incorrectly classified factual statements as opinions, they most often disagreed with the statement. When correctly classifying opinions as such, however, Americans expressed more of a mix of agreeing and disagreeing with the statement.

About the study

Statement selection

This is Pew Research Center's first step in understanding how people parse through information as factual or opinion. Creating the mix of statements was a multistep and rigorous process that incorporated a wide variety of viewpoints. First, researchers sifted through a number of different sources to create an initial pool of statements. The factual statements were drawn from sources including news organizations, government agencies, research organizations and fact-checking entities, and were verified by the research team as accurate. The opinion statements were adapted largely from public opinion survey questions. A final list of statements was created in consultation with Pew Research Center subject matter experts and an external board of advisers.

The goals were to:

1. Pull together statements that range across a variety of policy areas and current events
2. Strive for statements that were clearly factual and clearly opinion in nature (as well as some that combined both factual and opinion elements, referred to here as "borderline")
3. Include an equal number of statements that appealed to the right and left, maintaining an overall ideological balance

In the primary set of statements, respondents saw five factual, five opinion and two borderline statements. Factual statements that lend support to views held by more people on one side of the ideological spectrum (and fewer of those on the other side) were classified as appealing to the narrative of that side. Opinion statements were classified as appealing to one side if in recent

surveys they were supported more by one political party than the other. Two of the statements (one factual and one opinion) were "neutral" and intended to appeal equally to the left and right.

How Pew Research Center asked respondents to categorize news statements as factual or opinion

As noted previously, respondents were first asked to classify each news statement as a factual statement or an opinion statement. Extensive testing of the question wording was conducted to ensure that respondents would not treat this task as asking if they agree with the statement or as a knowledge quiz. This is why, for instance, the question does not merely ask whether the statement is a factual or an opinion statement and instead includes explanatory language as follows: "Regardless of how knowledgeable you are about the topic, would you consider this statement to be a factual statement (whether you think it is accurate or not) OR an opinion statement (whether you agree with it or not)?" For more details on the testing of different question wordings, see Appendix A.

After classifying each statement as factual or opinion, respondents were then asked one of two follow-up questions. If they classified a statement as factual, they were then asked if they thought the statement was accurate or inaccurate. If they classified it as an opinion, they were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement.

The factual, opinion and borderline statements

Below are the 12 news statements that respondents were asked to categorize:

Factual statements

- Health care costs per person in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world

- President Barack Obama was born in the United States

- Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally have some rights under the Constitution

- ISIS lost a significant portion of its territory in Iraq and Syria in 2017

- Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget

Opinion statements

- Democracy is the greatest form of government

- Increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour is essential for the health of the U.S. economy

- Abortion should be legal in most cases

- Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally are a very big problem for the country today

- Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient

Borderline statements

- Applying additional scrutiny to Muslim Americans would not reduce terrorism in the U.S.

- Voter fraud across the U.S. has undermined the results of our elections

1. Overall, Americans identified more statements correctly than incorrectly, but sizable portions got most wrong

Americans are more likely than not to correctly distinguish factual statements from opinions, suggesting they have some proficiency in understanding the type of news content they see. But there is still a fair amount of misinterpretation.[6]

In this new study, a little over 5,000 U.S. adults were shown a mix of five factual and five opinion statements across a range of policy and current event topic areas. For each, they were asked to identify the statement as either factual – one that could be proved or disproved based on objective factual evidence – or as an opinion.

About a quarter of Americans (26%) correctly identified all five of the factual statements, while roughly the same percentage (28%) got no more than two correct. The largest portion (46%) answered three or four correctly. Overall, about three-quarters of Americans (72%) got more correct than incorrect – classifying at least three as factual.

A somewhat greater portion of Americans (35%) correctly identified all five of the opinion statements than did so with the factual statements. The largest portion again (43%) answered three or four correctly, while about two-in-ten (22%) misinterpreted most of the opinion statements as factual, classifying two or fewer as opinion. And, just like the factual statements, most Americans got more opinion statements correct than incorrect: About eight-

Few classified all factual and opinion statements correctly, though a majority got more correct than incorrect

% of U.S. adults who correctly classified _____ factual statements as factual

Two or fewer 28%
All five 26%
Three or four 46%

72% of Americans got more correct than incorrect

% of U.S. adults who correctly classified _____ opinion statements as opinions

Two or fewer 22%
All five 35%
Three or four 43%

78% of Americans got more correct than incorrect
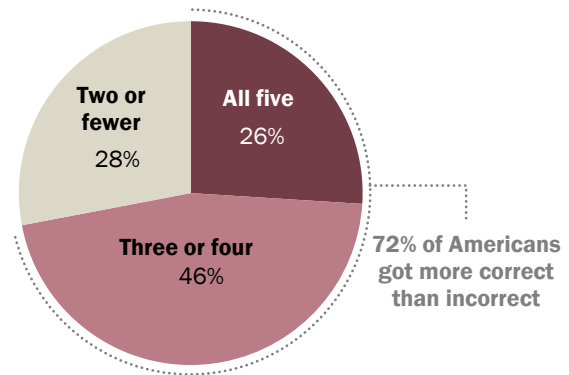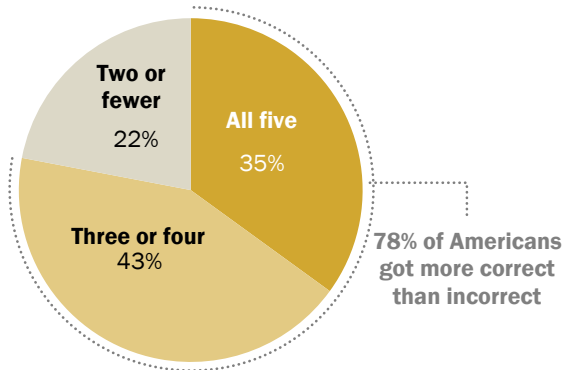
Note: Skipping a statement was counted as not correctly identifying it as factual or as opinion.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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[6] Research about the role of facts and opinions in the news has identified an increased blurring between the two, as well as increased opinion-based news coverage in recent years.

in-ten (78%) correctly classified at least three of the five as opinions.

Some statements were correctly identified more often than others

Overall, Americans were reasonably adept at identifying each of the five factual and five opinion statements. For each statement, a majority correctly identified it as either factual or opinion. However, Americans tended to better identify some statements than others. Among the factual statements, about three-quarters of Americans (77%) correctly identified "President Barack Obama was born in the United States" and about the same portion (76%) correctly classified "Health care costs per person in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world" as factual. The two factual statements that the public had the most difficulty with were "Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget" and "Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally have some rights under the Constitution," correctly labeled by just over half of respondents (57% and 54%, respectively).

Among the opinion statements, eight-in-ten Americans correctly identified "Abortion should be legal in most cases," and around seven-in-ten correctly classified the other four opinion statements.

Some news statements are more likely than others to be correctly identified as factual or opinion

% of U.S. adults who classified each statement as factual or opinion

	Factual	Opinion
Factual statements	%	%
President Barack Obama was born in the United States	77	22
Health care costs per person in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world	76	23
ISIS lost a significant portion of its territory in Iraq and Syria in 2017	68	30
Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget	57	41
Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally have some rights under the Constitution	54	44
Opinion statements		
Abortion should be legal in most cases	18	80
Increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour is essential for the health of the U.S. economy	26	73
Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient	28	71
Democracy is the greatest form of government	29	69
Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally are a very big problem for the country today	31	68

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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Most Americans classify statements that are not clearly factual or opinion as opinion

Not all news statements are unambiguously based in factual evidence or in a journalist's or source's beliefs, but rather fall somewhere in between the two. Statements that are in this murky space between factual statements and opinions – termed here as "borderline" statements – are more often treated by Americans as opinions.

In addition to the factual and opinion statements, respondents were asked to categorize two of these borderline statements. About half of Americans (52%) said both were opinions, compared with just 11% who said both were factual statements. About a third (35%) said one was factual and the other was opinion.

Looking at the individual statements, about three-quarters of Americans (74%) said "Applying additional scrutiny to Muslim Americans would not reduce terrorism in the U.S." was an opinion, as did about two-thirds (66%) for "Voter fraud across the U.S. has undermined the results of our elections."

Statements not clearly factual or opinion seen more as opinion

*% of U.S. adults who classified **two borderline statements** as …*

Both factual 11%

Both opinion 52%

One factual and one opinion 35%

No answer 2%

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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While these two statements can be based in objective evidence (the factual element of the statement), the vague language – and in one case a prediction – makes these statements difficult to prove definitively (the opinion element of the statement). Thus, both of these were determined to be in this murky space between factual and opinion statements.

The statement "Applying additional scrutiny to Muslim Americans would not reduce terrorism in the U.S." is predictive, and while evidence can be used to make an argument, it cannot be definitely proved or disproved because the results of such a policy in the U.S. are not yet known. For the second statement, "Voter fraud across the U.S. has undermined the results of our elections," while there is a variety of evidence around the topic of voter fraud, the vagueness of the language of undermining election results makes it difficult to definitively show the relationship one way or the other.

2. The ability to classify statements as factual or opinion varies widely based on political awareness, digital savviness and trust in news media

Overall, some groups of Americans are far better at parsing through news content than others, suggesting gaps in the public's competence. Most prominently, Americans' familiarity with politics and the digital world bleeds into how they understand statements in the news. Those with high political awareness (those who are both knowledgeable about politics and regularly get political news) and high digital savviness (those who say they are highly capable of using digital devices and regularly use the internet) are much more likely to know the difference between factual and opinion news statements. Likewise, Americans with a lot of trust in national news organizations have an easier time separating factual from opinion statements than those with less trust. How closely one follows the news, on the other hand, provides only a modest edge in classifying factual statements, but not opinions.

Even though these characteristics relate in predictable ways to education, these relationships hold true even when accounting for level of education.[7] Further, there is relatively modest overlap among the groups, meaning that each of these groups is distinct.[8] For example, just 32% of those with high political awareness also have a lot of trust in national news organizations. The group that shows the largest overlap with the other groups is those who are very digitally savvy, since they account for a large portion of the population generally (48%), but even here the overlap with the other groups never reaches more than 58%.

Terminology

- **Political awareness** is the measure of knowledge of and interest in politics and government and is based on the combined responses in two separate areas:

  1. Correctly answering three political knowledge questions (e.g., "Who is Mike Pence?"; see topline for all items)

  2. Including government and politics among the topics one regularly gets news about

Political awareness

% of U.S. adults with …

	%
High political awareness	34
Moderate political awareness	38
Low political awareness	28

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.

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[7] Level of education has a strong relationship of its own with how well Americans classify factual and opinion statements. But even though political awareness and digital savviness are related to education, education does not fully account for the relationship between these two factors and correctly identifying factual from opinions statements. Statistical analyses show that political awareness and digital savviness have an influence beyond that of education. In other words, among those at all levels of education, level of political awareness has an influence on their ability to correctly classify statements.

[8] See Appendix B for the overlap between each group.

Those with *high political awareness* both answer all three knowledge questions correctly and regularly get news about government and politics; for those with *moderate political awareness*, only one of these two is the case; and for those with *low political awareness*, neither is the case.

▪ **Digital savviness** is the measure of use of and familiarity with digital technology and is based on responses to two separate indicators:

> 1. Reporting using the internet at least multiple times a day
> 2. Being very confident in one's ability to use electronic devices

Those who are *very savvy* both use the internet multiple times a day and are very confident in their ability to use digital devices; for those who are *somewhat savvy*, only one of these is the case; and for those who are *not savvy*, neither is the case.

▪ **Trust in news media** is a measure based on the response to a single question: "How much, if at all, do you trust the information you get from national news organizations?" Respondents were divided into those who answered "a lot"; those who answered "some"; and those who answered either "not too much" or "none at all."

▪ **News interest** is a measure of interest in news more broadly and is based on the combined responses to two indicators:

> 1. Following the news "most of the time, whether or not something important is happening" (rather than "only when something important is happening")
> 2. Responding that getting the news is one of the three activities, among a list of six, done most frequently during one's free time

Digital savviness

% of U.S. adults who are …

	%
Very digitally savvy	48
Somewhat digitally savvy	34
Not digitally savvy	17

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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Trust in news media

% of U.S. adults who have ___ in the information from national news organizations

	%
A lot of trust	21
Some trust	49
Not too much/none at all	29

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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News interest

% of U.S. adults who are ___ in news

	%
Very interested	23
Somewhat interested	44
Not interested	32

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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Those who are *very interested* both follow the news most of the time and list getting the news as one of their most frequent leisure activities; for those who are *somewhat interested*, only one of these two is the case; and for those who are *not interested*, neither is the case.

Those with high political awareness are far better able to identify factual and opinion statements

Those with high political awareness show far greater ability to correctly identify both factual and opinion statements. About a third (36%) correctly identified all five factual statements as factual, compared with 17% of those with low political awareness. Those with moderate awareness fell in between the two at 24%.

What's more, just under half of those with low political awareness (45%) accurately classified two or fewer of the factual statements, misclassifying more than half of them. This was true of just 16% of those with high awareness.

A similar pattern emerges for correctly identifying all five of the opinion statements, which 44% of those with high political awareness, 29% of those with low awareness and 32% of those in between could do. The most politically aware were also more likely to see both borderline statements as opinions than those with moderate or low awareness, which is in line with people overall considering these statements to be opinions.

Those with high political awareness more likely to correctly identify factual and opinion news statements

% at each level of political awareness who correctly classified each number of ...
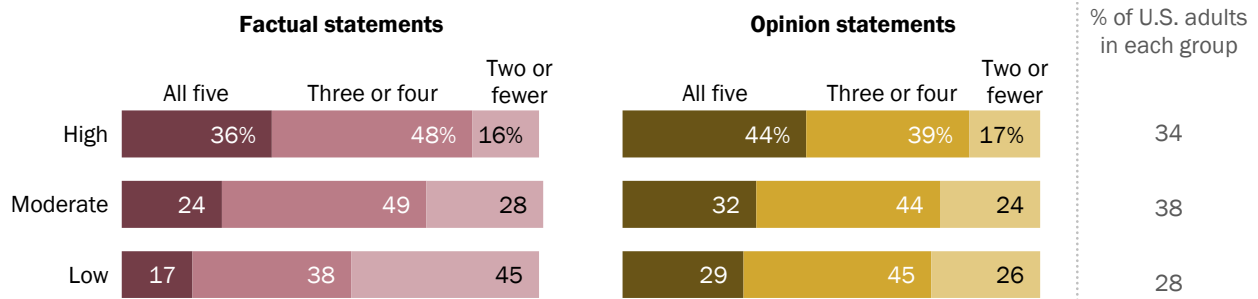
	Factual statements			Opinion statements			% of U.S. adults in each group
	All five	Three or four	Two or fewer	All five	Three or four	Two or fewer	
High	36%	48%	16%	44%	39%	17%	34
Moderate	24	49	28	32	44	24	38
Low	17	38	45	29	45	26	28

Note: Skipping a statement was counted as not correctly identifying it as factual or as opinion.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
"Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News"

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While some groups did fare better than others, overall, there was no group where a majority classified all five factual or opinion statements correctly.

In this study, political awareness measures how politically knowledgeable someone is and how often he or she gets news about government and politics. Those with high political awareness are both highly knowledgeable (accurately answering three political knowledge items) and report regularly getting political news. About a third of Americans (34%) have high political awareness, about four-in-ten (38%) have moderate awareness and 28% have low awareness.

Digitally savvy Americans fare far better at classifying factual and opinion statements

The very digitally savvy are also notably better at classifying statements as factual or opinion, with the divide between the very digitally savvy and those who are not savvy standing out as particularly stark. Roughly three times as many very digitally savvy (35%) as not savvy Americans (13%) classified all five factual statements correctly, with the somewhat savvy falling in between (20%). And about twice as many classified all five opinion statements correctly (44% of the very digitally savvy versus 21% of the not digitally savvy).

Like those with low political awareness, just under half of the not digitally savvy (45%) correctly classified two or fewer factual statements, erroneously identifying most as opinions. They were slightly more successful at the opinion statements, with around a third (34%) classifying two or fewer correctly.

Digitally savvy Americans much more likely to correctly identify factual and opinion statements

% at each level of digital savviness who correctly classified each number of …
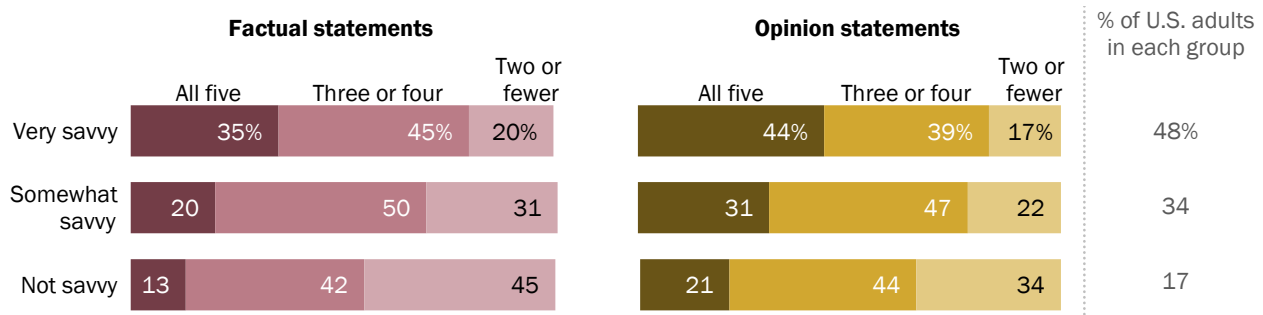
	Factual statements			Opinion statements			% of U.S. adults in each group
	All five	Three or four	Two or fewer	All five	Three or four	Two or fewer	
Very savvy	35%	45%	20%	44%	39%	17%	48%
Somewhat savvy	20	50	31	31	47	22	34
Not savvy	13	42	45	21	44	34	17

Note: Skipping a statement was counted as not correctly identifying it as factual or as opinion.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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Similar to those high in political awareness, those who are very digitally savvy were more likely to categorize both borderline statements as opinions than those who are less savvy.

Digital savviness is based on Americans' frequency of internet use and confidence in using digital devices. About half (48%) are very digitally savvy (those who use the internet at least multiple times a day and are very confident in using digital devices), while 17% are not savvy (those who use the internet once a day or less and are not very confident in using digital devices). About a third (34%) fall in between the two and are categorized as somewhat digitally savvy.

Those with greater trust in the news media are more likely to correctly classify factual and opinion statements

Previous Pew Research Center findings that Americans' attitudes about the news are strongly related to their news habits are reinforced in this study: Those more trusting of national news organizations are better at accurately categorizing factual and opinion statements.

About four-in-ten of those who have a lot of trust in the information from national news organizations (39%) categorized all five factual statements correctly, about twice the rate of those who have not much or no trust (18%) and also more than those with some trust (25%). Very similar gaps emerge for the opinion statements, declining from 43% among those with a lot of trust down to 30% among those with the least amount of trust. No differences surfaced for the borderline statements.

Likewise, looking at other news attitudes also measured in this survey, such as skepticism toward news and connection to news outlets, found that those who are less skeptical toward the news media were more likely to correctly classify both factual and opinion news statements.

Those with a lot of trust in national news organizations more likely to correctly identify factual and opinion news statements

% at each level of trust in the information from national news organizations who correctly classified each number of …
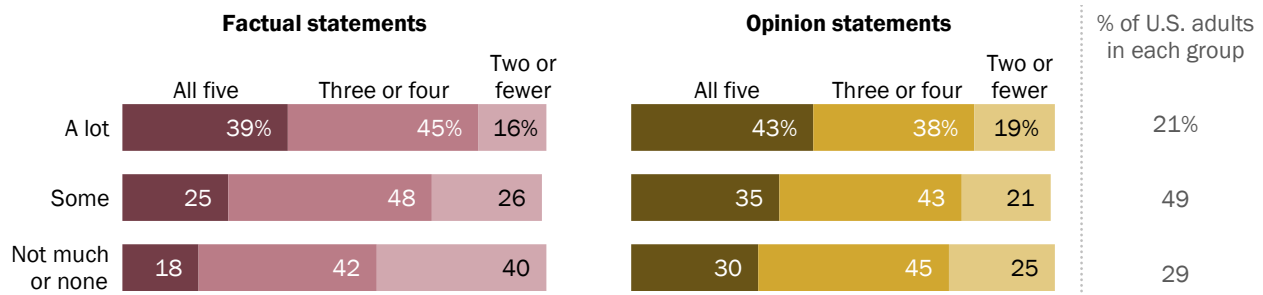
	Factual statements			**Opinion statements**			% of U.S. adults in each group
	All five	Three or four	Two or fewer	All five	Three or four	Two or fewer	
A lot	39%	45%	16%	43%	38%	19%	21%
Some	25	48	26	35	43	21	49
Not much or none	18	42	40	30	45	25	29

Note: Skipping a statement was counted as not correctly identifying it as factual or as opinion.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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Respondents who feel a closer connection to their news outlets were more likely to correctly classify the factual statements.

Overall, about one-in-five U.S. adults (21%) has a lot of trust in the information they get from national news organizations, about half (49%) have some trust and 29% have not too much trust or none at all. And while Democrats are more likely than Republicans to trust the news media a lot (35% vs. 12%, respectively), the findings hold true even when accounting for party differences.

The role of education

While those with high political awareness, digital savviness and trust in national news organizations are overall more educated, the findings persist even when accounting for level of education.

As is often seen with survey measures of proficiency, Americans' level of education makes a difference. Indeed, those with more education are more likely to classify factual and opinion statements correctly, with a magnitude of difference similar to that for political awareness and digital savviness. And given the differences between the very digitally savvy and those less so, it is not surprising that age matters as well, with those ages 18 to 49 being better at classifying statements than those ages 50 and older.[9] For a full breakdown, see Appendix B.

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[9] While digital savviness is associated with age, the relationship between digital savviness and correct classification persists even when accounting for age.

Greater interest in news connects modestly to correct classifications of factual statements; no difference for opinions

In contrast to attitudes about the news, having greater interest in the news is not as closely related to deciphering factual from opinion statements.

Respondents who are the most interested in news were somewhat more likely to correctly identify the factual statements. About a third of the very interested (32%) correctly identified all five factual statements, compared with roughly a quarter of both the least interested (24%) and the somewhat interested (25%). These differences between the high and low groups are notably smaller than for political awareness, digital savviness or trust. And when it comes to opinion statements, there is no clear pattern.

Other measures of news interest asked about in the survey were also only weakly predictive of success in classifying statements. For instance, those who are highly engaged with the news by doing such things as writing letters to the editor, sharing news on social media or performing other actions with the news were more likely than those less engaged to correctly identify the factual statements. This was also true when comparing those who tend to put more consideration into their news (those saying they like to gather additional information about stories they see, debate the news with others and think about the news).

Americans with high news interest somewhat more likely to correctly identify factual statements, but no more likely to do so for opinions

% at each level of news interest who correctly classified each number of …
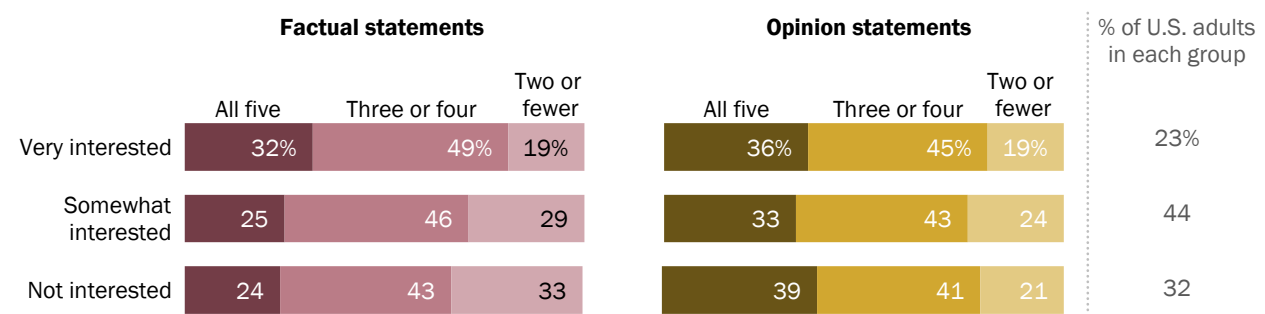
	Factual statements			**Opinion statements**			% of U.S. adults in each group
	All five	Three or four	Two or fewer	All five	Three or four	Two or fewer	
Very interested	32%	49%	19%	36%	45%	19%	23%
Somewhat interested	25	46	29	33	43	24	44
Not interested	24	43	33	39	41	21	32

Note: Skipping a statement was counted as not correctly identifying it as factual or as opinion.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
"Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News"

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For this study, news interest is based on whether people follow news closely and get news in their free time. Nearly a quarter of Americans (23%) fall into the very interested group, which means they follow news most of the time and say news is one of the top three activities in their free time. About a third (32%) are not interested in news – they follow the news only when something important is happening and do not frequently get news in their free time. The greatest portion (44%) do one or the other but not both and are thus deemed "somewhat interested."

3. Republicans and Democrats more likely to classify a news statement as factual if it favors their side – whether it is factual or opinion

In addition to past research that has shown stark differences between Republicans' and Democrats' trust of specific news outlets, the findings in this study go one step further, showing that those who identify with the two parties often differ in how they classify specific news content as factual or opinion.

Overall, majorities of both Republicans and Democrats correctly classified nearly all factual and opinion statements asked about. But Democrats were more likely to correctly classify a factual statement and to *incorrectly* classify an opinion as factual when it was more amenable to the left – and the same held for Republicans when the appeal was to the right. Some of these differences are quite large, with five of the 10 in the double digits.

As noted earlier, the goal was to include an equal number of statements in the study that would appeal to the sentiments of the left as of the right, maintaining an overall ideological balance. Even though most factual and opinion statements appealed more to either the left or the right, majorities of Republicans and Democrats correctly identified nearly all of them. There were only two instances across the factual and opinion statements in which no more than 50% of either party correctly classified them.

However, *how large* of a majority this was for each party often differed, sometimes substantially. Democrats were much more likely to correctly identify the two factual

Republicans and Democrats more likely to correctly identify factual news statements when they favor their side

*% who classified each **factual statement** as ...*

■ Factual ■ Opinion

Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget

	Factual	Opinion
Republicans	63%	36%
Independents	61	38
Democrats	54	45

ISIS lost a significant portion of its territory in Iraq and Syria in 2017

	Factual	Opinion
Republicans	72	27
Independents	73	26
Democrats	66	33

Health care costs per person in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world

	Factual	Opinion
Republicans	73	27
Independents	77	23
Democrats	80	19

Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally have some rights under the Constitution

	Factual	Opinion
Republicans	43	56
Independents	55	44
Democrats	65	34

President Barack Obama was born in the United States

	Factual	Opinion
Republicans	63	36
Independents	80	20
Democrats	89	10

Note: Percent who did not answer not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
"Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News"

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statements that were more favorable to the left. The statement "President Barack Obama was born in the United States" was classified as factual by 89% of Democrats, compared with 63% of Republicans. And "Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally have some rights under the Constitution" was classified as factual by 65% of Democrats versus 43% of Republicans.

Democrats were also somewhat more likely than Republicans to correctly identify one additional statement – one that was intended to appeal to both sides equally: "Health care costs per person in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world." Eight-in-ten Democrats identified the statement as factual versus 73% of Republicans. This gap, though, was roughly a third as large as for the statements intended to be more favorable to the left.

To a lesser degree, the same pattern emerged – albeit with the parties reversed – for the factual statements that appealed more to the right. Republicans (63%) were somewhat more likely than Democrats (54%) to correctly identify "Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget" as factual. And 72% of Republicans, compared with 66% of Democrats, identified "ISIS lost a significant portion of its territory in Iraq and Syria in 2017" as factual.

Overall, there was a modest difference between the two parties in the portion who answered more correctly than incorrectly – but not of the same magnitude as between those with more or less political awareness, digital savviness and trust in the information from national news organizations. Across these five factual statements, 78% of Democrats answered at least three of the five correctly, compared with 68% of Republicans. However, it should be noted that this difference may be a function of the statements themselves. The factual statements appealing to one side may have been more divisive or provocative than those that appealed to the other side. In other words, these findings should not be taken to imply that one party is better able to classify factual statements than the other – but that the appeal seems to matter at least to a certain degree to both sides.

Members of both political parties are also more likely to *incorrectly* label opinion statements as factual when they are amenable to their side. Overall, some large divisions – up to 32 percentage points – emerge between both parties in identifying opinions.
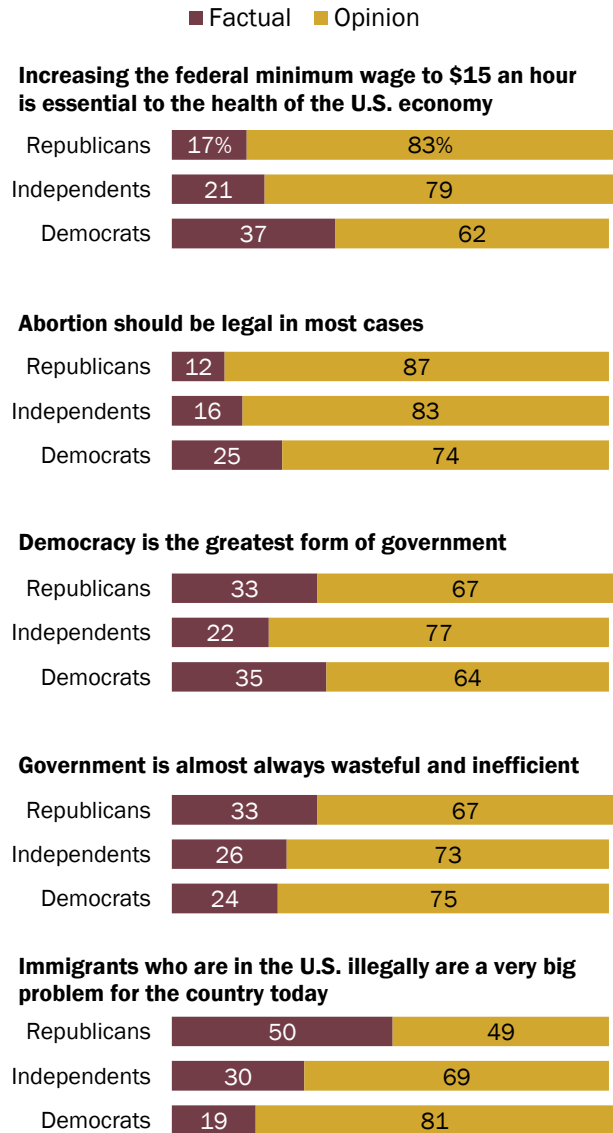
Republicans were less likely than Democrats to correctly identify the two opinion statements that appeal more to the right. Nearly half of Republicans (49%) classified "Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally are a very big problem for the country today" as opinion versus 81% of Democrats, and "Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient" was classified as opinion by 67% of Republicans versus 75% of Democrats.

Likewise, Democrats were less likely to correctly identify the opinion statements amenable to the left. About six-in-ten Democrats (62%) classified "Increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour is essential to the health of the U.S. economy" as an opinion versus 83% of Republicans, while "Abortion should be legal in most cases" was classified as opinion by 74% of Democrats versus 87% of Republicans. The parties were on par in classifying "Democracy is the greatest form of government," the statement intended to appeal equally to both sides, as an opinion, with 67% of Republicans and 64% of Democrats doing so.

With the two borderline statements, Republicans were more likely than Democrats to classify each as opinions. About eight-in-ten Republicans (82%) said that "Applying

Republicans and Democrats more likely to incorrectly classify opinions as factual when they favor their side

% who classified each __opinion statement__ as …

■ Factual ■ Opinion

Increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour is essential to the health of the U.S. economy

	Factual	Opinion
Republicans	17%	83%
Independents	21	79
Democrats	37	62

Abortion should be legal in most cases

	Factual	Opinion
Republicans	12	87
Independents	16	83
Democrats	25	74

Democracy is the greatest form of government

	Factual	Opinion
Republicans	33	67
Independents	22	77
Democrats	35	64

Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient

	Factual	Opinion
Republicans	33	67
Independents	26	73
Democrats	24	75

Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally are a very big problem for the country today

	Factual	Opinion
Republicans	50	49
Independents	30	69
Democrats	19	81

Note: Percent who did not answer not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
"Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News"

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additional scrutiny to Muslim Americans would not reduce terrorism in the U.S." is an opinion, compared with two-thirds of Democrats (67%). For the statement "Voter fraud across the U.S. has undermined the results of our elections," Republicans were 7 percentage points more likely than Democrats to say it is an opinion (71% vs. 64%, respectively).

With a few exceptions, independents fell somewhere in between Republicans and Democrats in their classification of the 12 statements.

4. Americans overwhelmingly see statements they think are factual as accurate, mostly disagree with factual statements they incorrectly label as opinions
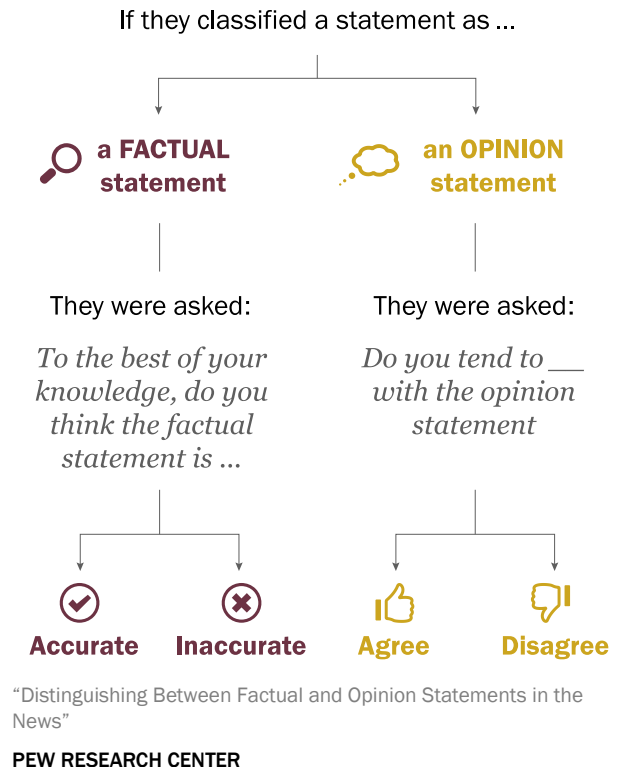
To understand what drives Americans to classify news as either factual or opinion, respondents were asked a follow-up question after each initial response. If they classified a statement as factual, respondents were asked if they thought it was accurate or inaccurate. An opinion classification was followed with a question asking if they agreed or disagreed with the statement.

Overall, Americans overwhelmingly tie the idea of news statements being factual with them also being accurate. This is consistent with how the term "facts" is sometimes used in modern political debate – statements that are *true*. Americans are far less likely to see factual statements as inaccurate – statements that can be disproved based on objective evidence. For both factual statements that people correctly classified and opinion statements that they *incorrectly* classified as factual, Americans were far more likely to have said each was accurate than inaccurate.

As for opinion statements, correct classifications are not necessarily associated with agreement, but instead result in a mix of agreement and disagreement. However, seeing factual statements as opinions largely coincides with disagreeing with them.

A follow-up classification of factual and opinion statements

Americans were asked to classify a series of statements as either factual or opinion

If they classified a statement as …

a FACTUAL statement   an OPINION statement

They were asked: They were asked:

To the best of your knowledge, do you think the factual statement is …   *Do you tend to ___ with the opinion statement*

Accurate Inaccurate   Agree Disagree

"Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News"
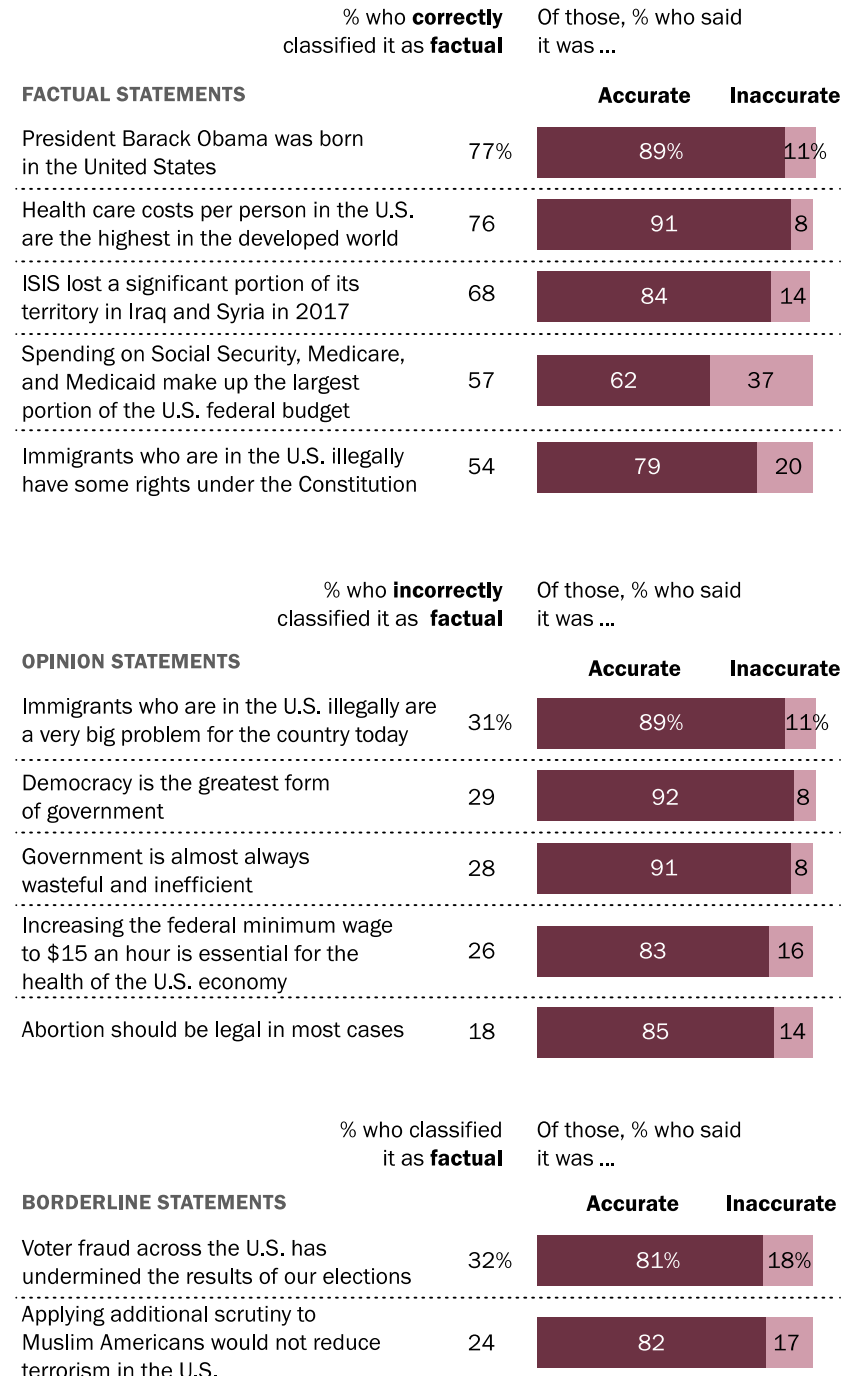
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Statements classified as factual are almost always seen as accurate

On the whole, across the factual, opinion and borderline statements, large majorities of those who classified each as factual said it was accurate.

All five of the factual statements were accurate, so it makes sense that, overall, large majorities of those who classified each as factual thought it was accurate. For example, 91% of those who correctly identified the statement "Health care costs per person in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world" as factual said it was accurate.

Even when opinion statements were incorrectly classified as factual, large majorities again thought they were accurate, showing that misclassification links to people's perceptions of their accuracy. At least eight-in-ten of those who identified each of the five opinions as factual statements also said it was accurate. For example, 92% of those who incorrectly classified

Americans overwhelmingly see accuracy in statements they both correctly and incorrectly deem as factual

	% who **correctly** classified it as **factual**	Of those, % who said it was …	
FACTUAL STATEMENTS		**Accurate**	**Inaccurate**
President Barack Obama was born in the United States	77%	89%	11%
Health care costs per person in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world	76	91	8
ISIS lost a significant portion of its territory in Iraq and Syria in 2017	68	84	14
Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget	57	62	37
Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally have some rights under the Constitution	54	79	20

	% who **incorrectly** classified it as **factual**	Of those, % who said it was …	
OPINION STATEMENTS		**Accurate**	**Inaccurate**
Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally are a very big problem for the country today	31%	89%	11%
Democracy is the greatest form of government	29	92	8
Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient	28	91	8
Increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour is essential for the health of the U.S. economy	26	83	16
Abortion should be legal in most cases	18	85	14

	% who classified it as **factual**	Of those, % who said it was …	
BORDERLINE STATEMENTS		**Accurate**	**Inaccurate**
Voter fraud across the U.S. has undermined the results of our elections	32%	81%	18%
Applying additional scrutiny to Muslim Americans would not reduce terrorism in the U.S.	24	82	17

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
"Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News"

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"Democracy is the greatest form of government" as a factual statement said it was accurate. Likewise, those who classified each borderline statement as factual largely saw accuracy in each.

This does not mean, though, that the public does not ever see a claim in the news as factual and wrong – something that is stated as a fact, but can be unambiguously disproved by objective evidence. Segments of the public – albeit mostly small – classified statements as both factual and inaccurate. For example, a majority of those who correctly classified the statement "Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget" as a factual statement saw it as accurate (62%), but roughly four-in-ten (37%) thought it was inaccurate. While the findings do not address how Americans assess inaccurate statements since all of the factual statements included in the study were accurate, this study provides some evidence that Americans can see news as both factual and inaccurate.

Americans most often disagree with factual statements they incorrectly think are opinions

Dissent is a driving factor in why most Americans see factual statements as opinions. In the case of four of the five factual statements, each was largely disagreed with when incorrectly identified as an opinion. For example, 82% of those who incorrectly identified "Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget" as an opinion disagreed with it. There was a split between agreeing and disagreeing for only one of the five factual statements when incorrectly classified as an opinion.

There was more variation among correctly classified opinion statements. Americans who correctly classified the opinion statement "Democracy is the greatest form of government," for instance, were more likely to agree (70%) than disagree with it (28%). On the other hand, those who said

Americans often disagree with factual statements they incorrectly label as opinions

FACTUAL STATEMENTS	% who **incorrectly** classified it as **opinion**	Of those, % who said it was an opinion with which they …	
		Agree	**Disagree**
Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally have some rights under the Constitution	44%	27%	72%
Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget	41	17	82
ISIS lost a significant portion of its territory in Iraq and Syria in 2017	30	33	64
Health care costs per person in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world	23	49	48
President Barack Obama was born in the United States	22	25	73

OPINION STATEMENTS	% who **correctly** classified it as **opinion**	Of those, % who said it was an opinion with which they …	
		Agree	**Disagree**
Abortion should be legal in most cases	80%	49%	49%
Increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour is essential for the health of the U.S. economy	73	37	62
Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient	71	52	46
Democracy is the greatest form of government	69	70	28
Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally are a very big problem for the country today	68	30	69

BORDERLINE STATEMENTS	% who classified it as **opinion**	Of those, % who said it was an opinion with which they …	
		Agree	**Disagree**
Applying additional scrutiny to Muslim Americans would not reduce terrorism in the U.S.	74%	51%	48%
Voter fraud across the U.S. has undermined the results of our elections	66	30	69

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
"Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News"

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"Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally are a very big problem for the country today" were more likely to disagree (69%) than agree with it (30%).

Similar to the opinion statements, there was variation in agreement when borderline statements were classified as opinions. Nearly seven-in-ten (69%) of those who classified the statement "Voter fraud across the U.S. has undermined the results of our elections" as an opinion disagreed with it. However, those who classified "Applying additional scrutiny to Muslim Americans would not reduce terrorism in the U.S." as an opinion were split between agreeing (51%) and disagreeing (48%).

5. Tying statements to news outlets had limited impact on Americans' capacity to identify statements as factual or opinion
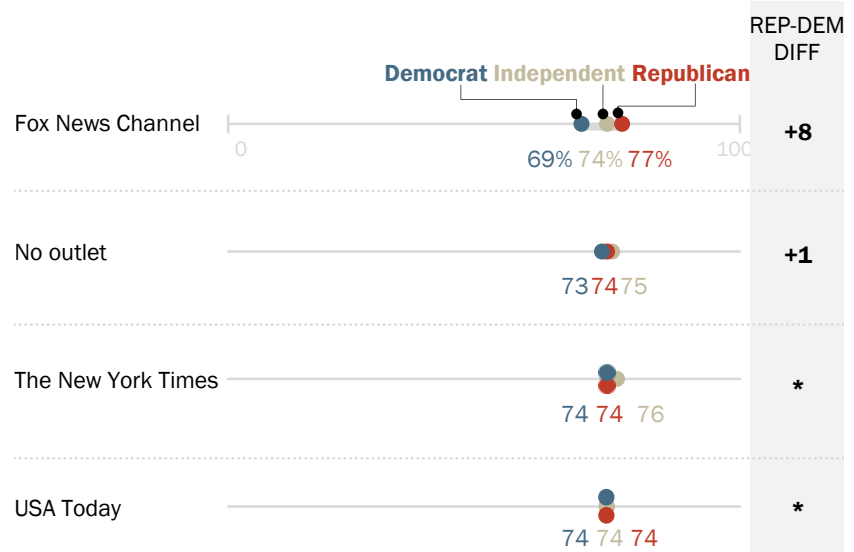
Given the strong partisan differences in the trust and use of various news outlets identified in the Center's other research, this study separately examined the impact of adding news outlet attributions to factual and opinion statements. Overall, the attribution had a limited impact, except for one place: Republicans were modestly more likely than Democrats to accurately classify factual statements when they were attributed to Fox News Channel. But there was no influence of this news outlet between parties when it came to opinion or borderline statements.

For this part of the analysis, U.S. adults saw a mix of eight additional statements – three factual statements, three opinion statements and two borderline statements – all different from the first round of 12 statements discussed previously. One group – making up a quarter of respondents – was shown all eight statements attributed to no source, while a second group saw each statement randomly attributed to The New York Times (an outlet whose audience leans to the left), Fox News Channel (an outlet whose audience leans to the right) or USA Today (an outlet whose audience is more mixed).[10] The classification of these three outlets' audiences is based on previously reported survey data, the same data that were used to classify audiences for a recent study about coverage of the Trump administration. For more detail on how this

Democrats' and Republicans' ability to correctly identify factual statements modestly influenced when attributed to Fox News

% of the time Republicans, Democrats and independents correctly classified a factual statement as factual when it was attributed to each outlet

	REP-DEM DIFF
Fox News Channel — Democrat 69% Independent 74% Republican 77%	+8
No outlet — 73 74 75	+1
The New York Times — 74 74 76	*
USA Today — 74 74 74	*

Note: Skipping a statement was counted as not correctly identifying it as factual or as opinion.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
"Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News"

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[10] At the end of the survey, respondents who saw news statements attributed to the news outlets were told, "Please note that the statements that you were shown in this survey were part of an experiment and did not actually appear in news articles of the news organizations." Those who did not see the statements attributed to the outlets were told, "Please note that the statements that you were shown in this survey were part of an experiment and did not actually appear in news articles."

analysis was done, see the Methodology.

Overall, as with the initial set of twelve statements, Republicans and Democrats were again more likely to label a claim as factual if it appealed to their side, regardless of outlet attribution. (See the detailed table in Appendix B.) And, overall, the different levels of success in classifying statements seen between the groups discussed in Chapter 2 emerge here as well.

The one instance in which the source label showed a modest influence on how members of both political parties categorized the factual statements was when the statements were attributed to Fox News Channel. While members of both parties accurately classified factual statements attributed to Fox News most of the time, Republicans did so to a greater degree (77% of the time), while Democrats did so to a lesser degree (69% of the time).[11] Independents fell in between, identifying factual statements attributed to Fox News about three-quarters of the time (74%).

In contrast, Republicans and Democrats were about as likely to correctly identify the three factual statements when no outlet was attributed to them and when attributed to the two other outlets, The New York Times and USA Today. Furthermore, the attribution of any of the three outlets had no impact on Republicans' or Democrats' classifications of the opinion and borderline statements.

Though source attribution in this experiment had a minor impact on responses, other research has found strongly differing reactions to news outlets and widely diverging usage among Democrats and Republicans. So, it is important to keep in mind that this is one experiment within a larger study and that additional research could probe further into when news brands influence perceptions of the news and when they don't.

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[11] Since, due to the randomization, it was not possible to break up respondents into discrete groups by outlet attribution, this analysis grouped together all of the times the 5,035 respondents who saw a statement attributed to each of the outlets or no outlet at all. The results, then, are framed as the percent of the time that respondents classified statements a given way when attributed to each outlet. For more details on what "percent of the time" means, see the Methodology.

Acknowledgments

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Methodology

Survey

The analysis in this report is based on a nationally representative survey conducted from Feb. 22 to March 4, 2018, among a sample of 5,035 adults 18 years of age or older. The margin of error for the full sample is plus or minus 1.5 percentage points. This report was made possible by The Pew Charitable Trusts, which received support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Open Society Foundations. Support for the research is part of Knight Foundation's Trust, Media and Democracy initiative, which aims to strengthen the role of strong, trusted journalism as essential to a healthy democracy.

The survey was conducted by the GfK Group in English and Spanish using KnowledgePanel, its nationally representative online research panel. KnowledgePanel members are recruited through probability sampling methods and include those with internet access and those who did not have internet access at the time of their recruitment (KnowledgePanel provides internet access for those who do not have it, and if needed, a device to access the internet when they join the panel). A combination of random-digit dialing (RDD) and address-based sampling (ABS) methodologies have been used to recruit panel members (in 2009 KnowledgePanel switched its sampling methodology for recruiting members from RDD to ABS).

KnowledgePanel continually recruits new panel members throughout the year to offset panel attrition as people leave the panel. All active members of the GfK panel were eligible for inclusion in this study. In all, 8,066 panelists were invited to take part in the survey. All sampled members received an initial email to notify

Margins of error

	Sample size	Margin of error in percentage points
U.S. adults	5,035	+/- 1.5
Party affiliation		
Republican	1,437	+/- 2.8
Democrat	1,633	+/- 2.7
Independent	1,438	+/- 2.8
Political awareness		
High awareness	1,951	+/- 2.4
Moderate awareness	1,902	+/- 2.5
Low awareness	1,182	+/- 3.1
Digital savviness		
Very savvy	2,394	+/- 2.2
Somewhat savvy	1,760	+/- 2.6
Not savvy	848	+/- 3.7
Trust in national news organizations		
A lot of trust	1,139	+/- 3.2
Some trust	2,477	+/- 2.2
Not much or no trust	1,396	+/- 2.9
News interest		
Very interested	1,321	+/- 2.9
Somewhat interested	2,280	+/- 2.2
Not interested	1,389	+/- 2.9

Note: The margins of error are reported at the 95% level of confidence and are calculated by taking into account the average design effect for each subgroup.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
"Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News"

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them of the survey and provided a link to the survey questionnaire. Additional follow-up reminders were sent to those who had not responded as needed.

The final sample of 5,035 adults was weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, race, Hispanic origin, education, region, household income, home ownership status and metropolitan area to the parameters of the Census Bureau's March 2016 Current Population Survey (CPS). This weight is multiplied by an initial sampling or base weight that corrects for differences in the probability of selection of various segments of GfK's sample and by a panel weight that adjusts for any biases due to nonresponse and noncoverage at the panel recruitment stage (using all of the parameters described above).

Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting at each of these stages.

The table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% confidence level.

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.

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Assessing factual and opinion statements in the news

In this survey, respondents were provided with a series of statements and told that they came from news stories. For each statement, respondents were asked to categorize it as a factual or opinion statement. In a first module, respondents saw 12 statements. A second module included an additional eight statements, but unlike the first module, some statements were attributed to one of three news outlets. (For more information on the second set of statements, see the next section.

Asking respondents to categorize statements as factual or opinion

Respondents were asked to categorize each statement into one of two categories: a **factual statement** (regardless of whether it was accurate or inaccurate) or an **opinion statement** (whether they agree with it or not).

In other words, respondents were to choose the factual classification if they thought that the statement could be proved or disproved based on factual, objective evidence. They were to choose the opinion classification if they thought that the statement was based on the values and beliefs of the journalist or the source making the statement, and could not definitively be proved or disproved based on factual, objective evidence.

Each statement appeared in an image that was intended to look as if it were a quotation pulled from a news story.

After respondents classified a statement as

How Americans were asked to classify factual and opinion news statements

In this survey, U.S. adults were shown statements like the one below and asked:

You will now be shown a series of statements that have been taken from news stories. Regardless of how knowledgeable you are about the topic, would you consider this statement to be ...

Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget.

a **FACTUAL statement**
(whether you think it is accurate or not)

an **OPINION statement**
(whether you agree with it or not)

To the best of your knowledge, do you think the factual statement is ...

Do you tend to ___ with the opinion statement

Accurate **Inaccurate**   **Agree**   **Disagree**

"Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News"

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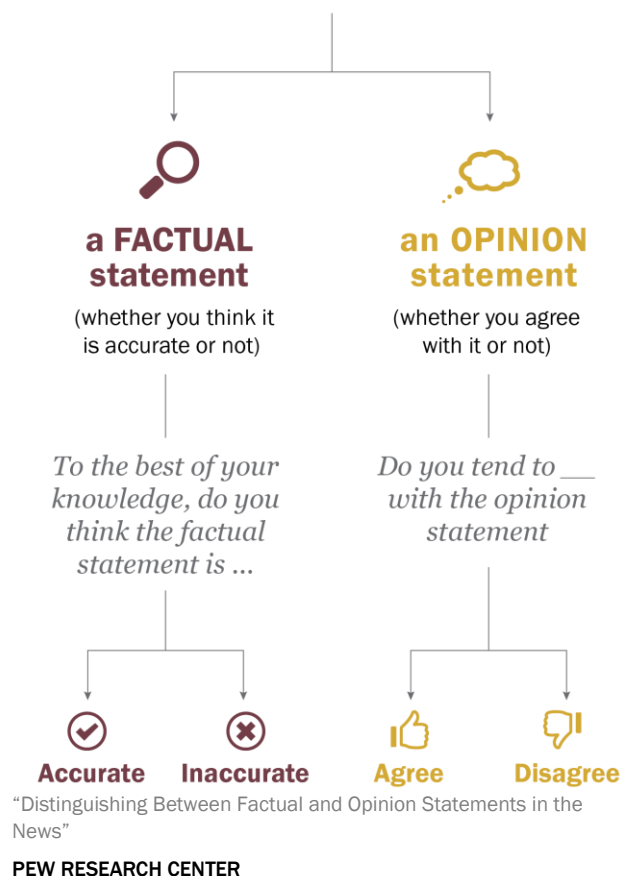
either a factual or opinion statement, they were asked one of two follow-up questions. After a factual classification, they were asked if they thought the statement was accurate or inaccurate. After an opinion classification, they were asked if they agreed or disagreed with it.

Selecting the statements

The initial set of 12 statements included five factual, five opinion and two borderline statements developed by Pew Research Center analysts and subject-matter experts in conjunction with an external advisory board. Factual statements are unambiguous statements that one can prove to be accurate or inaccurate based on objective evidence. Opinion statements are based in people's beliefs and values, whether political, religious, moral, cultural, or some other belief system, and therefore lack traditional standards of objectivity. And borderline statements have elements of both factual and opinion statements – they can be based in objective evidence, but claims are vague enough that they can neither be unambiguously proved nor disproved by factual evidence, in part because such evidence is often conflicting, incomplete, contested or involves making predictions.

Researchers used a multistep, deliberative process to construct and select the final statements used in the survey. The factual statements were drawn from a variety of sources, including news organizations, government sources, research organizations and fact-checking entities. The factual statements included only accurate – as opposed to inaccurate – statements that were fact-checked by the research team from primary data sources, fact-checking organizations and news stories, among other sources. The opinion statements were adapted largely from existing public opinion surveys on a range of topics. The borderline statements were inspired by the sources used to develop both the factual and opinion statements.

Next, a number of the statements were pretested using nonprobability online surveys to ensure that they would be understood by respondents. Lastly, the final set of statements was reviewed by Center subject matter experts and an external board of advisers with three goals in mind:

1. Pull together statements that range across a variety of policy areas and current events (e.g., climate change, abortion, terrorism, immigration, democracy and elections).
2. Strive for statements that were clearly factual and clearly opinion in nature (as well as some that combined both factual and opinion elements, referred to here as "borderline").
3. Include an equal number of statements that appealed to the ideological predispositions of the right and of the left, maintaining an overall ideological balance.

Researchers deliberately decided to include statements that lend support to the political views or policy position of each side of the political spectrum. In today's polarized media environment, much of the news content has ideological appeal. For example, a 2017 Pew Research Center study that looked at how news organizations covered the beginning days of the Trump administration

found that while outlets largely covered the same storylines, the tone of the coverage varied dramatically based on whether the outlet had a right-leaning, left-leaning or more mixed audience. With this in mind, statements in this study appealed to each side of the political spectrum to understand how Americans interpret statements that would mimic what people may see around contentious issues – that is, statements that are either true (in the case of the factual statements) or opinions, but nevertheless support an overall tone favoring one side or another.

A number of steps were taken to determine the ideological appeal of a statement. For the factual statements, existing literature on the political views of each side was pulled from various outlets and organizations. Factual statements that lend support to views held by more of those on one side of the ideological spectrum (and less of those on the other side) were classified as appealing to that side. Opinion statements were classified as appealing to one side if they were supported more so by one side in recent surveys. In addition, two "neutral" statements were included – one factual and one opinion statement – which were intended to appeal equally to the left and right. The borderline statements relied both on existing polling and other sources to determine whether each appealed to a particular policy narrative.

Attribution of statements to news outlets

A separate analysis tested the impact of attributing statements to news outlets on Americans' ability to decipher factual statements from opinions. Respondents were provided with a second set of news statements, eight in all. These statements were all different from the initial 12 statements but were selected using the same criteria as noted above. There were three factual statements, three opinion statements and two borderline statements. Again, an equal number of statements appealed to the ideological predispositions of the left and right. This second set included one factual, one opinion, and one borderline statement that appealed to each side, as well as one neutral factual statement and one neutral opinion statement.

Respondents were asked to evaluate this second set of eight statements after the initial set of 12. The two sets of statements were separated by several other questions. (See the topline for more information on the placement of the two sets of statements.)

Attribution to news outlets

In the first set of statements, all respondents were told that each statement was "taken from news stories" but not attributed to a news source. However, in the second set of statements, some respondents saw statements attributed to specific news outlets. A quarter of respondents (N=1,260) saw all eight statements with no source attributed to them, while three-quarters (N=3,775) saw each attributed to one of three news outlets: Fox News Channel, The New York Times, or USA Today.

These three outlets were chosen to represent those that appeal to different audiences ideologically: one that appeals more to a right-leaning audience (Fox News Channel), one that appeals more to a left-leaning audience (The New York Times) and one with a mixed audience (USA Today). The audience composition of these three outlets was based on a Nov. 29 through Dec. 12, 2016, survey that asked respondents if they regularly got news about the 2016 presidential election from a number of outlets. The ideological leaning of an outlet's audience was based on the portion of the audience who self-identifies as a liberal Democrat (including independents who lean Democratic) compared with the portion who identifies as a conservative Republican (including independents who lean Republican). The audience composition of The New York Times was 51% liberal Democrats, compared with 12% conservative Republicans. Fox News audience composition was 43% conservative Republicans and 10% liberal Democrats. USA Today's audience composition was somewhat more mixed ideologically with 26% self-identifying as liberal Democrats and 16% as conservative Republicans. (See here for more information on the ideological composition and categorization of news outlets' audiences.)

For those who saw the statements attributed to news outlets, each statement was randomly attributed to one of the three. Additionally, each respondent randomly saw three statements from two of the outlets and two from the third outlet. This was done so that each respondent saw a mix of outlets across the eight statements. The content of the statement and the visual appearance of the image looked exactly the same except for the news outlet attribution. The final layout of the source lines was based on best practices in company identification. The example below shows one of the statements across the four different attributions.

Example of news outlet attributions for second set of statements

In general, regardless of who is in power, politicians can't be trusted.

In general, regardless of who is in power, politicians can't be trusted.

- Fox News Channel

In general, regardless of who is in power, politicians can't be trusted.

- USA Today

In general, regardless of who is in power, politicians can't be trusted.

- The New York Times
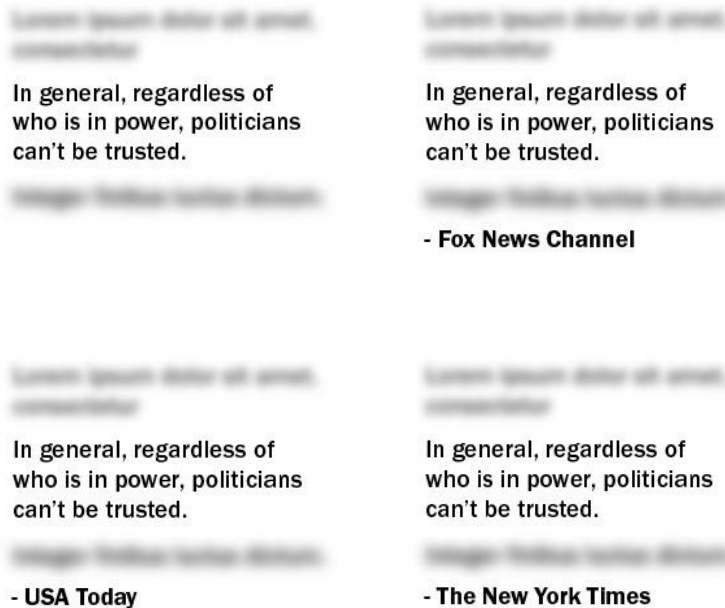
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At the end of the survey, respondents who saw news statements attributed to the news outlets were told, "Please note that the statements that you were shown in this survey were part of an experiment and did not actually appear in news articles of the news organizations." Those who did not see the statements attributed to the outlets were told, "Please note that the statements that you were shown in this survey were part of an experiment and did not actually appear in news articles."

Analyzing the impact of news outlets

The framework used to analyze the influence of news outlets differs from that used for the initial set of 12 statements, in which none of the statements were attributed to a news outlet. In the analysis of the initial set, results were given as the percent *of respondents* who classified factual and opinion statements. Here, they are given as the percent *of the time* respondents classified statements.

Since everyone who saw the statements attributed to news outlets saw a mix of all three outlets, it was not possible to break up respondents into discrete groups as was done for the initial set. Instead, this analysis grouped together all of the times the 5,035 respondents saw a statement attributed to each of the outlets or no outlet at all. The results, then, are framed as the percent *of the time* that respondents classified the factual, opinion and borderline statements as factual or opinion for each outlet. For example, for the three factual statements, we analyzed the percent of the time that respondents said they were factual when they were attributed to Fox News, The New York Times, USA Today or no outlet at all. The illustration shows how the data are organized for this analysis.

Analyzing the impact of news outlets on classifying factual and opinion news statements

Below is an example showing the 3 factual statements:

In this example, these two people saw all three factual statements without an outlet

These six example people randomly saw each factual statement attributed to one of the three news outlets

Statement 1
Statement 2
Statement 3

The New York Times   Fox News Channel   USA Today
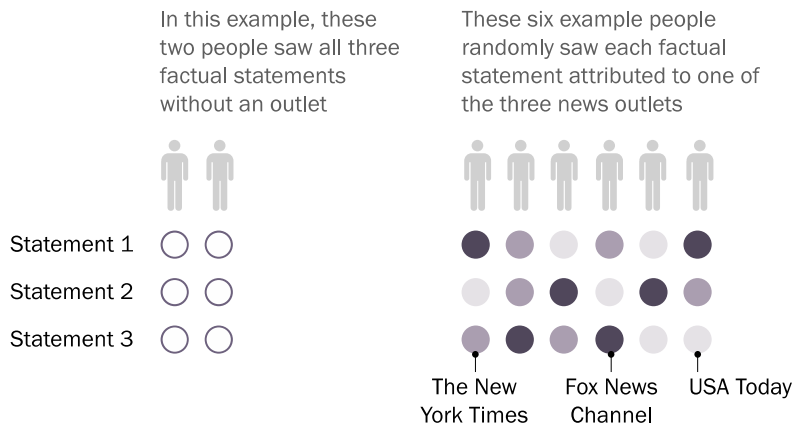
The times the three factual statements were attributed to Fox News Channel were then examined together, as were the times they were attributed to The New York Times, USA Today, or no outlet
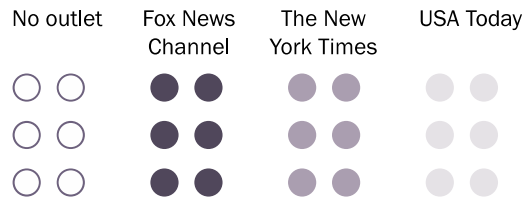
No outlet   Fox News Channel   The New York Times   USA Today

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Appendix A: Measuring capacity to classify statements as factual or opinion

Prior to launching the survey, researchers conducted a series of preliminary tests to determine how best to ask Americans to classify news-related statements. The purpose of these tests was to analyze the effects of changes in the language used in the question instructions and response options, the number of response options and the attributions of the statements to different news outlets. These tests were *not* intended to be representative of the U.S. adult population.

To explore different question wording options, a series of tests were conducted using SurveyMonkey's online nonprobability panel. The sample size for each test ranged from 76 to 232 respondents. Each test included five to 22 news-related statements, a number of which were used in the final questionnaire. In addition to asking respondents to classify statements, each test included one of three open-ended questions, asking for challenges they had in classifying the statements, their general experience with the survey, or how they defined "facts" and "opinions."

The table below provides the question instruction wording used with the statements included in each test.

Question wording and response options in preliminary tests

Best testing version

Test 10
The following statement has been taken from a news article. Regardless of your knowledge of the topic, if you were to read this statement in an article, would you think it is ...
1. A factual statement, whether accurate or not
2. An opinion, whether you agree with it or not

Tests with two factual/opinion response options

Test 1
The following statements are taken from news articles. For each one, indicate whether you think it is a fact or an opinion.
1. Fact
2. Opinion

Test 8
The following statements are taken from news articles. If you were to read each statement in an article, would you consider it to be ...
1. Presented as a fact, whether accurate or not
2. Presented as an opinion, whether you agree with it or not

Test 9
The following statement has been taken from a news article. Regardless of your knowledge of the topic, if you were to read this statement in an article, would you consider it to be ...
1. A statement that can be proven to be true or not
2. An opinion

Note: The version used in the final survey had minor modifications from the best testing version. For exact question wording in the final questionnaire, see the topline. Tests are numbered by the order in which they were conducted. An additional test was run with the wording of Test 1 that included an open-ended response after each classification.
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Question wording and response options in preliminary tests (continued)

Tests with three factual/opinion response options

Test 2

The following statements are taken from news articles. For each one, indicate whether you think it is a fact, a statement that appears to be a fact but is untrue, or an opinion.
1. A fact
2. A statement that appears to be a fact but is untrue
3. An opinion

Test 3

The following statements have been taken from news articles. For each, indicate whether the author is stating a fact, is making a statement that appears to be a fact but is untrue, or is stating their opinion. We are NOT asking whether you agree or disagree with the statement.
1. Stating a fact
2. Making a statement that appears to be a fact, but is untrue
3. Stating their opinion

Test 4

The following statements have been taken from news articles. For each, indicate whether the author is stating a fact, is making a statement that appears to be a fact but is untrue, or is stating their opinion. We are NOT asking whether you agree or disagree with the statement.
1. Stating a fact
2. Making a statement that appears to be a fact, but is untrue
3. Stating their opinion
4. Don't know

Test 5

The following statements have been taken from news articles. For each, indicate whether the author is stating a fact, is making a statement that appears to be a fact but is untrue, or is stating their opinion.
1. Stating a fact
2. Making a statement that appears to be a fact, but is untrue
3. Stating their opinion, whether or not you agree with it
4. Don't know

Test 6

The following statements have been taken from news articles. Regardless of your knowledge of the topic, if you were to read each statement in an article, would you consider it to be a statement of fact, an opinion, or a statement presented as fact but untrue?
1. A statement of fact
2. An opinion
3. A statement presented as fact, but untrue

Test 11

The following statement has been taken from a news article. Regardless of your knowledge of the topic, if you were to read this statement in an article, would you consider it to be …
1. A factually accurate statement
2. A factually inaccurate statement
3. An opinion

Test with four factual/opinion response options

Test 7

The following statements are taken from news articles. If you were to read each statement in an article, would you consider it to be …
1. A fact
2. A statement that appears to be a fact but is untrue
3. An opinion that you agree with
4. An opinion that you disagree with

Note: Tests are numbered by the order in which they were conducted.
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Determining the level of explanatory language

The best testing version (test 10 in the table) included explanatory language in both the question instructions and the response options. Test results suggested that this added language helped people better understand the task, alleviated pressure to have prior knowledge on the statement's topic, and provided some guidance in what "factual statements" and "opinion statements" referenced.

Initial tests included no explanatory language, which, according to open-end responses, led to confusion among a number of respondents. (See the question wording in tests 1 and 2.) Some interpreted the exercise as either a knowledge quiz – in which they assessed the accuracy of the statement – or an evaluation of whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement.

The added language to the factual (tests 2 through 11) and opinion response options (tests 5, 7, 8 and 10) more clearly specified the task. Additionally, some tests (tests 3 and 4) experimented with adding a sentence, "We are NOT asking whether you agree or disagree with the statement," in the question instructions, but tests with that addition did not perform better. Language was also added to the question instructions to lessen the cognitive difficulty respondents may have had when classifying statements (language such as "Regardless of your knowledge of the topic..." was added in tests 6, 9, 10 and 11).

Taken together, there was little evidence of confusion over what the question was asking in the best testing version.

Varying the number of response options

While the best testing version (test 10) included two response options – a factual statement, whether accurate or not, and an opinion, whether you agree with it or not – these tests also explored versions with three and four factual/opinion response options.

Tests with three response options (tests 2 through 6 and 11) included one opinion option and two factual options: an accurate factual statement and an inaccurate factual statement. While this deterred people from categorizing statements that they perceived to be inaccurate as opinions, the imbalance of factual and opinion options substantially decreased the likelihood of someone selecting the single opinion option.

The four response options (test 7), in which there were two factual options (accurate and inaccurate) and two opinion options (opinion you agree with and opinion you disagree with) made the task more difficult. Respondents had to make multiple classifications at once (factual vs. opinion and either accurate/inaccurate or agree/disagree), which resulted in an increase in item nonresponse.

Attributing sources to news statements

Additional tests were conducted (using language and response options from tests 2, 8, 10 and 11) which layered on attributions of news outlets to the statements. In each test, a respondent saw one of four options: statements attributed to an outlet with a left-leaning audience (The New York Times), a right-leaning audience (Fox News Channel), a mixed audience (USA Today) or no outlet. In these tests, each respondent saw the same outlet for all statements.

When certain language such as "presented as" was used (in test 8), many respondents answered based on how they thought the news outlet was classifying the statement, not how they would classify it. This helped inform the decision to avoid this question wording for the main set of items as well. Otherwise, no additional differences arose when source lines were added.

Appendix B: Detailed tables

Correct classification by age

% of U.S. adults who correctly classified each number of factual and opinion statements

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
	%	%	%	%
Factual statements				
Two or fewer	24	27	31	30
Three or four	42	43	47	53
All five	34	30	22	17
Opinion statements				
Two or fewer	18	18	24	30
Three or four	37	39	47	49
All five	46	42	29	21

Note: Skipping a statement was counted as not correctly identifying it as factual or as opinion.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
"Distinguishing Between Factual and Opinion Statements in the News"

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Correct classification by education

% of U.S. adults who correctly classified each number of factual and opinion statements

	High school or less	Some college	College+
	%	%	%
Factual statements			
Two or fewer	39	29	15
Three or four	47	47	43
All five	15	24	42
Opinion statements			
Two or fewer	30	23	11
Three or four	48	44	35
All five	22	33	54

Note: Skipping a statement was counted as not correctly identifying it as factual or as opinion.
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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Statement classification by source attribution and party

*% of U.S. adults who classified each statement as **factual** when it was attributed to …*

	No outlet			New York Times			USA Today			Fox News Channel		
	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Factual statements												
Republicans currently hold a majority of seats in both chambers of Congress	86	89	91	88	90	91	91	86	92	88	86	93
Most of the heroin that currently makes it into the U.S. comes across the southern border	56	61	65	56	63	65	56	62	65	48	62	68
In the aftermath of the war in Iraq, no active weapons of mass destruction were found	76	76	65	77	77	65	77	73	68	71	72	68
Opinion statements												
In general, regardless of who is in power, politicians can't be trusted	27	22	28	27	22	25	24	23	23	26	23	29
The government must make a greater effort to reduce climate change	48	29	20	46	28	16	50	28	17	46	30	17
The courts have gone too far in restricting public expression of Christian beliefs	20	21	35	25	24	40	22	21	41	19	24	36
Borderline statements												
Recent tax cuts have benefited the wealthiest of Americans more than others	75	50	26	72	54	27	76	53	27	73	57	30
Police around the country treat racial and ethnic minorities as fairly as they treat whites	20	21	28	16	22	29	20	25	33	19	17	26

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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Overlap between groups

	% who (have/are) ...				
	High political awareness	Very digitally savvy	A lot of trust in national news organizations	Very interested in news	Total
Of those who (have/are) ...	%	%	%	%	%
High political awareness	-	58	32	38	34
Very digitally savvy	41	-	25	24	48
A lot of trust in national news organization	51	58	-	37	21
Very interested in news	57	52	35	-	23

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 22-March 4, 2018.
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Appendix C: Topline questionnaire

2018 FACTUAL/OPINION NEWS STATEMENTS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
February 22–March 4, 2018
TOTAL N=5,035

ASK ALL:
FREETIME During a typical day, which of the following do you most frequently do in your free time? Choose up to three. **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4
<u>2018</u>
25 Get news
25 Exercise
44 Go on a social media site (such as Facebook, Twitter or Snapchat)
69 Watch TV or movies for entertainment
11 Shop
26 Read a book
1 No answer

ASK ALL:
NEWS_PLATFORMa-i[12]

ASK IF GETS NEWS FROM MULTIPLE PLATFORMS IN NEWS_PLATFORM:
NEWS_PREFER

ASK IF GETS NEWS FROM MULTIPLE TV PLATFORMS IN NEWS_PLATFORM AND PREFERS TO GET NEWS FROM TV IN NEWS_PREFER:
[NOTE: TV PLATFORM PREFERENCE INCLUDES THOSE WHO ONLY GET NEWS FROM ONE TV PLATFORM IN NEWS_PLATFORM]
NEWS_TVPLAT

ASK ALL:
NEWSIMPT Which of the following statements best describes you? I follow the news closely… **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4
<u>2018</u>
34 Only when something important is happening
65 Most of the time, whether or not something important is happening
1 No answer

---

[12] In this point in the questionnaire, respondents were asked about the platforms from which they get news. We do not think that the measurement of this questions was as accurate as when a similar question was administered in prior surveys. Therefore, NEWS_PLATFORMa-i and the two questions filtered from it – NEWS_PREFER and NEWS_TVPLAT – are not shown here. For more information, please contact Pew Research Center.

ASK ALL:

NEWSSKEP   Which of the following best describes how you approach national news stories, even if neither is exactly right? I typically go into a news story expecting that it will…
[RANDOMIZE]

Feb 22-March 4
<u>2018</u>
71   Largely be accurate
27   Largely be inaccurate
2   No answer

COMBINED RESPONSES TOPICS AND TOPICMOST [BASED ON TOTAL N=5,035]:
ASK ALL:
TOPICS   Which, if any, of these topics do you regularly get news about? [*Check all that apply*]
[RANDOMIZE]
ASK IF REGULARLY GETS NEWS ABOUT TWO OR MORE TOPICS IN TOPICS
TOPICMOST   And, among those topics, which do you get news about MOST? **[SHOW ONLY THOSE SELECTED IN TOPICS; KEEP IN SAME ORDER AS TOPICS]**

		Net interested (TOPICS)	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 Most interested (TOPICMOST)/ Selected alone (TOPICS)	Interested (TOPICS)/Not most interested (TOPICMOST)	Not selected/ No answer
a.	Government and politics	64	35	28	36
b.	People and events in your own community	45	15	30	55
c.	Sports	35	11	24	65
d.	Business and finance	30	4	26	70
e.	Science and technology	34	4	30	66
f.	Entertainment	33	6	27	67
g.	Crime	48	12	37	52
h.	Health and medicine	38	4	34	62
i.	None of the above	10	N/A	N/A	90

ASK ALL:
GROUP_TRUST   How much, if at all, do you trust the information you get from…?

	A lot	Some	Not too much	Not at all	No answer
a. National news organizations					
Feb 22–March 4, 2018	21	49	20	9	*
Mar 13-Mar 27, 2017	20	52	22	6	*
Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016	18	59	18	6	*
b. Local news organizations					
Feb 22–March 4, 2018	28	55	12	5	1
Mar 13-Mar 27, 2017	25	60	12	2	*
Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016	22	60	14	3	1
c. Friends, family, and acquaintances					
Feb 22–March 4, 2018	13	58	23	5	1
Mar 13-Mar 27, 2017	15	61	21	3	1
Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016	14	63	19	3	1
d. Social media sites (such as Facebook, Twitter or Snapchat)[13]					
Feb 22–March 4, 2018	4	29	36	30	1
Mar 13-Mar 27, 2017	5	30	40	25	*
Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016					
Based on web-using U.S. adults [N=4,339]	4	30	33	32	1

ASK ALL:
NEWSCON1   Thinking about the outlet you get most of your national news from, which comes closer to your view? **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4
    2018
42	I feel connected to the outlet I get most of my national news from
56	I do not feel particularly connected to the outlet I get most of my national news from
2	No answer

ASK ALL:
NATLMEDIA_JOB   Regardless of how closely you follow NATIONAL NEWS, how well do the national news media keep you informed of the most important NATIONAL stories of the day?

Feb 22-March 4 2018		Mar 13-Mar 27 2017	Jan 12-Feb 8 2016
17	Very well	21	23
58	Fairly well	54	54
18	Not too well	20	17
6	Not at all well	4	5
1	No answer	*	1

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[13] For the January 2016 and March 2017 surveys, GROUP_TRUSTd read "Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter".

RANDOMIZE WATCHDOG_1 & WATCHDOG_3
ASK ALL:
WATCHDOG_1 Some people think that by criticizing leaders, news organizations keep political leaders from doing their job. Others think that such criticism is worth it because it keeps political leaders from doing things that should not be done. Which position is closer to your opinion?

Feb 22-March 4 2018		Mar 13-Mar 27 2017	Jan 12-Feb 8 2016
31	Keep political leaders from doing their job	28	21
65	Keep political leaders from doing things that shouldn't be done	70	75
4	No answer	2	4

RANDOMIZE WATCHDOG_1 & WATCHDOG_3
ASK ALL:
WATCHDOG_3 In presenting the news dealing with political and social issues, do you think that news organizations deal fairly with all sides, or do they tend to favor one side?

Feb 22-March 4 2018		Mar 13-Mar 27 2017	Jan 12-Feb 8 2016
30	Deal fairly with all sides	28	24
68	Tend to favor one side	72	74
2	No answer	*	3

ASK ALL:
NEWS_FORM Whether online or offline, do you prefer to get your news by…? **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4 2018		Jan 12-Feb 8 2016
32	Reading it	35
53	Watching it	46
14	Listening to it	17
1	No answer	2

ASK ALL:
FACTOPIN   You will now be shown a series of statements that have been taken from news stories.

Regardless of how knowledgeable you are about the topic, would you consider this statement to be a factual statement (whether you think it is accurate or not) OR an opinion statement (whether you agree with it or not)? **[RANDOMIZE THE 12 IMAGES WITH THE STATEMENTS]**[14]

		A factual statement (whether you think it is accurate or not)	An opinion statement (whether you agree with it or not)	No answer[15]
1.	Health care costs per person in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world Feb 22–March 4, 2018	76	23	1
2.	President Barack Obama was born in the United States Feb 22–March 4, 2018	77	22	1
3.	Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally have some rights under the Constitution Feb 22–March 4, 2018	54	44	2
4.	ISIS lost a significant portion of its territory in Iraq and Syria in 2017 Feb 22–March 4, 2018	68	30	2
5.	Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget Feb 22–March 4, 2018	57	41	2
6.	Democracy is the greatest form of government Feb 22–March 4, 2018	29	69	2
7.	Increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour is essential for the health of the U.S. economy Feb 22–March 4, 2018	26	73	1
8.	Abortion should be legal in most cases Feb 22–March 4, 2018	18	80	1
9.	Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally are a very big problem for the country today Feb 22–March 4, 2018	31	68	1
10.	Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient Feb 22–March 4, 2018	28	71	1
11.	Applying additional scrutiny to Muslim Americans would not reduce terrorism in the U.S. Feb 22–March 4, 2018	24	74	2
12.	Voter fraud across the U.S. has undermined the results of our elections Feb 22–March 4, 2018	32	66	1

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[14] Statements were shown in images that were intended to look like they had been taken from news stories.
[15] If respondents skipped this question, they were given a follow-up question asking why they did not answer the question. For more information, contact Pew Research Center.

ASK IF SELECTED FACTUAL STATEMENT IN FACTOPIN1-12:
STATEFACT   To the best of your knowledge, do you think the factual statement is accurate or inaccurate?

		Accurate	Inaccurate	No answer
1.	Health care costs per person in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=3,887]	91	8	1
2.	President Barack Obama was born in the United States			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=3,904]	89	11	*
3.	Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally have some rights under the Constitution			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=2,710]	79	20	1
4.	ISIS lost a significant portion of its territory in Iraq and Syria in 2017			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=3,532]	84	14	2
5.	Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=2,914]	62	37	1
6.	Democracy is the greatest form of government			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=1,466]	92	8	1
7.	Increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour is essential for the health of the U.S. economy			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=1,174]	83	16	1
8.	Abortion should be legal in most cases			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=878]	85	14	1
9.	Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally are a very big problem for the country today			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=1,627]	89	11	1
10.	Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=1,394]	91	8	1
11.	Applying additional scrutiny to Muslim Americans would not reduce terrorism in the U.S.			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=1,126]	82	17	1
12.	Voter fraud across the U.S. has undermined the results of our elections			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=1,520]	81	18	1

ASK IF SELECTED OPINION STATEMENT IN FACTOPIN1-12:
STATEOPIN   Do you tend to agree or disagree with the opinion statement?

		Agree	Disagree	No answer
1.	Health care costs per person in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=1,101]	49	48	3
2.	President Barack Obama was born in the United States			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=1,070]	25	73	3
3.	Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally have some rights under the Constitution			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=2,261]	27	72	1
4.	ISIS lost a significant portion of its territory in Iraq and Syria in 2017			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=1,403]	33	64	3
5.	Spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid make up the largest portion of the U.S. federal budget			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=2,054]	17	82	1
6.	Democracy is the greatest form of government			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=3,500]	70	28	2
7.	Increasing the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour is essential for the health of the U.S. economy			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=3,818]	37	62	1
8.	Abortion should be legal in most cases			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=4,105]	49	49	2
9.	Immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally are a very big problem for the country today			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=3,367]	30	69	1
10.	Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=3,601]	52	46	2
11.	Applying additional scrutiny to Muslim Americans would not reduce terrorism in the U.S.			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=3,847]	51	48	2
12.	Voter fraud across the U.S. has undermined the results of our elections			
	Feb 22–March 4, 2018 [N=3,464]	30	69	1

ASK ALL:
NEWSUND   And now, which of the following statements comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right? In general… **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4
   <u>2018</u>
   40   News organizations understand people like me
   58   News organizations don't understand people like me
   3   No answer

ASK ALL:
NEWSMIS   And, which of the following statements comes closer to your view? In general… **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4
   <u>2018</u>
   30   News organizations are willing to admit their mistakes
   68   News organizations try to cover up their mistakes
   2   No answer

ASK ALL:
NEWSAMOUNT   Again, which of the following statements comes closer to your view? **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4
   <u>2018</u>
   68   I am worn out by the amount of news there is these days
   30   I like the amount of news there is these days
   2   No answer

ASK ALL:
BREAKINGREACT   When a breaking news event happens, where do you typically go FIRST to get more information? **[RANDOMIZE; "SOCIAL MEDIA SITE" ALWAYS BEFORE "A NEWS AGGREGATING WEBSITE OR APP"]**

Feb 22-March 4
   <u>2018</u>
   54   Your preferred news organization
   9   A social media site
   13   A news aggregating website or app (such as Google News, Apple News or Flipboard)
   15   A search engine
   7   Friends, family or acquaintances
   2   No answer

RANDOMIZE NEWSTHO1 - NEWSTHO3
ASK ALL:
NEWSTHO1   Which of the following best describes what you do when you read, watch or listen to a news story that is complicated? **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4
   <u>2018</u>
   50   I typically feel the need to gather more information to understand the story
   48   I typically read the story and move on
   2   No answer

RANDOMIZE NEWSTHO1 - NEWSTHO3
ASK ALL:
NEWSTHO2   Which of the following best describes how you feel about discussing news with others, even if neither is exactly right? **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4
<u>2018</u>

33	I typically enjoy having debates with others about what I learn from the news
65	I do not typically enjoy having debates with others about what I learn from the news
2	No answer

RANDOMIZE NEWSTHO1 - NEWSTHO3
ASK ALL:
NEWSTHO3   Which of the following best describes you, even if neither is exactly right? **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4
<u>2018</u>

55	I typically think a lot about the news I get, even if it doesn't affect me personally
43	I do not typically feel the need to think a lot about the news I get
2	No answer

ASK ALL:
LEAD   When you talk to friends and family about the news, do you tend to… **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4
<u>2018</u>

75	Listen to the conversation more than lead
23	Lead the conversation more than listen
2	No answer

ASK ALL:
INTFREQ   Now, on a different topic,

Overall, how often do you use the internet?

Feb 22-March 4
<u>2018</u>

25	Most of the day
53	Multiple times a day
11	About once a day
5	Several times a week
2	Once a week
2	Less than once a week
2	Never
1	No answer

ASK ALL:
COMPCONF   Overall, how confident do you feel using computers, smartphones, or other electronic devices to do the things you need to do online?

Feb 22-March 4
<u>2018</u>
52	Very confident
34	Somewhat confident
10	Only a little confident
4	Not at all confident
1	No answer

ASK ALL:
FACTOPINb   Again, you will be shown a series of statements that have been taken from news stories.

Regardless of how knowledgeable you are about the topic, would you consider the statement to be a factual statement (whether you think it is accurate or not) OR an opinion statement (whether you agree with it or not)? **[RANDOMIZE THE 8 IMAGES WITH THE STATEMENTS]**

FORM 1 (1/4 OF RESPONDENTS): [Shown statements that have no source attributed]
FORM 2 (3/4 OF RESPONDENTS): [Shown statements that were randomly attributed to Fox News Channel, The New York Times or USA Today.[16]]

Feb 22–March 4, 2018

	A factual statement (whether you think it is accurate <u>or not)</u>	An opinion statement (whether you agree with it <u>or not)</u>	No <u>answer</u>[17]
1. Republicans currently hold a majority of seats in both chambers of Congress			
Attributed to no source [N=1,260]	86	12	2
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=1,296]	86	13	2
Attributed to The New York Times [N=1,194]	88	11	2
Attributed to USA Today [N=1,285]	86	11	3
2. Most of the heroin that currently makes it into the U.S. comes across the southern border			
Attributed to no source [N=1,260]	58	40	2
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=1,185]	56	42	2
Attributed to The New York Times [N=1,289]	59	38	3
Attributed to USA Today [N=1,301]	59	38	3
3. In the aftermath of the war in Iraq, no active weapons of mass destruction were found			
Attributed to no source [N=1,260]	71	26	3
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=1,278]	68	28	4
Attributed to The New York Times [N=1,219]	72	25	3
Attributed to USA Today [N=1,278]	71	26	3

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[16] Statements were randomized so that respondents saw at least two and no more than three statements attributed to each news outlet.
[17] If respondents skipped this question, they were given a follow-up question asking why they did not answer the question. For more information, contact Pew Research Center.

FACTOPINb CONTINUED

Feb 22–March 4, 2018

		A factual statement (whether you think it is accurate or not)	An opinion statement (whether you agree with it or not)	No answer
4.	In general, regardless of who is in power, politicians can't be trusted			
	Attributed to no source [N=1,260]	27	71	1
	Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=1,281]	26	72	3
	Attributed to The New York Times [N=1,210]	25	73	2
	Attributed to USA Today [N=1,284]	24	74	2
5.	The government must make a greater effort to reduce climate change			
	Attributed to no source [N=1,260]	33	65	2
	Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=1,244]	32	66	2
	Attributed to The New York Times [N=1,302]	31	67	2
	Attributed to USA Today [N=1,229]	33	64	3
6.	The courts have gone too far in restricting public expression of Christian beliefs			
	Attributed to no source [N=1,260]	25	72	2
	Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=1,262]	25	72	2
	Attributed to The New York Times [N=1,302]	28	69	3
	Attributed to USA Today [N=1,211]	26	72	2
7.	Recent tax cuts have benefited the wealthiest of Americans more than others			
	Attributed to no source [N=1,260]	52	45	2
	Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=1,215]	55	44	1
	Attributed to The New York Times [N=1,284]	53	45	2
	Attributed to USA Today [N=1,276]	54	44	2
8.	Police around the country treat racial and ethnic minorities as fairly as they treat whites			
	Attributed to no source [N=1,260]	23	75	2
	Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=1,293]	21	77	2
	Attributed to The New York Times [N=1,249]	21	77	2
	Attributed to USA Today [N=1,233]	25	73	2

ASK IF SELECTED FACTUAL STATEMENT IN FACTOPINb1-8:
STATEFACTb   To the best of your knowledge, do you think the factual statement is accurate or
                    inaccurate?

Feb 22–March 4, 2018

	Accurate	Inaccurate	No answer
1. Republicans currently hold a majority of seats in both chambers of Congress			
Attributed to no source [N=1,128]	95	4	1
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=1,146]	93	6	1
Attributed to The New York Times [N=1,076]	94	6	1
Attributed to USA Today [N=1,147]	93	6	1
2. Most of the heroin that currently makes it into the U.S. comes across the southern border			
Attributed to no source [N=739]	83	16	1
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=675]	82	16	2
Attributed to The New York Times [N=779]	81	17	1
Attributed to USA Today [N=784]	83	16	1
3. In the aftermath of the war in Iraq, no active weapons of mass destruction were found			
Attributed to no source [N=919]	81	17	2
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=901]	79	20	1
Attributed to The New York Times [N=904]	82	17	1
Attributed to USA Today [N=937]	78	20	1
4. In general, regardless of who is in power, politicians can't be trusted			
Attributed to no source [N=316]	91	8	1
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=314]	94	6	*
Attributed to The New York Times [N=287]	90	10	0
Attributed to USA Today [N=301]	94	5	*
5. The government must make a greater effort to reduce climate change			
Attributed to no source [N=389]	94	6	*
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=386]	94	6	1
Attributed to The New York Times [N=386]	90	9	*
Attributed to USA Today [N=387]	90	10	0
6. The courts have gone too far in restricting public expression of Christian beliefs			
Attributed to no source [N=318]	91	9	1
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=314]	90	9	1
Attributed to The New York Times [N=355]	88	12	*
Attributed to USA Today [N=310]	89	10	1
7. Recent tax cuts have benefited the wealthiest of Americans more than others			
Attributed to no source [N=648]	92	8	1
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=662]	91	8	1
Attributed to The New York Times [N=688]	91	8	1
Attributed to USA Today [N=676]	91	8	1
8. Police around the country treat racial and ethnic minorities as fairly as they treat whites			
Attributed to no source [N=276]	73	27	*
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=271]	74	24	2
Attributed to The New York Times [N=246]	73	27	0
Attributed to USA Today [N=299]	63	36	1

ASK IF SELECTED OPINION STATEMENT IN FACTOPINb1-8:
STATEOPINb   Do you tend to agree or disagree with the opinion statement?

Feb 22–March 4, 2018

	Agree	Disagree	No answer
1. Republicans currently hold a majority of seats in both chambers of Congress			
Attributed to no source [N=112]	47	49	4
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=132]	40	58	3
Attributed to The New York Times [N=102]	38	61	1
Attributed to USA Today [N=109]	31	61	8
2. Most of the heroin that currently makes it into the U.S. comes across the southern border			
Attributed to no source [N=496]	38	60	2
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=488]	36	61	2
Attributed to The New York Times [N=478]	41	57	1
Attributed to USA Today [N=488]	42	56	2
3. In the aftermath of the war in Iraq, no active weapons of mass destruction were found			
Attributed to no source [N=307]	23	74	2
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=342]	24	74	2
Attributed to The New York Times [N=289]	24	74	2
Attributed to USA Today [N=314]	23	74	4
4. In general, regardless of who is in power, politicians can't be trusted			
Attributed to no source [N=929]	67	32	1
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=947]	64	35	1
Attributed to The New York Times [N=906]	66	32	2
Attributed to USA Today [N=968]	67	32	2
5. The government must make a greater effort to reduce climate change			
Attributed to no source [N=849]	55	42	2
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=840]	54	45	1
Attributed to The New York Times [N=899]	56	43	1
Attributed to USA Today [N=820]	55	44	1
6. The courts have gone too far in restricting public expression of Christian beliefs			
Attributed to no source [N=917]	42	56	2
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=926]	42	57	1
Attributed to The New York Times [N=918]	41	57	2
Attributed to USA Today [N=883]	41	57	2
7. Recent tax cuts have benefited the wealthiest of Americans more than others			
Attributed to no source [N=588]	39	59	2
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=540]	42	55	2
Attributed to The New York Times [N=574]	40	58	2
Attributed to USA Today [N=576]	42	56	2
8. Police around the country treat racial and ethnic minorities as fairly as they treat whites			
Attributed to no source [N=962]	30	68	1
Attributed to Fox News Channel [N=1,006]	27	71	2
Attributed to The New York Times [N=984]	26	73	1
Attributed to USA Today [N=913]	25	74	1

ASK ALL:
NEWSOUTL   And now, thinking generally about the news these days, which comes closer to your view? Getting news from many different outlets makes it… **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4
<u>2018</u>
54	Easy to get a solid understanding of important issues and events
43	Confusing to understand important issues and events
3	No answer

ASK ALL:
NEWS_ACTION   Below is a list of ways people might discuss or share information about news issues and events. Please indicate how often you do any of the following.
[RANDOMIZE; B ALWAYS BEFORE C]

	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never	No answer
a. Share a news story with someone either digitally or in hard copy					
Feb 22-March 4, 2018	5	27	28	38	2
b. Discuss or comment on the news on social media					
Feb 22-March 4, 2018	5	20	24	49	2
c. Comment about the news on a website, blog, or letter to the editor					
Feb 22-March 4, 2018	2	10	19	67	2
d. Call into a live radio or TV show					
Feb 22-March 4, 2018	1	4	7	86	2
e. Post or submit *your own* news content to a news outlet, newsletter, listserv, or online forum					
Feb 22-March 4, 2018	1	6	13	78	2
f. Discuss the news with others in person or over the phone					
Feb 22-March 4, 2018	12	41	25	20	2

RANDOMIZE KNOW1 – KNOW3
Here are a few questions about people and things that you may have seen in the news. Please answer the questions as best as you can.

ASK ALL:
KNOW1   How many justices are there on the Supreme Court of the United States?

Feb 22-March 4
2018
5   Three
8   Five
19   Seven
64   Nine
5   No answer

RANDOMIZE KNOW1 – KNOW3
ASK ALL:
KNOW2   Who is Mike Pence? **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4
2018
87   Vice President of the United States
5   Secretary of State
2   A U.S. Senator from Minnesota
1   Chairman of General Motors
4   No answer

RANDOMIZE KNOW1 – KNOW3
ASK ALL:
KNOW3   Who is the current Prime Minister of the United Kingdom? **[RANDOMIZE]**

Feb 22-March 4
2018
56   Theresa May
4   Kate Middleton
22   David Cameron
11   Jeremy Corbyn
8   No answer

ASK ALL:
MAINSO_OE   What news outlet do you turn to most often for news about GOVERNMENT AND
                   POLITICS? Please list the name of the specific news organization or outlet.

[OPEN-END RESPONSES RECODED]

ALL SOURCES MENTIONED

Feb 22-March 4
2018[18]

15	CNN
15	Fox News
6	ABC
6	NBC
4	Local TV
4	CBS
4	MSNBC
3	NPR
2	The New York Times
1	Univision
1	BBC
1	MSN
1	The Washington Post
1	Google
1	Yahoo
1	Telemundo
1	Local newspaper
1	Drudge Report
1	Local radio
1	PBS
18	No answer

ASK ALL:
PARTY   In politics today, do you consider yourself a…?

Feb 22-March 4
2018

26	Republican
34	Democrat
28	Independent
10	Something else
3	No answer

ASK IF DID NOT SELECT REPUBLICAN OR DEMOCRAT AT PARTY:
PARTYLN   As of today do you lean more to…

Feb 22-March 4
2018
N=1,965

38	The Republican Party
48	The Democratic Party
14	No answer

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[18] Respondents were asked to provide their main source. If respondents volunteered more than one source, Pew Research accepted up to three. Sources shown are those that were named by at least 1% of respondents.

ASK ALL:
IDEO   In general, would you describe your political views as… **[REVERSE ORDER FOR HALF OF RESPONDENTS]**

Feb 22-March 4
<u>2018</u>

7	Very conservative
24	Conservative
44	Moderate
17	Liberal
6	Very liberal
3	No answer