

State of the Facts 2018

Part 2 of 2
Summary of Results
September 2018



Objective and Methodology

USAFacts conducted the second annual State of the Facts survey in 2018 to revisit questions asked in 2017 about the current climate around news, information, and data that influence the American public and their decisions. The 2018 survey benchmarks shift in opinion one year later and adds questions about the changing landscape around usage and trust of data. The survey also explores the role of data in light of the 2018 midterms, and how Americans share data on social media.

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of USAFacts from June 30 – July 5, 2017 among 2,521 U.S. adults and from August 30 - Sept 4, 2018 among 2,501 U.S. adults. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

Results were weighted for age within gender, region, race/ethnicity, marital status, household size, income, employment, and education where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

Throughout the report arrows indicate significant changes at the 95% confidence level.

The margin of sampling error for full-base questions (n=2,501) is +/-2%. The Harris Poll does not ordinarily report on the "margin of error" since it is difficult to derive the total margin of error in survey research.

Executive Findings – Part 2 of 2

Headline

Supportive Findings

America is Having a Crisis of Facts

- Americans increasingly attribute problems and partisanship in the country to people using different sets of facts rather than holding different political beliefs.
- Public debate and discourse seems less rooted in fact.
- 88% believe people generally only agree with facts that fit their beliefs rather than letting them shape their opinion.
- However, 85% believe that people need to use the same data to have an informed debate about the country.

Government Data Critical for Building Trust and Winning Elections

- 70% of Americans believe most information they come across about the government is biased.
- Americans trust data from the government as much or more than other sources, but they are less satisfied with information from government websites than they are with other sources.
- Americans would trust elected officials more if they used government data to make decisions, and they are more likely to vote for candidates who use data to explain their positions on important issues.

Despite Lack of Trust, Social Media is Still a Popular Source of News

- Despite 90% of American saying that information is factual when based in data, only about one quarter post data on social media, and it is most often data from media/news outlets.
- Americans would use data on social media to fact-check and educate others.
- In 2018, Americans rely more on social media for news in general, but they rely on it less for government information, are less satisfied with it as a source, and recognize its bias as a source of election information.

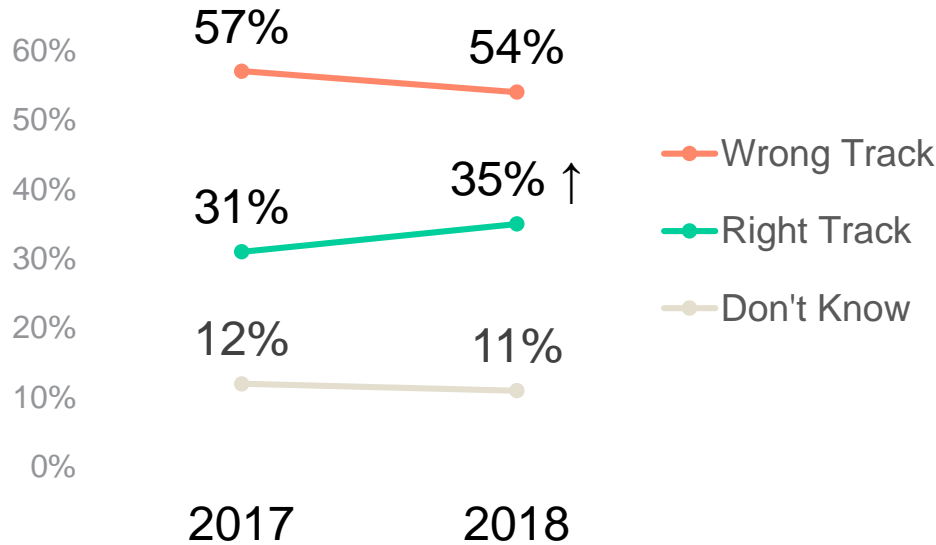
For additional key findings, see [part 1](#)



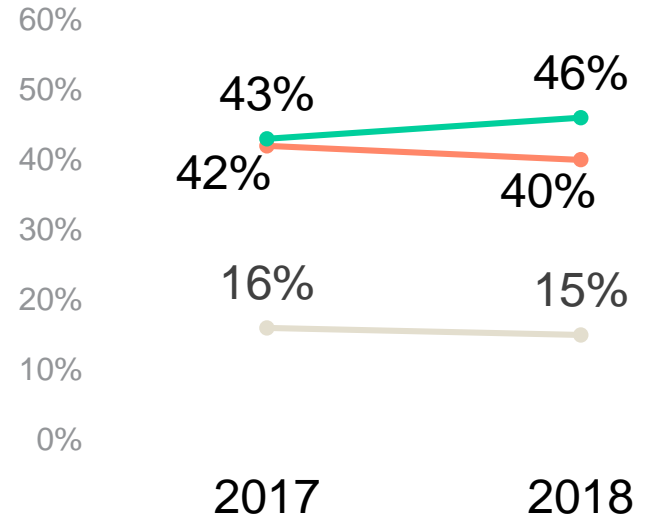
National Situation

Despite most Americans believing the nation is on the wrong track, positive signs of improvement exist for both the nation and economy

Nation Generally



U.S. Economy



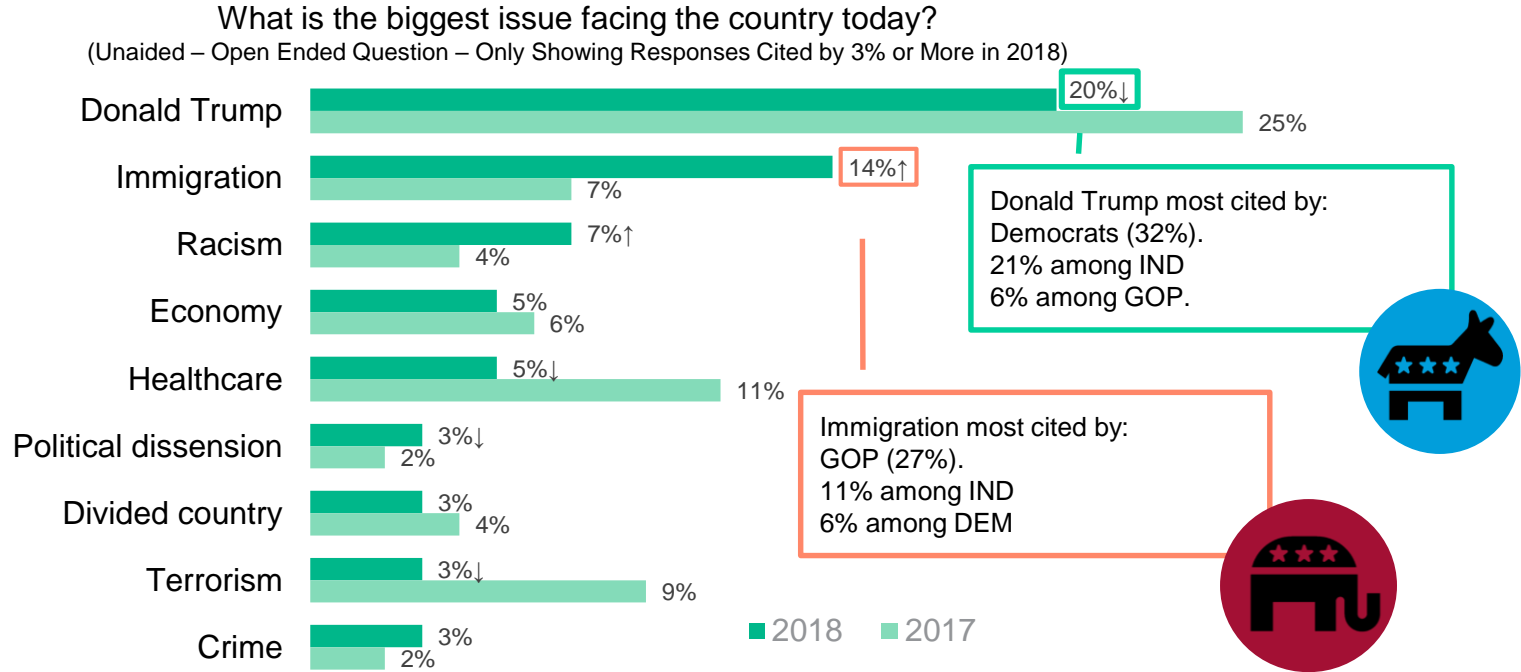
BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q604. Do you think things in the nation are generally headed in the right direction, or do you feel that things are off on the wrong track?

Q605. Do you think the economy in the United States is on right track or wrong track?

For Democrats, Donald Trump is the biggest issue facing the country, while Republicans are most concerned about immigration

Immigration and Racism are bigger issues in 2017 than in 2018, while fewer people cite Donald Trump, Healthcare, and Terrorism



BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q606 What is the biggest issue facing the country today?

Many Democrats see Donald Trump as biggest issue facing the country, while Republicans are more focused on media bias and animosity towards agenda

What is the biggest issue facing the country today?

Democrats: Top issue is Trump's Honesty and Leadership

"President Trump not knowing how to lead the USA."

Female, 62, Strong Democrat

"Trump. Lying and attacks on the FBI, Justice Department, corruption, etc."

Male, 76, Strong Democrat

"The way the electing of Trump has seemed to cause more bad than good"

Female, 49, Lean Democrat

Republicans: Worry about Media bias and Animosity Towards Trump

"The bias of the liberal left. They refuse to face the reality of what Trump has accomplished in his short time as President."

Male, 74, Strong Republican

"Democrats hating on Donald Trump, the best president of the United States of America. Hilary Clinton not being arrested for the Benghazi attacks."

Male, 28, Strong Republican

"Trump— as a Republican he has to learn to get off Twitter, keep his mouth shut and act Presidential."

Female, 67, Lean Republican



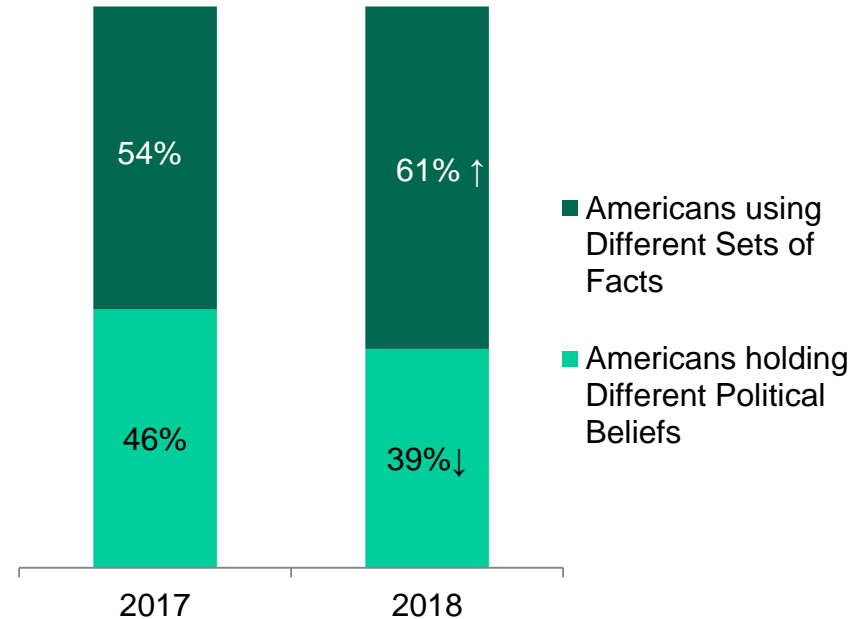
State of the Facts

In 2018, Americans using different sets of facts is increasingly problematic...

Eight Point Gap Becomes 22 Point Gap in One Year

- Over the past year, Americans have become more likely to believe using different sets of facts causes more problems over holding different political beliefs
- About 6 out of 10 Americans believe Americans using different sets of facts is more problematic

What Causes More Problems in the U.S.?



BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

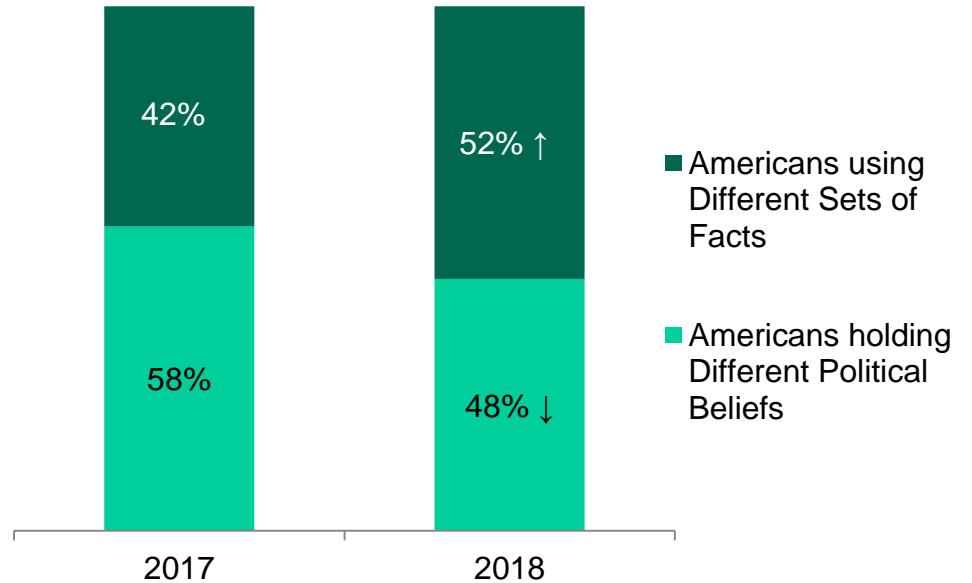
Q625. Which do you believe causes more problems in the United States today?

...And in 2018, Americans using different sets of facts is a bigger cause of partisanship

Cause of U.S. Partisanship: Both Different Political Beliefs & Different Sets of Facts

- In 2018, a slight majority now believe using different sets of facts is a larger cause of partisanship than holding different political beliefs
- Although opinion is split, this represents a significant shift from last year.

Which do you believe is a Bigger Cause of Partisanship in the U.S. today?



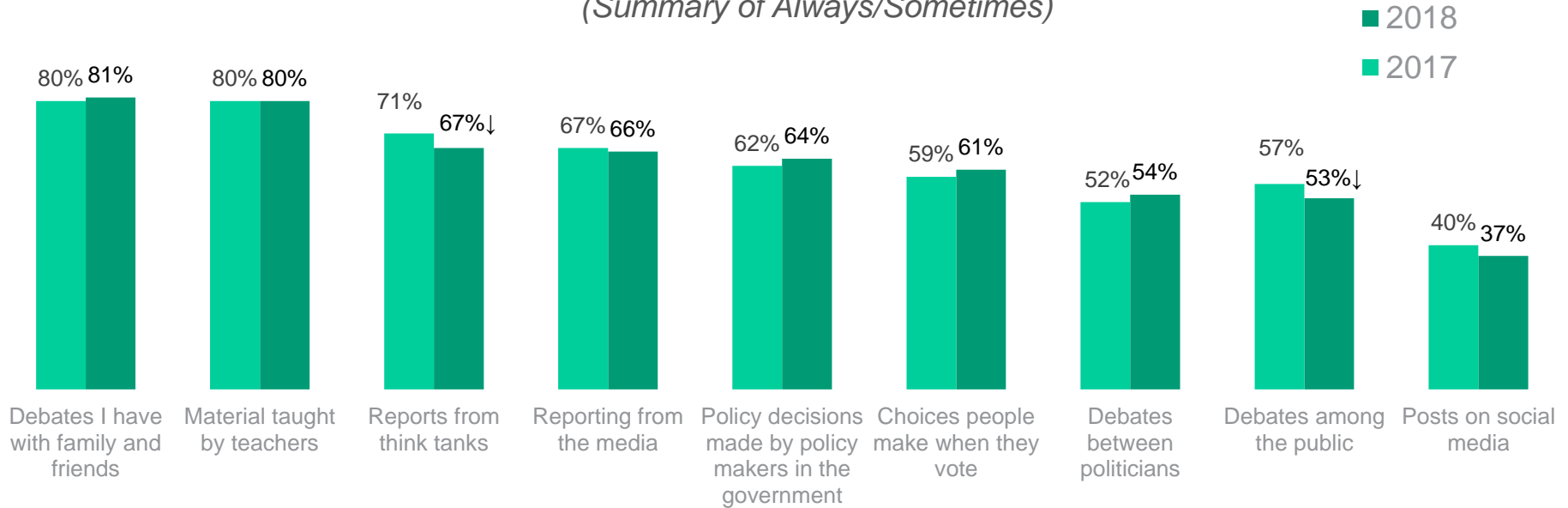
BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q624. Which do you believe is a bigger cause of partisanship in the United States today?

Americans are skeptical of information in political and public debates

Compared to 2017, Americans believe debates among the public, reports from think tanks, and posts on social media are less often based in fact.

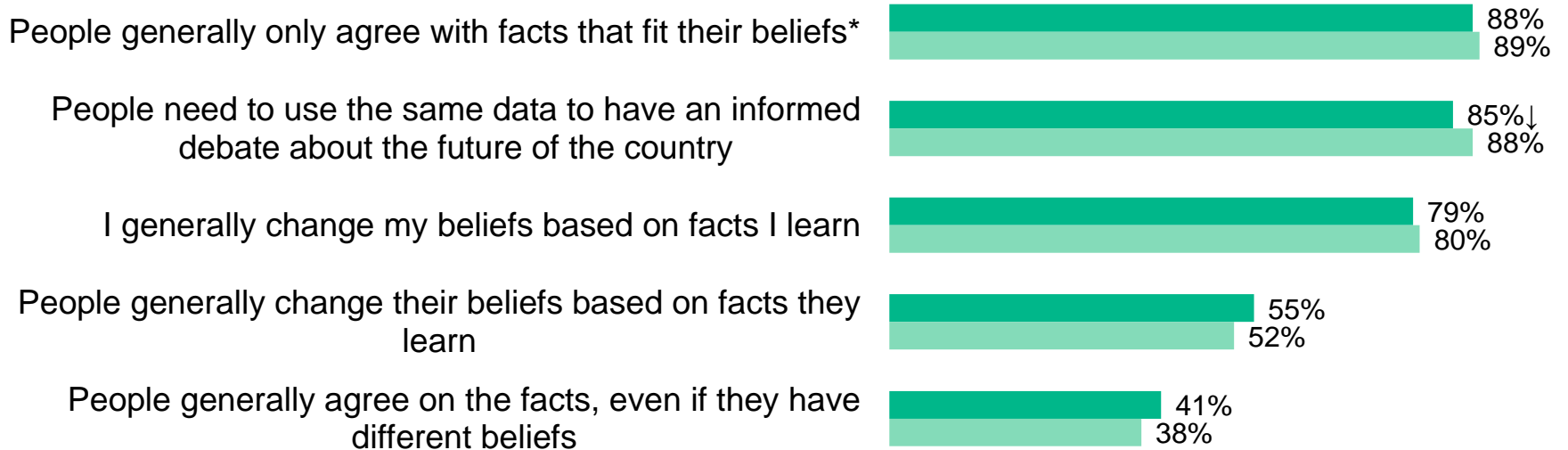
How often are the following Based in Fact (Summary of Always/Sometimes)



BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)
Q626. How often are the following based in fact?

In order to have an informed debate, Americans need to agree on facts; but Americans don't agree on facts

Most Americans think that people with different beliefs don't agree on facts; however 85% think people need to use the same data to have an informed debate



Summary of Strongly/Somewhat Agree

■ 2018
■ 2017

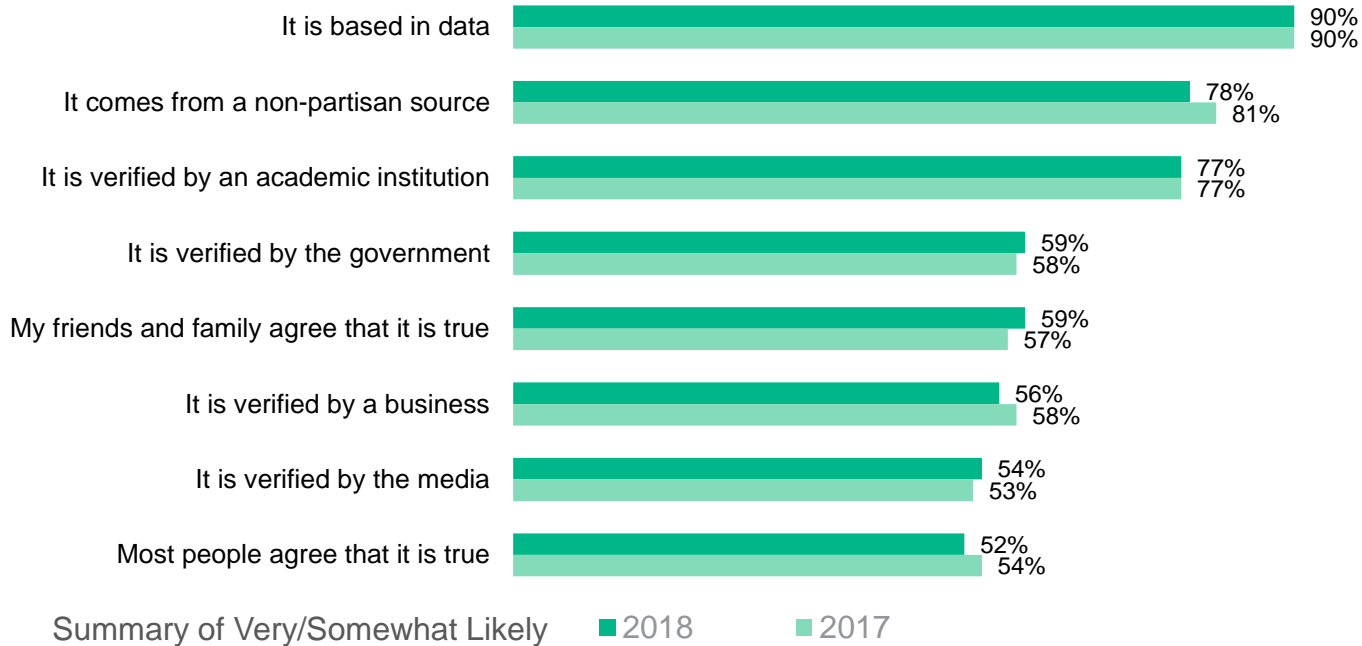
BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q619. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

*Note: in 2017 worded as: "People generally believe the facts that fit their beliefs"

Strong majority of Americans consider information factual if it is based in data, non-partisan, or academically verified

Americans trust the opinions of friends and family over data verified by the media.



BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q627. How likely would you be to consider information factual if...?

Younger Americans and Democrats more readily trust information backed by the government or an academic institution

Older Americans, more so than younger, readily trust information coming from a non-partisan source.

Very/Somewhat Likely to consider information factual if...	Total	18-49 (A)	50+ (B)	Dem (E)	Ind (F)	Rep (G)
It is based in data	90%	89%	91%	94% (FG)	88%	88%
It comes from a non-partisan source	78%	75%	82% (A)	83% (FG)	77%	77%
It is verified by an academic institution	77%	80% (B)	73%	90% (FG)	74% (E)	66%
It is verified by the government	59%	65% (B)	53%	63% (F)	56%	60%
My friends and family agree that it is true	59%	61%	57%	62%	58%	59%
It is verified by a business	56%	59% (B)	52%	57%	52%	59% (F)
It is verified by the media	54%	55%	53%	73% (FG)	50% (E)	38%
Most people agree that it is true	52%	54%	49%	56%	52%	50%

BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q627. How likely would you be to consider information factual if...?

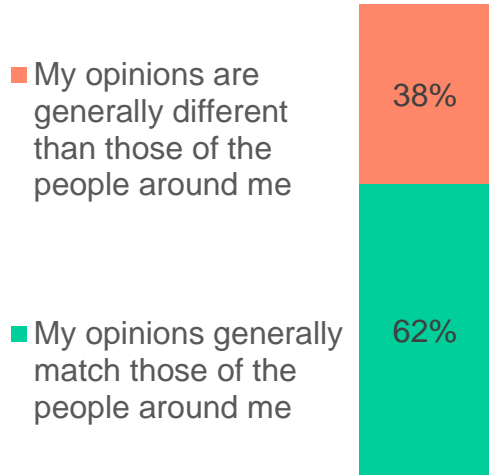
LETTERS DENOTE STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OVER INDICATED COLUMN

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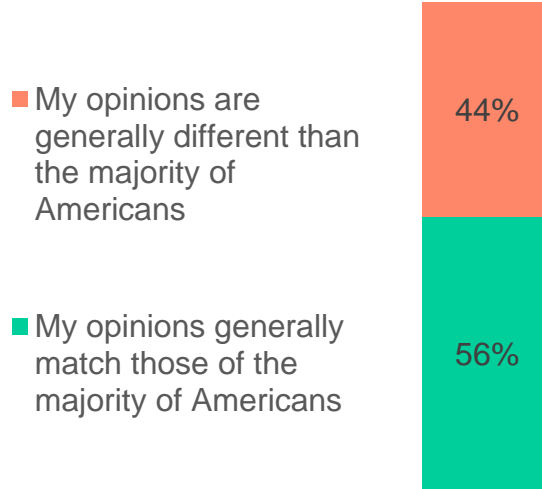
Opinions match those of people around them more than the majority

Supports the claim that Americans are in “echo-chambers”

Which of the following is closer to your view?



Which of the following is closer to your view?



Younger Americans More Likely (than older) to say Their Opinions Differ from the Majority of Americans

Americans under 50 – 50%
Americans 50+ – 38%



BASE: 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q627B. Which of the following is closest to your view?

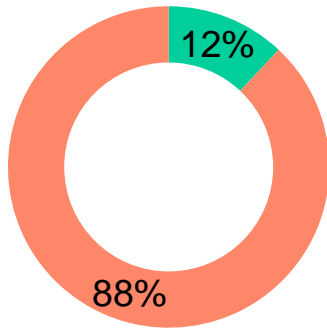
Q627C. Which of the following is closest to your view?

People prefer facts & figures to anecdotes

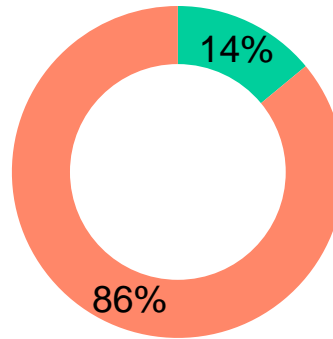
Americans still like and want facts and figures over anecdotal stories

Are you generally the kind of person who likes...

2017



2018



■ Stories & Anecdotes ■ Facts & Figures

■ Stories & Anecdotes ■ Facts & Figures

However, in 2018, some groups are more Interested in *Stories and Anecdotes* over Facts and Figures than they were in 2017

2017 vs 2018
Women - 12% vs 17%
Boomers (65+) - 6% vs 12%
Nation Wrong Track – 11% vs 15%

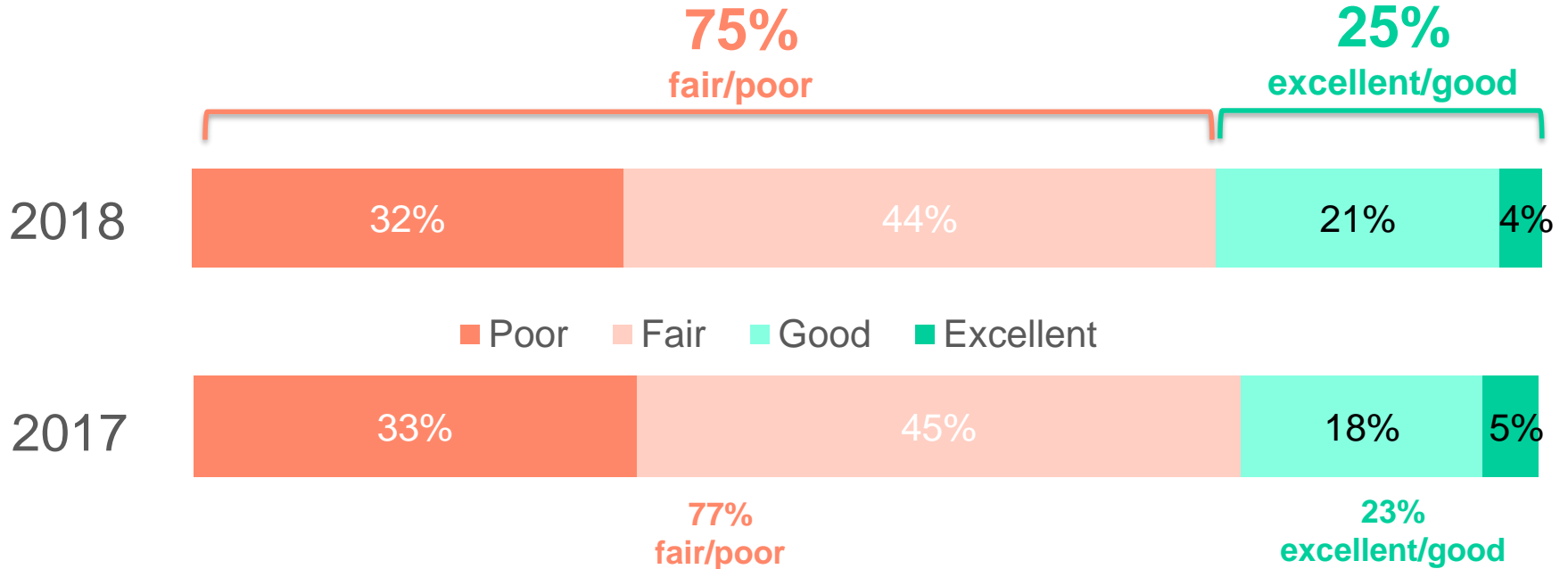
BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q610. Are you generally the kind of person who likes facts and figures on the country and your government or someone who is more interested in stories and anecdotes?

A majority of Americans continue to find civic education to be fair/poor

Civic education in the U.S. is consistently rated poorly over the past two years

Rating of Civic Education



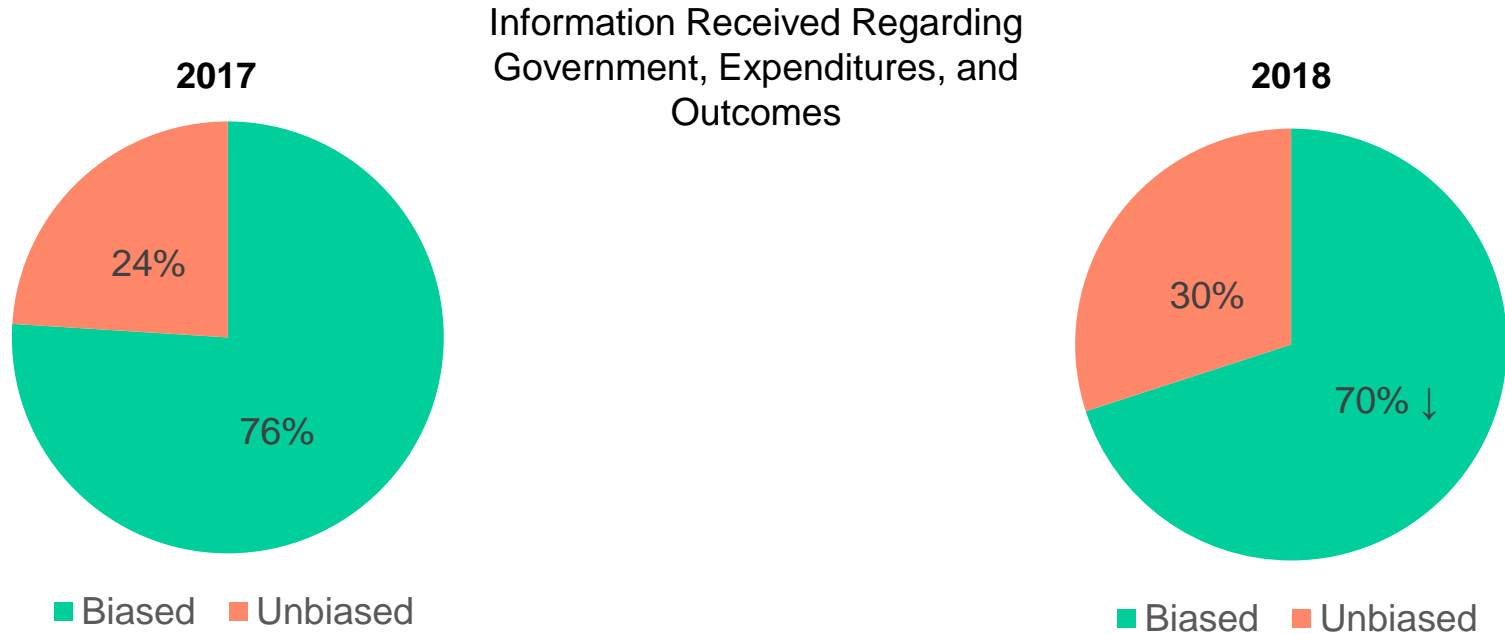
BASE: 2017 & 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=5022)
Q632. How would you rate civic education in the United States?



Government Data

Americans continue to believe information about the government is biased

By more than a two-to-one margin, Americans see information about the government as biased, though it is viewed as less biased than it was in 2017.

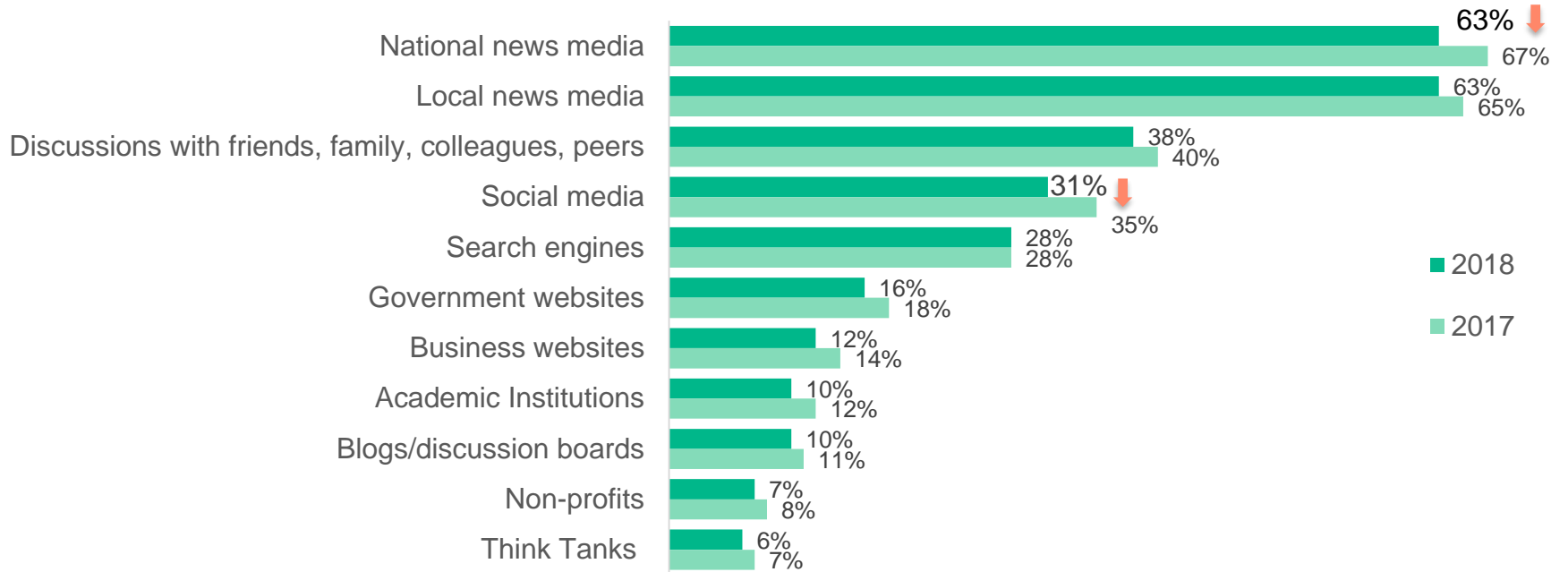


BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q618. In general is most of the information you come across about the government, its expenditures and the outcomes of its programs today...?

In 2018, Americans are relying less on national news media and social media for information about government

Which of the following sources do you rely on for information about the government?



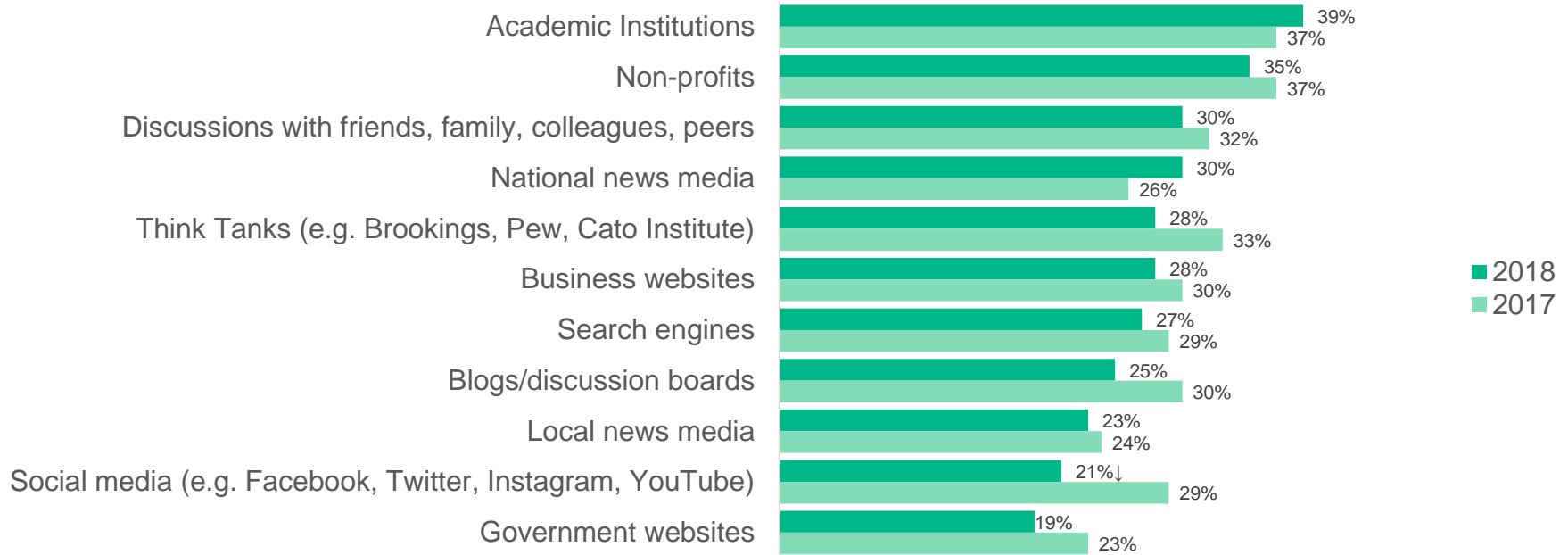
BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q607A. Which of the following sources do you rely on for information about the government (federal, state, or local)?

Most sources are less satisfactory providers of government information compared to 2017, with government websites and social media least satisfactory

Americans are not less satisfied with social media in 2018 than they were in 2017

How satisfied are you with the information you receive about the government from each source?
(Summary of Very Satisfied)



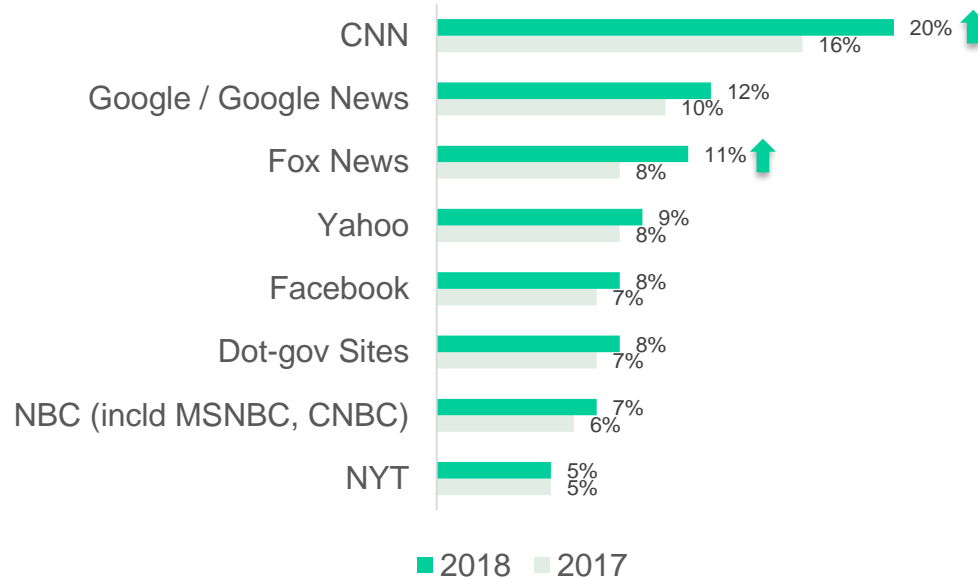
BASE: VARIABLE BASES

Q607B. How satisfied are you with the information you receive about the government from each source?

In 2018, Americans most often go to CNN, Google News, and Fox News for information about the government on the web

What websites do you specifically visit to get information about the government?

(Showing sources used by 5% or more of the population)



BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

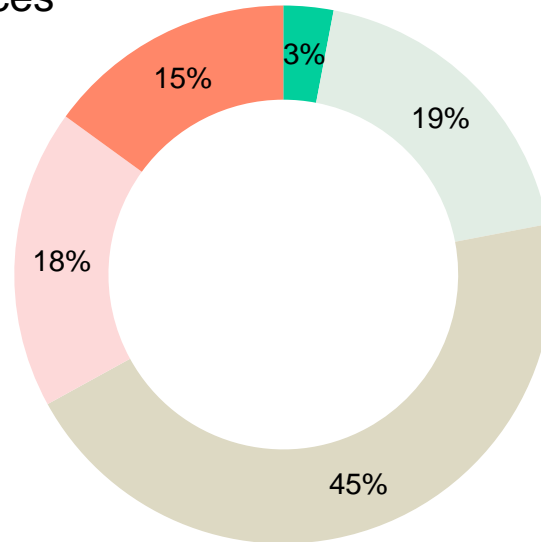
Q607C. What websites do you specifically visit to get information about the government?

Two-thirds of Americans trust data from the government at least as much as data from other sources

However, more Americans trust it less than other sources than trust it more

Trust Data from Government More or Less than Other Sources

- Much more than other sources
- Somewhat more than other sources
- Neither more nor less than other sources
- Somewhat less than other sources
- Much less than other sources



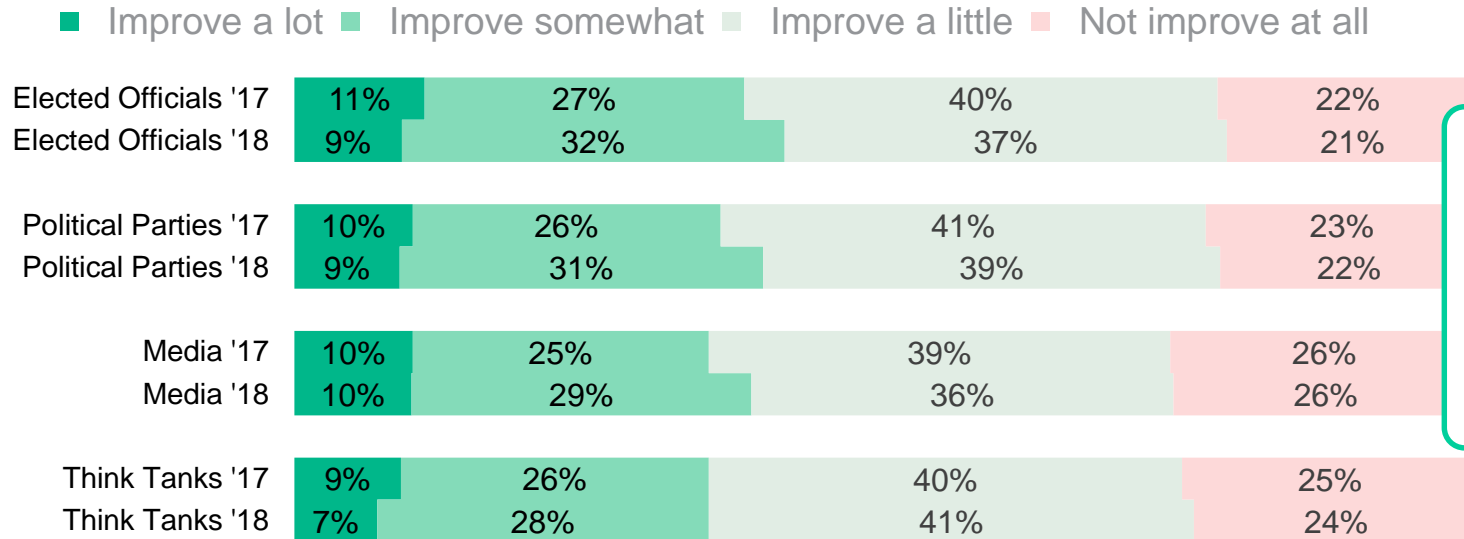
BASE: 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q725A. Compared to other data sources, how much do you trust data from the government?

Relying on government data improves trust

About three in four Americans would trust elected officials, political parties, think tanks, and the media at least a little more if they relied on government data

If ___ relied more on government data to make decisions, would it improve your trust in them?



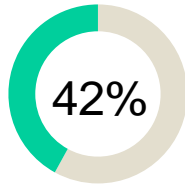
Younger Americans are More Likely To Improve (a lot or somewhat) Trust in Elected Officials if they use Government Data to Make Decisions
 Ages 18-49 – 46%
 Ages 50+ – 36%

BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

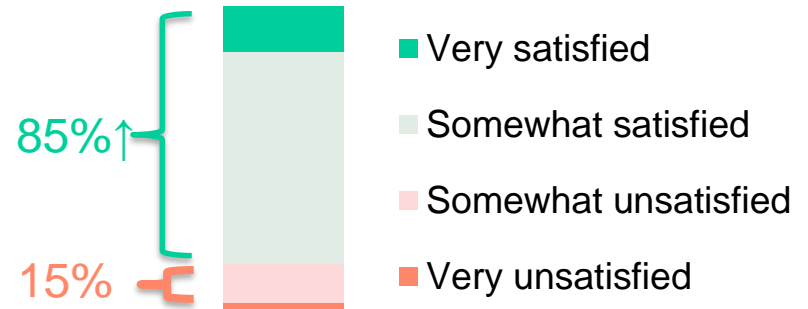
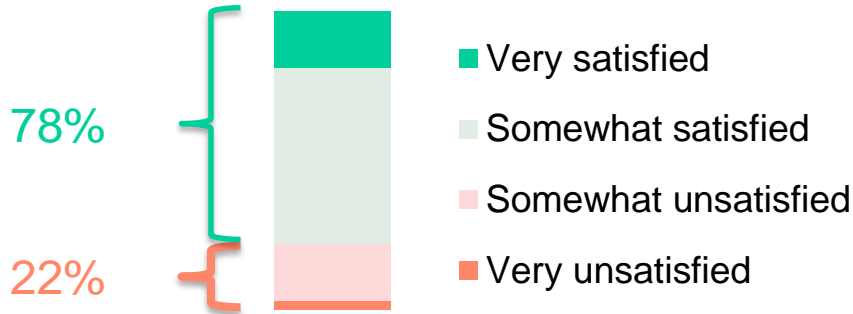
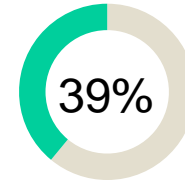
- Q628.** If all elected officials relied more on government data to make decisions, would it improve your trust in them?
- Q629.** If political parties relied more on government data for their public debates, would it improve your trust in them?
- Q631.** If think tanks relied more on government data in their reporting, would it improve your trust in them?
- Q630.** If the media relied more on government data in their reporting, would it improve your trust in them?

Similar use of federal government websites compared to 2017, but significantly more satisfaction among those who use them

Used Federal Govt Websites 2017



Used Federal Govt Websites 2018



BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q636A. Have you used the federal government websites (e.g. Census Bureau, White House, Centers for Disease Control) site to look up information?

BASE: 2017 HAVE USED GOVERNMENT SITES (n=995), 2018 HAVE USED GOVERNMENT SITES (n=892)

Q636B. How satisfied are you with the federal government websites?



Data & Social Media

Despite lack of trust in social media data, it is a common source of news

Especially Among Millennials

Data vs Facts

- Most Americans agree that factual information must be based in data
- However, most people do not post data on social media

Voters acknowledge bias in social media, but use it as a source of information

90% Say Information is Factual if Based in Data

76% Do Not Post Data on Social Media

73% Believe Social Media is a Biased Source

21% of people who use social media as a source of government information are satisfied with it

Nonetheless...

37% Often get their News from Social Media

↑ (Up from nearly 30% in 2017)

59% Among Millennials Ages 18-34

BASE: 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q627. How likely would you be to consider information factual if...?

Q654 Have you ever used data in your posts on social media?

BASE: DOES RESEARCH (n=509)

Q725 Are these sources...?

BASE: 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2027*)

Q648. Where do you go most often for news? *Asked as single question in separate sample

Social media is less useful as a source of government information today than a year ago

As a source of government information, social media

- Is less likely to be used as a source than it was in 2018
- Among those who use social media as a source, they are less satisfied with it too

Use Social Media As Source of Gov't Information



Satisfied with Social Media As Source of Gov't Information (Among Those Using As Source)



BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

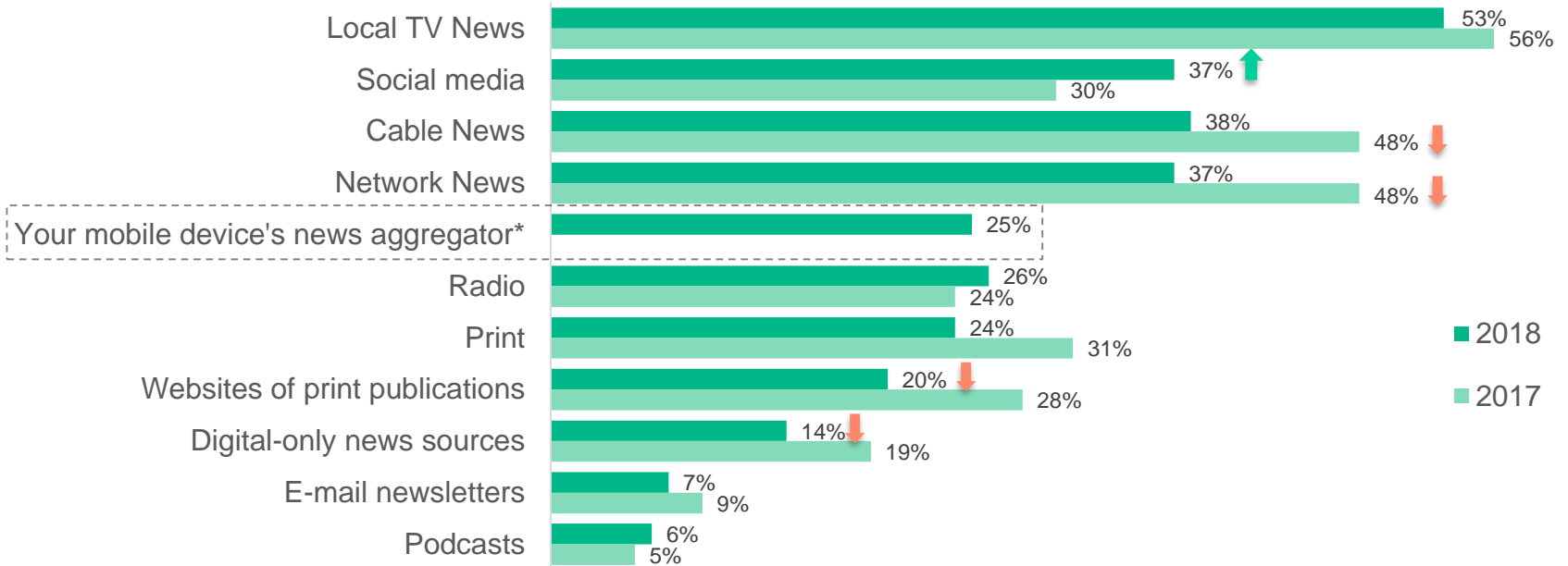
Q607A. Which of the following sources do you rely on for information about the government (federal, state, or local)?

Q607B. How satisfied are you with the information you receive about the government from each source?

However, Americans in 2018 get their regular news more often from Social Media, and less often from Print, Print Websites, Cable, and Network News

One quarter of Americans get their news from their Mobile Device News Aggregator

Where do you go most often for news?



BASE: 2017 U.S. ADULTS (n=2521), 2018 U.S. ADULTS (n=2027**)

Q648. Where do you go most often for news?

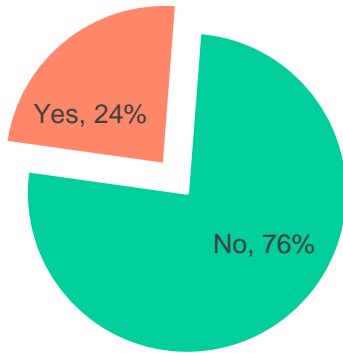
**Asked as single question in separate sample

*Note: "Your mobile device's news aggregator" was added in 2018

Americans have a complex relationship with data and social media

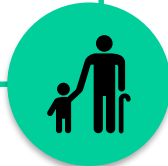
Social Media is not based in data, and is also viewed as less factual and trustworthy.

Post Data on Social Media

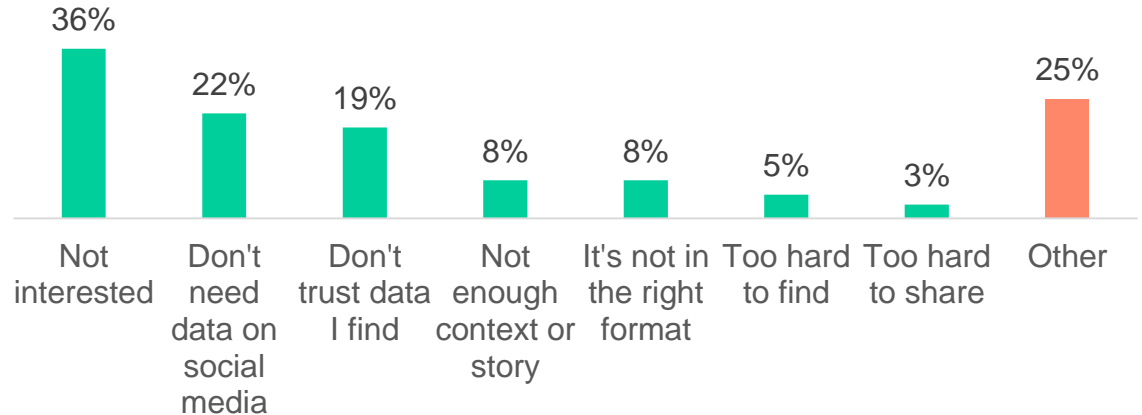


Younger Americans are More Likely To Post Data on Social Media

Ages 18-49 – 33%
Ages 50+ – 14%



Why have you not used data in your social media posts?



“Most of Social Media is not fact based.”

“I don't want to get into dispute with those who don't want their opinion confused by facts.”

BASE: U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q654 Have you ever used data in your posts on social media?

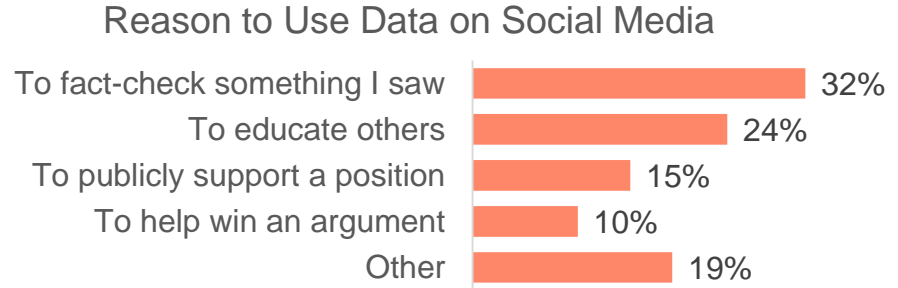
BASE: Not Shared Data on Social Media (n=1947)

Q655 Why have you not used data in your social media posts?

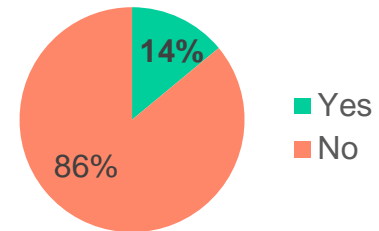
Americans who post data on social media like to share data from media/news outlets or government websites

Americans might use data in social media posts to fact-check and educate others.

Where did you get the data you shared on Social Media?	Total
A media/news outlet website	47%
A government website	34%
A different post on social media	33%
A school/university website	23%
A business website	21%
A non-internet source	20%
A think tank	14%
Other	7%



Reached out to an Elected Official on Social Media



BASE: Shared Data on Social Media (n=554)

Q660 Where did you get the data you shared on social media?

BASE: U.S. ADULTS (n=2501)

Q665 For what reason would you be most likely to use data on social media?

Q670 Have you ever reached out to an elected official on social media?

DEMOGRAPHICS

	Total 2017	Total 2018
Base	2521	2501
18-24	11%	11%
25-34	18%	18%
35-44	16%	16%
45-54	18%	17%
55-64	17%	17%
65+	20%	20%

	Total 2017	Total 2018
Base	2521	2501
Male	48%	48%
Female	52%	52%

	Total 2017	Total 2018
Base	2521	2501
Less than HS degree	6%	8%
HS degree to less than 4 year college degree	61%	58%
4 year college degree or more	33%	33%

	Total 2017	Total 2018
Base	2521	2501
White	65%	63%
Black or African American	12%	12%
Hispanic	15%	15%
Other	8%	10%

	Total 2017	Total 2018
Base	2521	2501
Less than \$75k	51%	48%
\$75k+	43%	44%

	Total 2017	Total 2018
Base	2521	2501
Yes	88%	85%
No	11%	13%
Don't know	1%	2%

	Total 2017	Total 2018
Base	2521	2501
Conservative	29%	31%
Moderate	38%	34%
Liberal	26%	24%
Don't know	7%	10%

	Total 2017	Total 2018
Base	2521	2501
DEMOCRAT	40%	39%
REPUBLICAN	31%	31%
Independent	24%	23%