

State of the Facts 2020: 40% of Americans say it is difficult to know if a candidate is telling the truth

The data comes from the 2020 State of the Facts poll, conducted by The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Updated on Wed, November 18, 2020 by the [USAFacts Team](#)

[Home](#) / [Government spending](#) / [Articles](#) /

State of the Facts 2020: 40% of Americans say it is difficult to know if a candidate is telling the truth

Eighty-three percent of Americans say the spread of misinformation is a major problem. Daily use of social media as a source of information on the government is down 31% since 2019. A quarter of Americans have difficulty understanding fact and opinion with respect to the election.

Those are some of the findings from the 2020 State of the Facts poll. Each year, USAFacts conducts a poll to assess how Americans feel about facts, data, and where that data is sourced. The resulting report, called the State of the Facts poll, provides insights into how Americans agree and disagree on data.

Sources of information about the government at least once a day

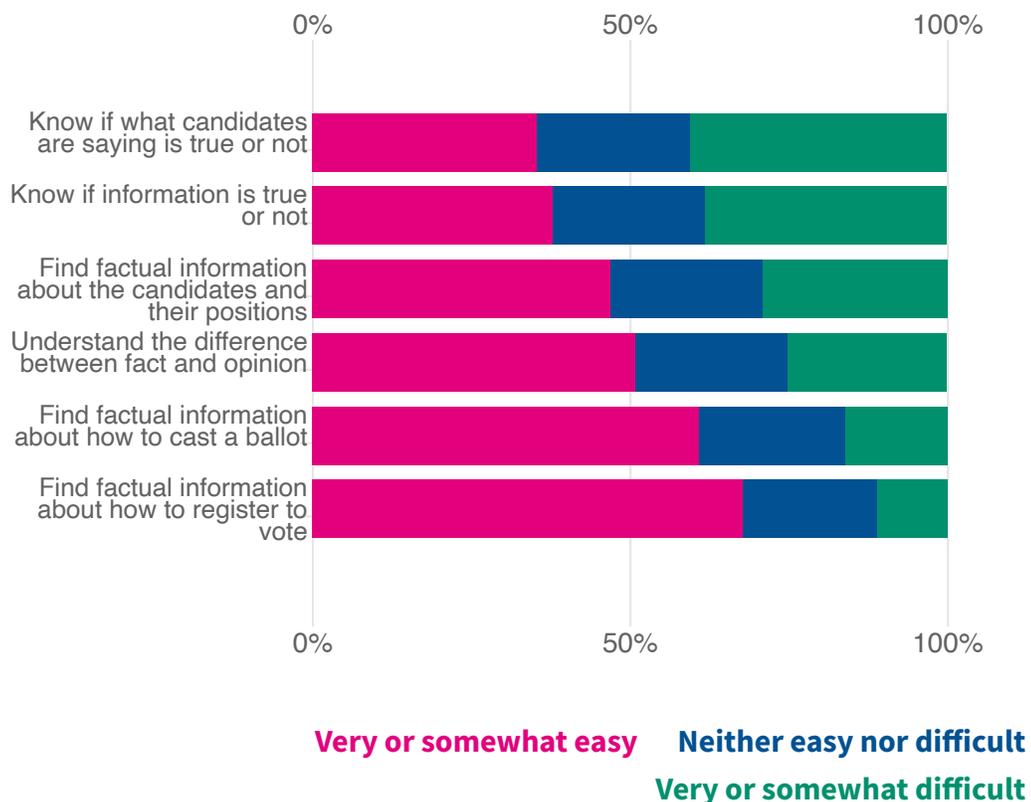
State of the Facts in the 2020 election

Forty-eight percent of Americans say they are closely paying attention to the presidential election. Political leanings show some differences, with 58% of

Democrat-leaning voters saying they are closely following the election compared with 47% of those who are Republican-leaning.

When it comes to the election, respondents said it was easier to find information about the voting process than facts about candidates. Forty percent of respondents said it was difficult to find such information about whether candidates are telling the truth, while 35% of respondents say it's easy to find such information. Sixty-one percent of respondents say it is easy to find information about how to cast ballots, while 68% also found it easy to find voter registration information.

Ease of processing election-related information

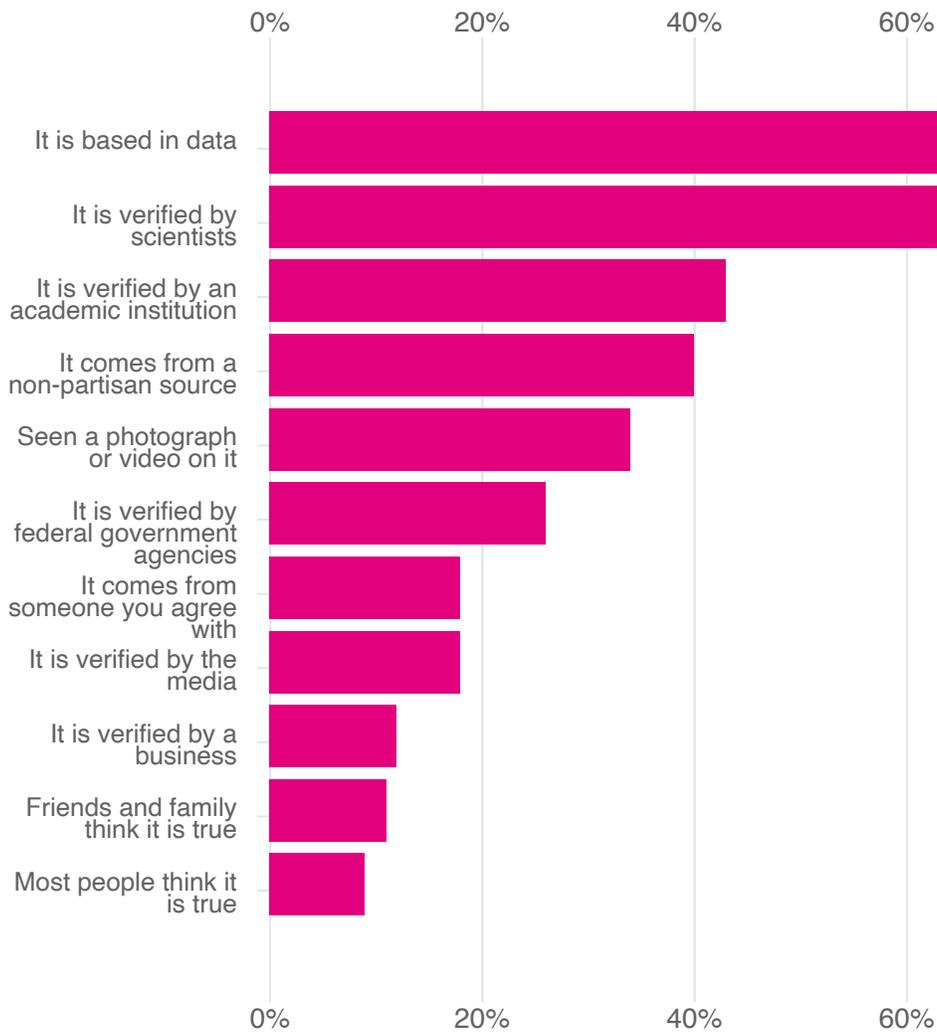


Political leanings also trend with whether respondents think a statement or action is based on facts. For example, 7% of Democrat-leaning respondents say Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden's campaign messages are rarely or never based on fact, compared with 71% of Republican-leaning respondents. On the other end, 86% of Democrat-leaning respondents say that President Donald Trump's campaign messages are rarely or never based on fact, compared with 24% of Republican-leaning respondents.

How Americans make sense of information

Respondents have varying criteria on what leads them to consider information as factual. Sixty-six percent said if information is based in data, then it is considered factual. That is up from 61% in the 2019 version of the poll. If information is verified by the media, 18% of respondents say that would likely consider that information factual.

Factors needed to consider information factual



Eighty-five percent of respondents also say accuracy is an important factor in considering information factual, compared with 21% who said it is important that they agree with the information.

Americans are also getting information about the government from a variety of sources. Daily use of social media for such information decreased to 37% from 54% in 2019.

The 2020 State of the Facts poll, conducted with The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research between Sept. 15 and Sept. 25, featured about the 2020 election and broader questions about information, sources and trust. There were also several questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Download a presentation of this data and get the facts every week by signing up for our newsletter.

SOURCES & FOOTNOTES

Details on the poll

This nationwide poll was conducted by The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and funded by USAFacts.

AP-NORC polled 1,043 adults (966 via the web and 77 via telephone) between September 15-25 using the AmeriSpeak Panel®, AmeriSpeak is NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of all US households.

Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

Margin of error is +/- 4.1 percentage points.

Complete topline and methodology available at www.apnorc.org.



State of the Facts 2020: Elections & Information Trends

State of the Facts Poll 2020: Elections

- 48% pay close attention to information on elections and politics, but they are often unsure where to go for information they trust.
- 40% find it difficult to know if what the candidates in the upcoming presidential election are saying is true or not.
- 51% feel Trump's campaign messages are rarely or never based in facts, compared to 39% who feel the same about the Biden campaign.
- 11% are having a difficult time finding factual information on how to register to vote, and 16% say the same about how to cast their ballot this year.
- Nearly three-quarters are at least somewhat concerned about foreign interference in the November election.

State of the Facts Poll 2020: Information Trends

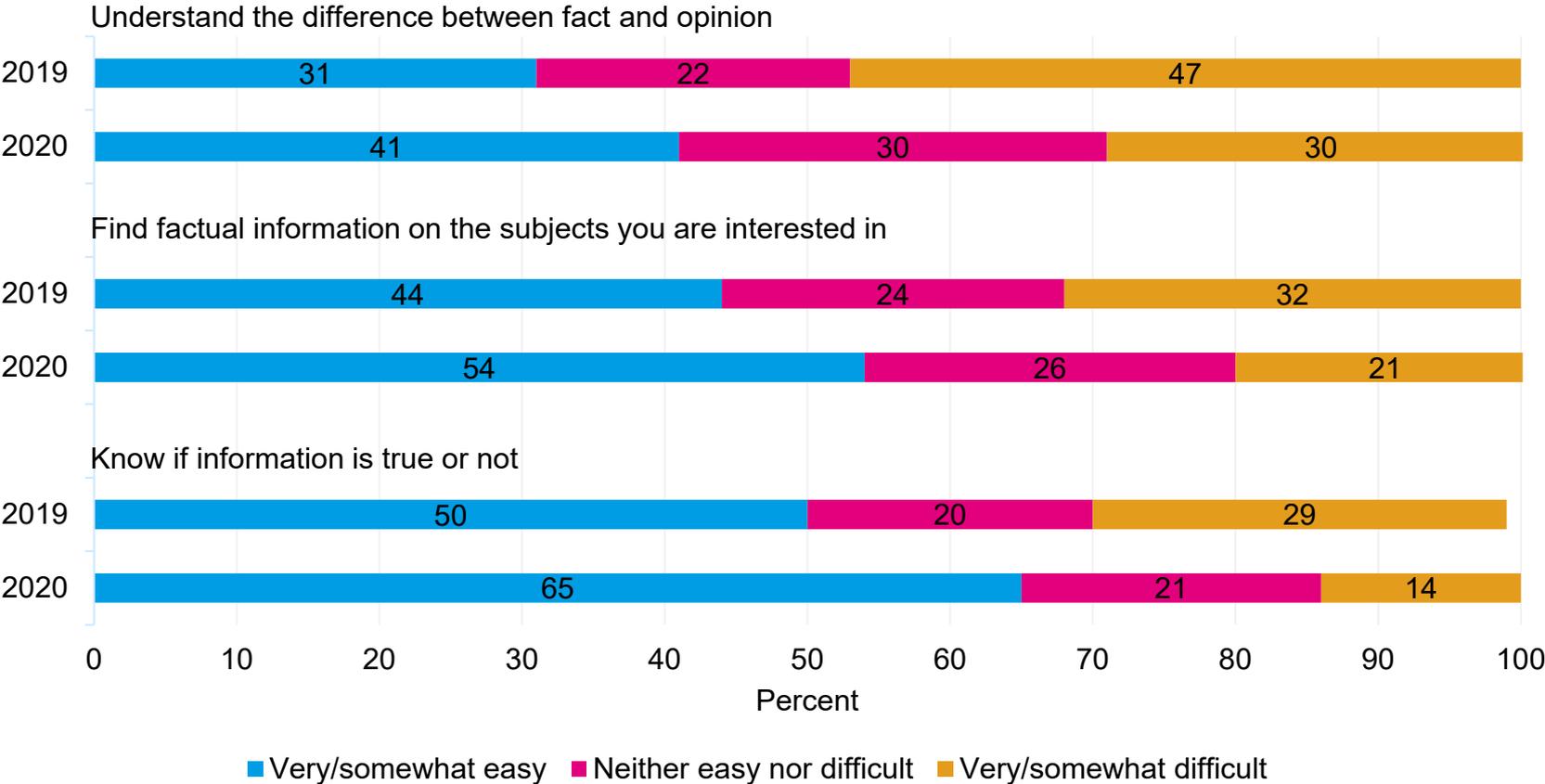
- Compared to 2019, more Americans now believe a reliance on different facts is a cause of political division in the country.
- 83% consider the spread of misinformation a major problem.
- Americans are getting information about the government from a variety of sources. Daily use of social media as a source decreased considerably since 2019 (37% 2020 vs. 54% 2019).
- Trust in government information on most topics remains low.
- 59% feel the political beliefs of the president have a lot of influence on the information provided by the government.
- When it comes to forming opinions on an issue, people's values (78%), data (73%), and personal experience (68%) top the list of important factors.

The State of the Facts



Americans say it is easier for them to determine fact from opinion, find factual information, and know if information is true compared to 2019.

How easy or difficult is it for you to...



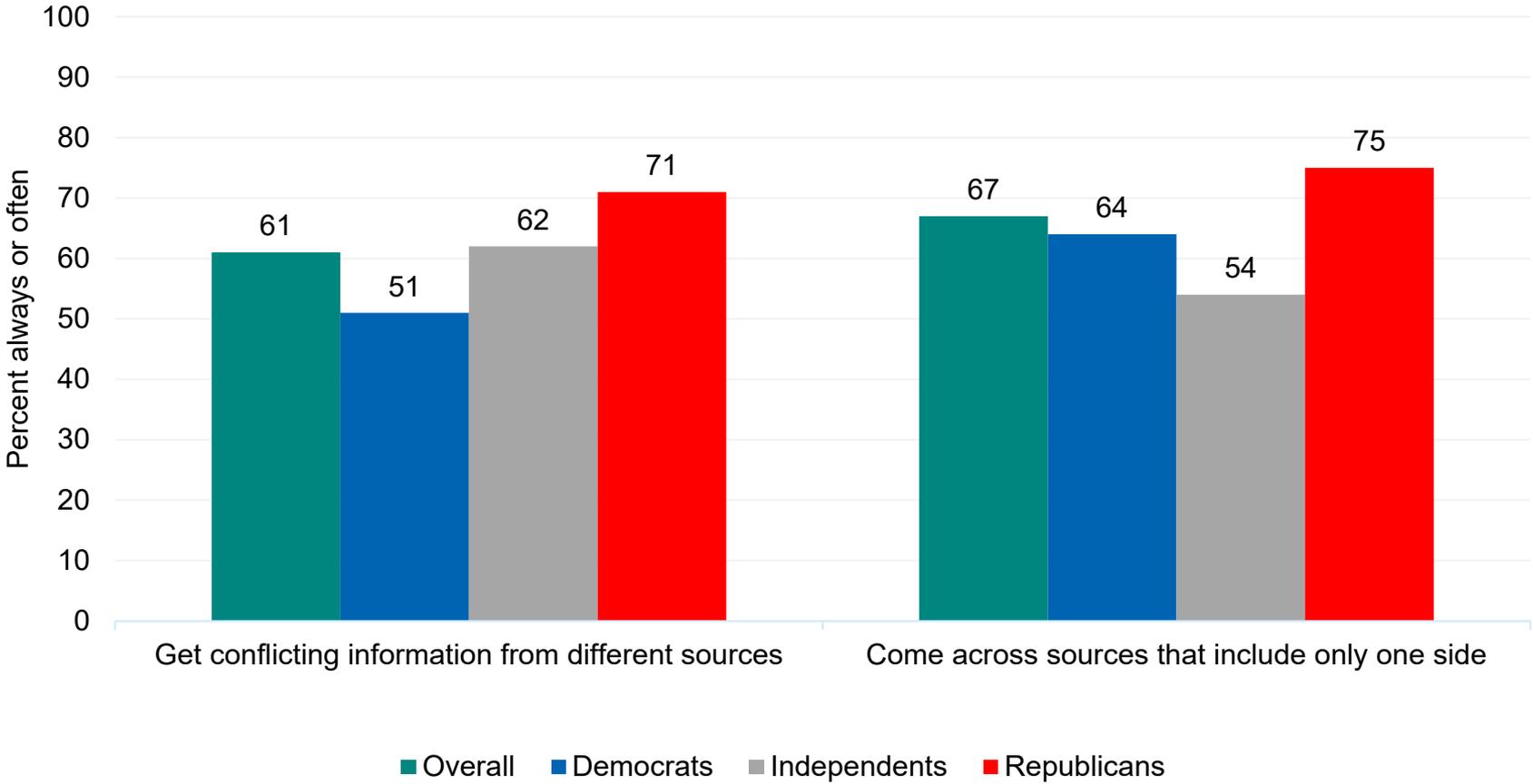
Next, these days, how easy or difficult is it for you to ...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts polls conducted October 15-28, 2019, with 1,032 adults and September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



About two-thirds of Americans get conflicting information from different sources and come across lopsided sources when gathering information.

How often do you feel like you...



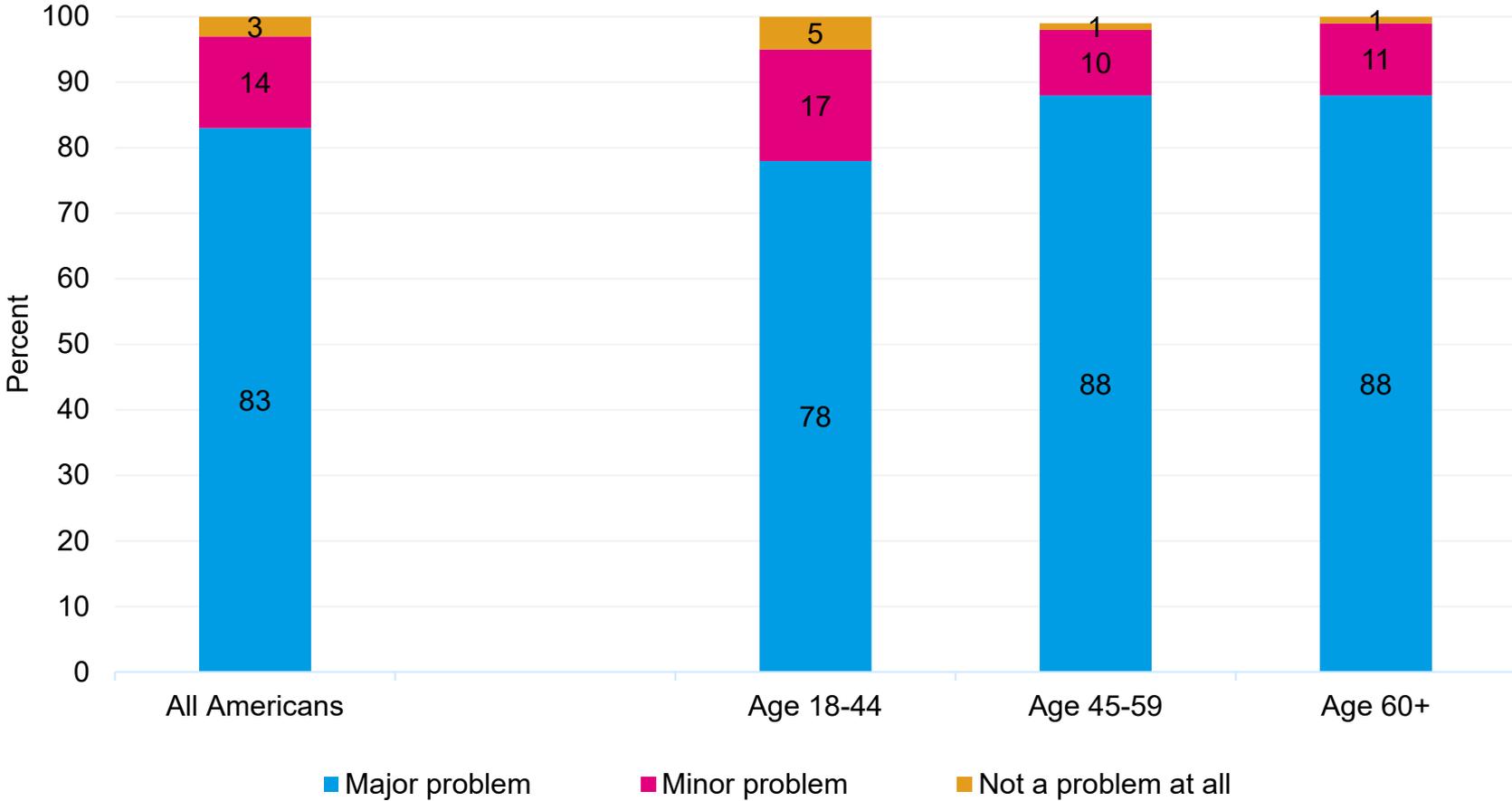
How often do you feel like you ...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



Most Americans say the spread of misinformation is a major problem, but those age 18-44 are less likely to think so.

Do you think the spread of misinformation is a ...



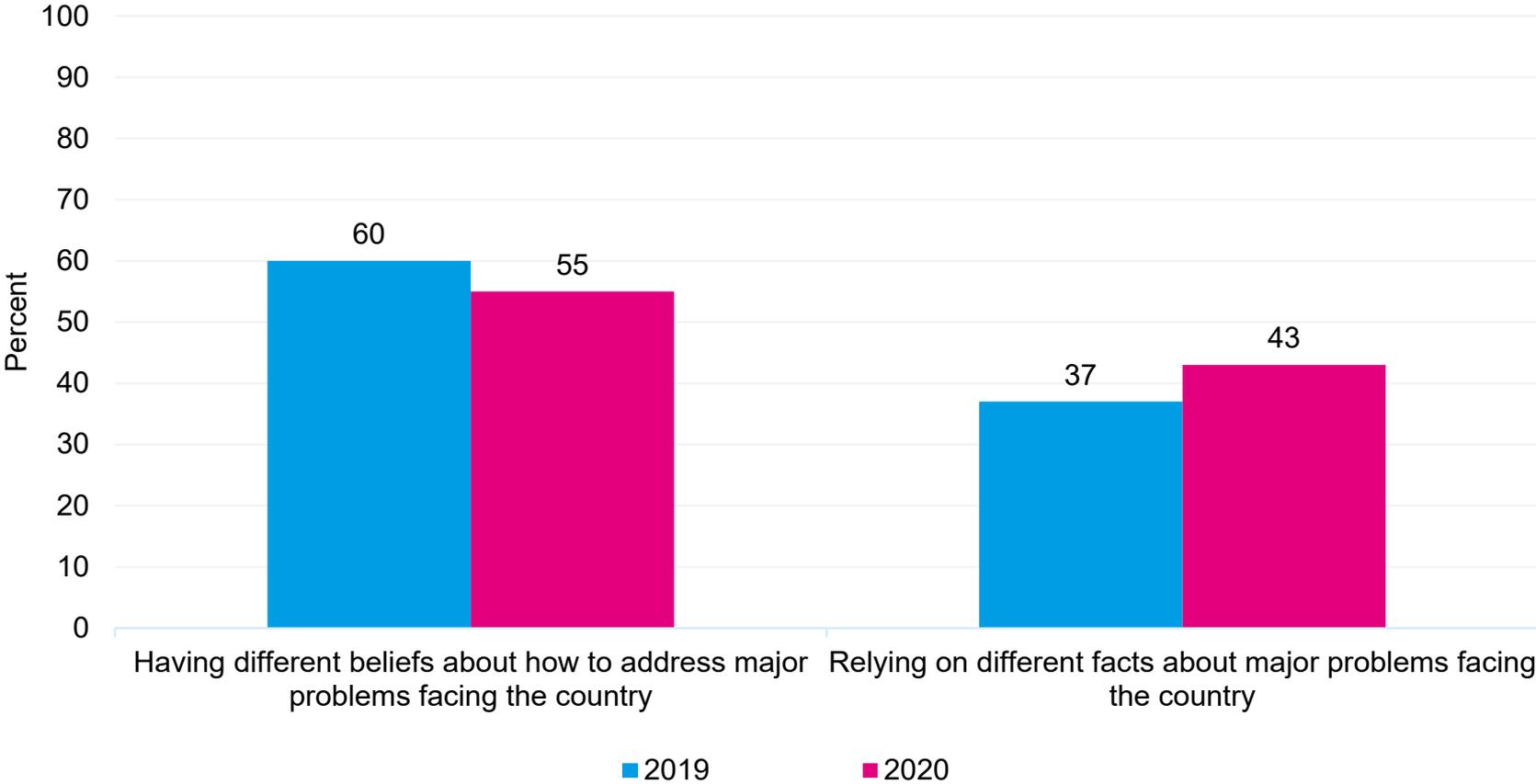
When it comes to getting information about the government, do you think the spread of misinformation is a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem at all?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



Compared to 2019, more Americans now believe a reliance on different facts is a cause of political division in the country.

Which comes closest to your view?



Which of the following statements comes closest to your view, even if neither is exactly right? Political division in the United States is more a result of Americans ...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts polls conducted October 15-28, 2019, with 1,032 adults and September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults

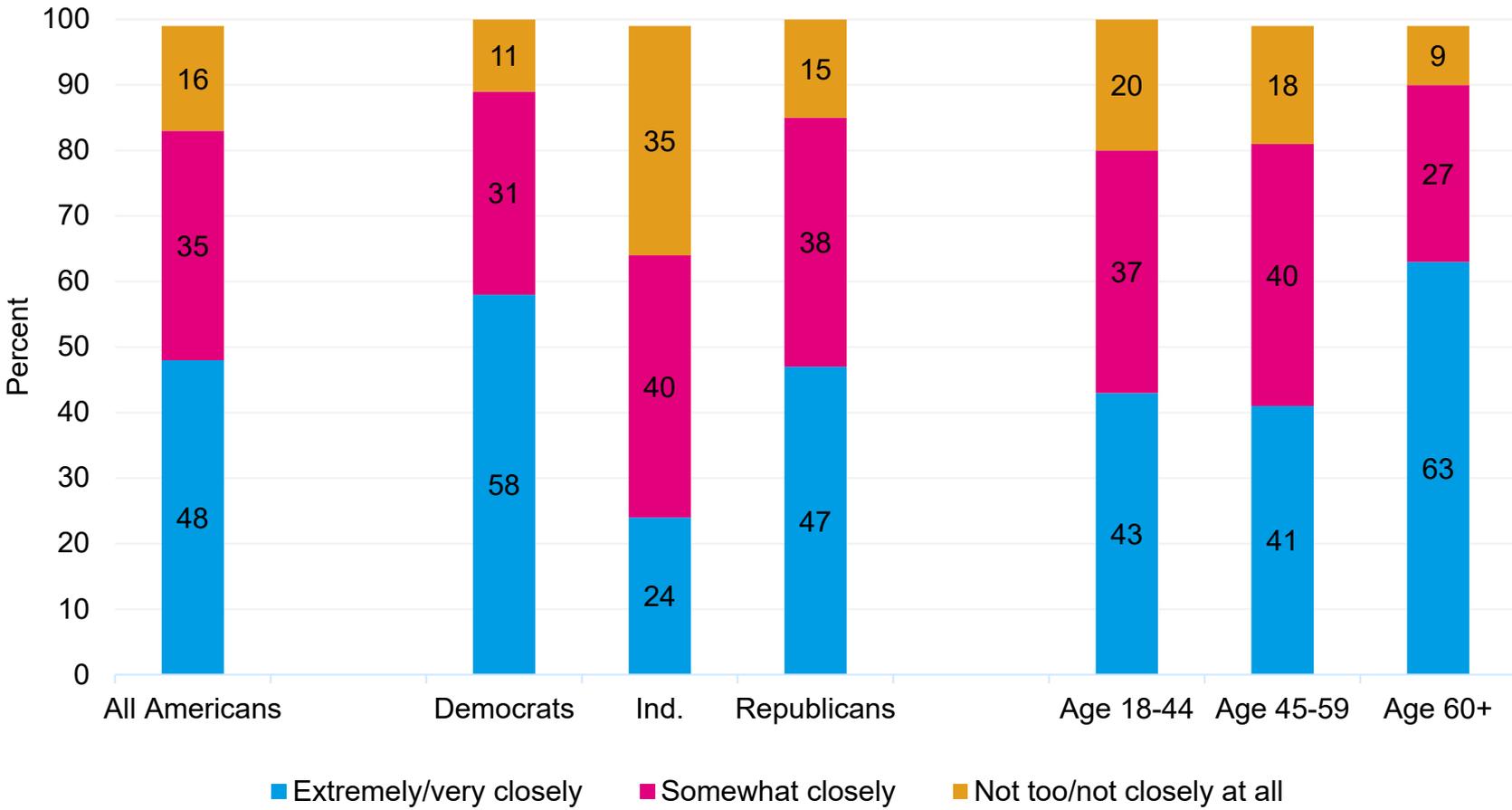


Facts in the 2020 Election



About half of Americans closely follow elections and politics, with Democrats, Republicans, and older Americans most likely to do so.

How closely do you pay attention to elections and politics?



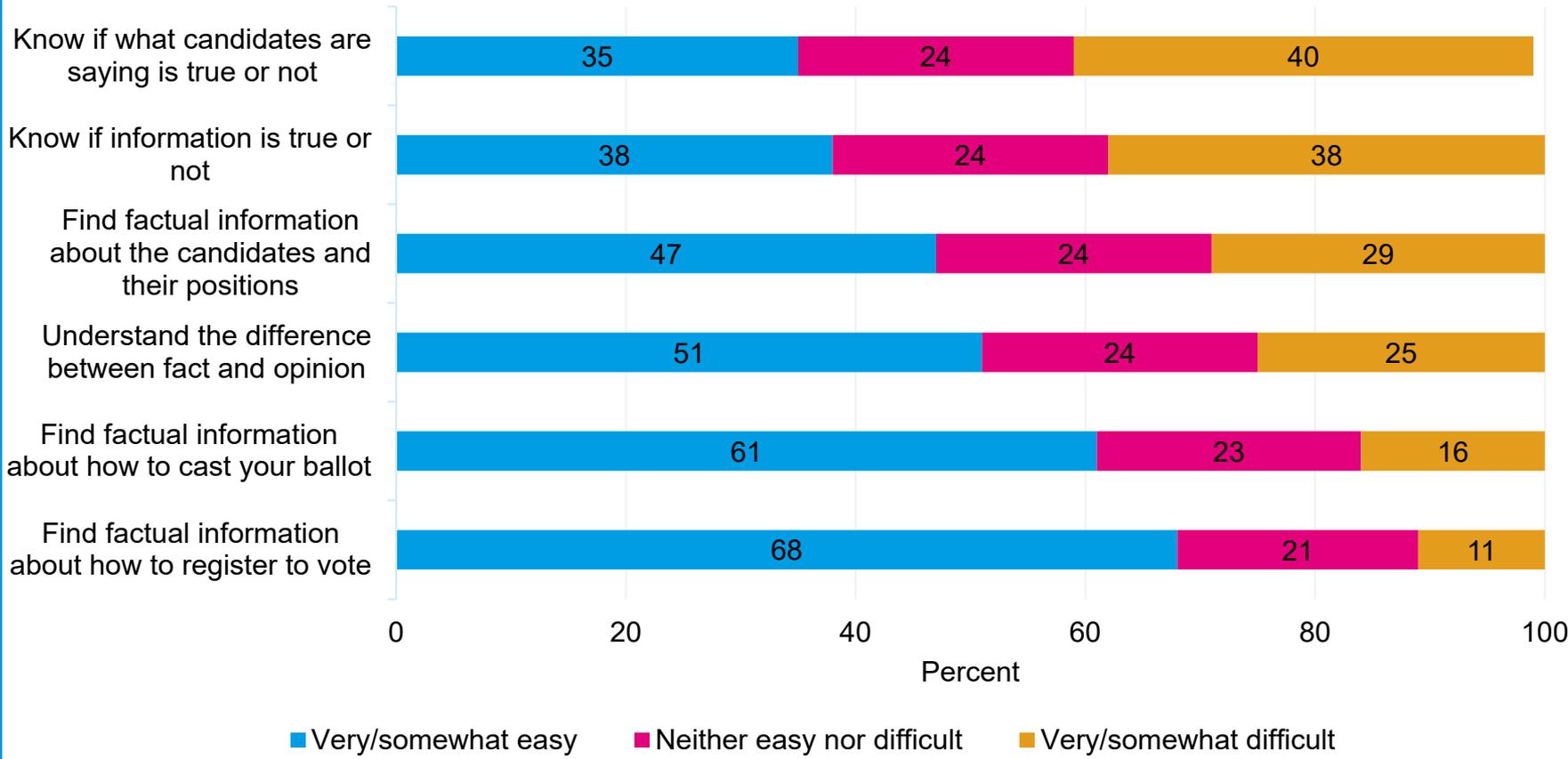
Next, how closely do you pay attention to information about each of the following topics? [Elections and politics]

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



When it comes to election information, about 4 in 10 find it difficult to know what the candidates are saying or if information is true.

When it comes to information about the upcoming presidential election, how easy or difficult is it for you to...?



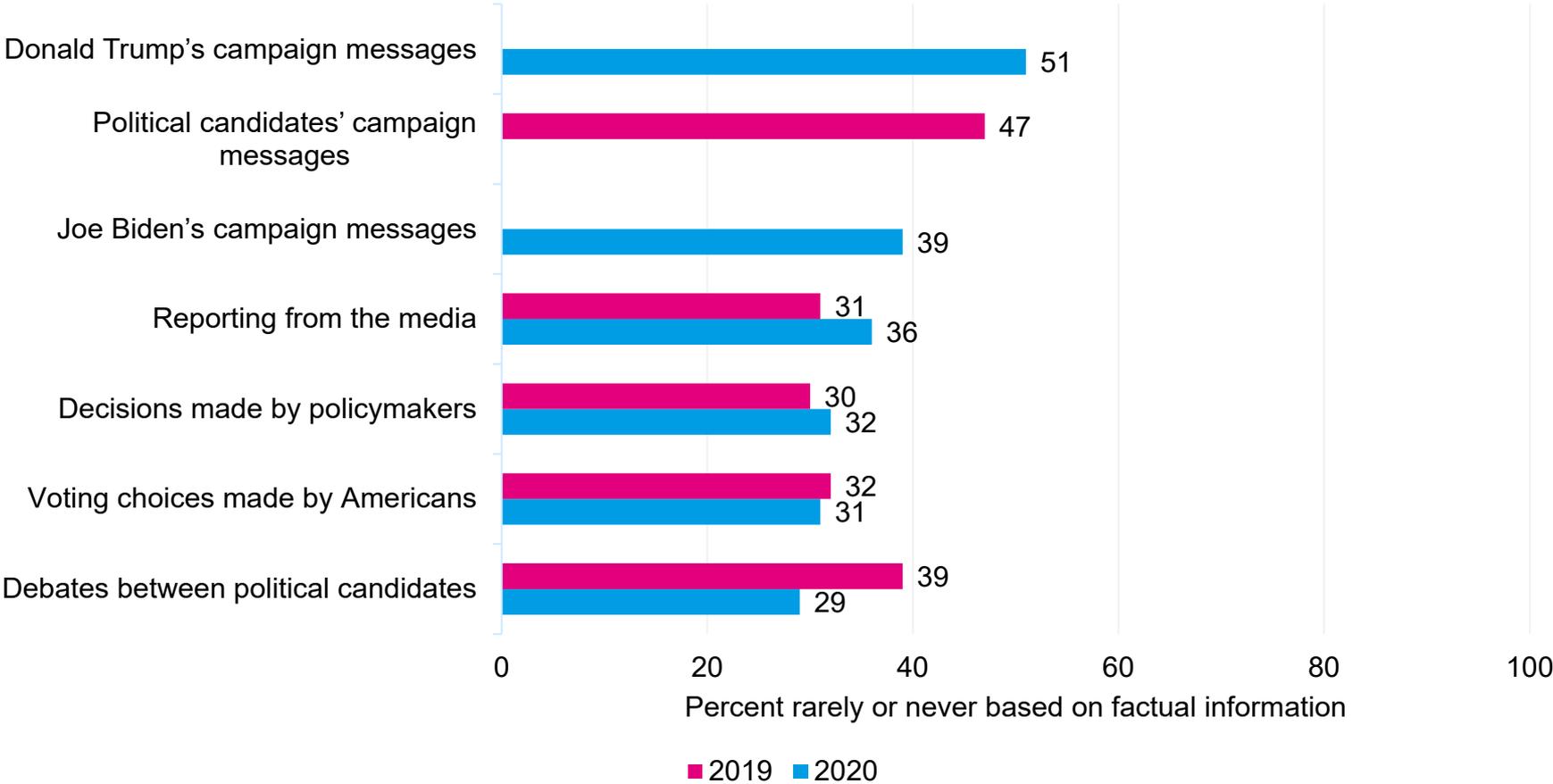
When it comes to information about the upcoming presidential election, how easy or difficult is it for you ...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



A majority of Americans overall feel President Trump's campaign messages are not grounded in facts.

How often do you think each of the following are based on factual information?



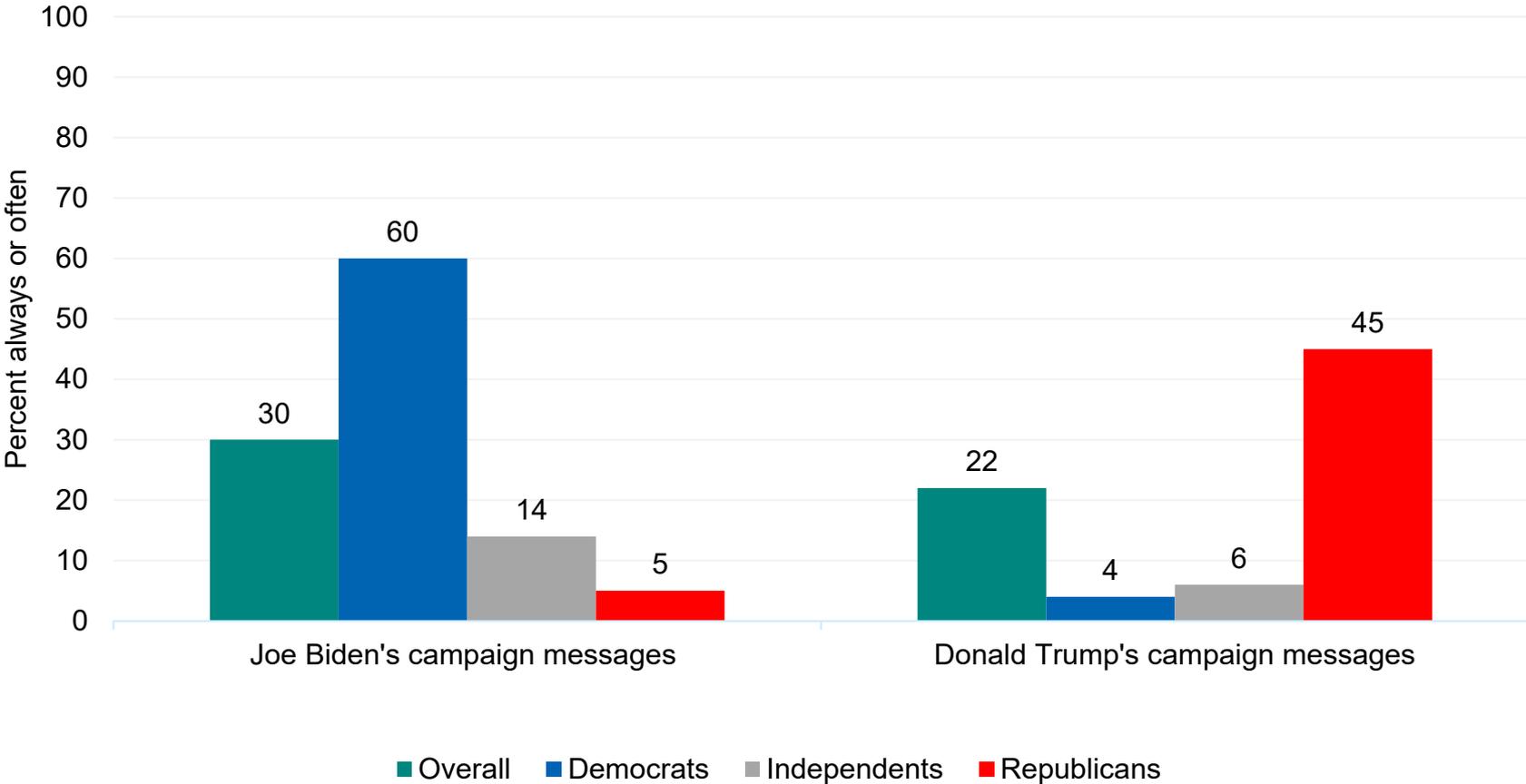
When it comes to information about the upcoming presidential election, how easy or difficult is it for you ...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts polls conducted October 15-28, 2019, with 1,032 adults and September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



More Democrats say Joe Biden's campaign messages are always or often grounded in facts compared to how Republicans feel about Donald Trump.

How often do you think each of the following are based on factual information?



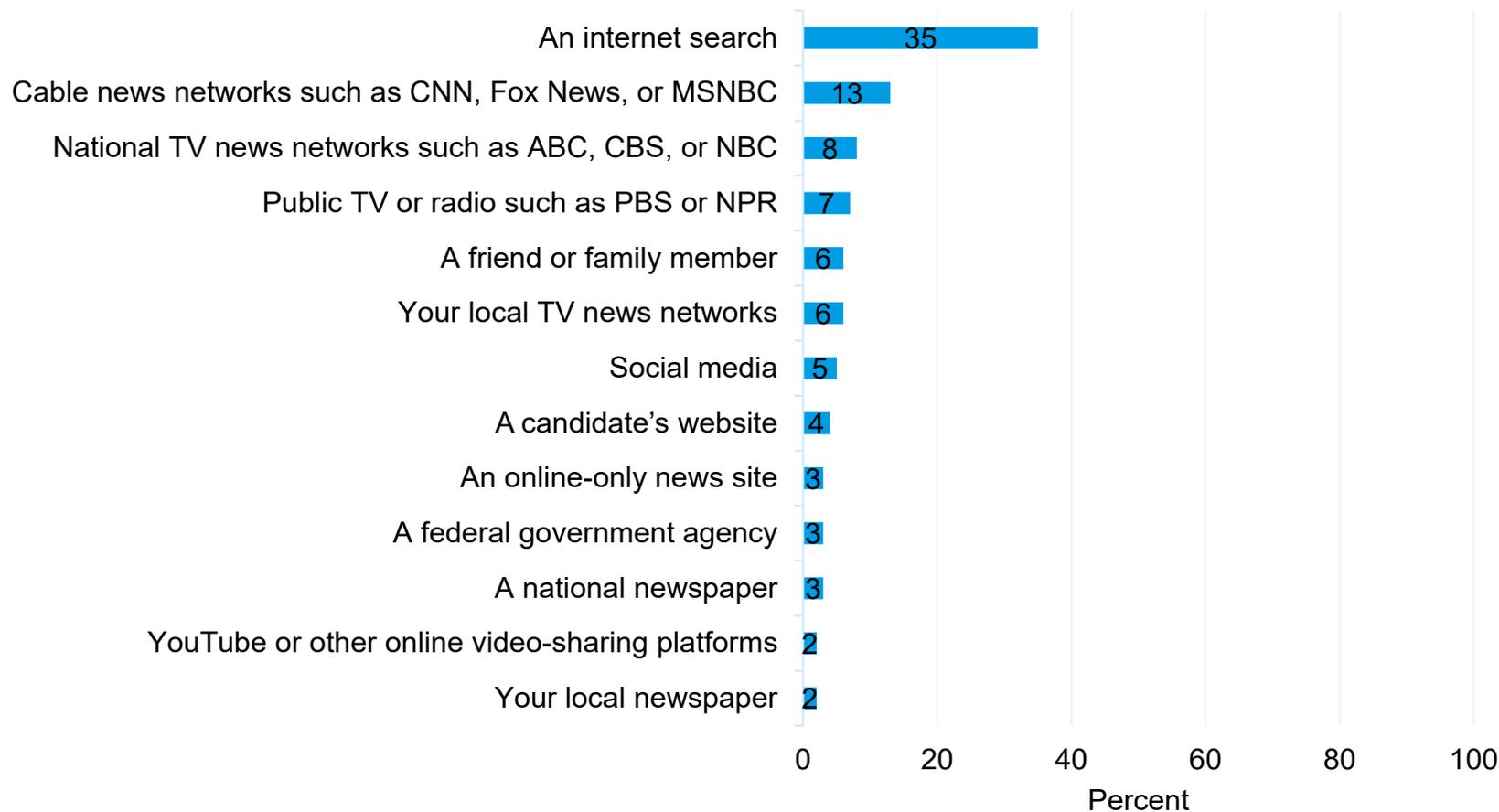
When it comes to information about the upcoming presidential election, how easy or difficult is it for you ...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



When trying to determine if news about the election is true, an internet search is the most common approach.

Where do you generally go first to check if news about the election is true or not?



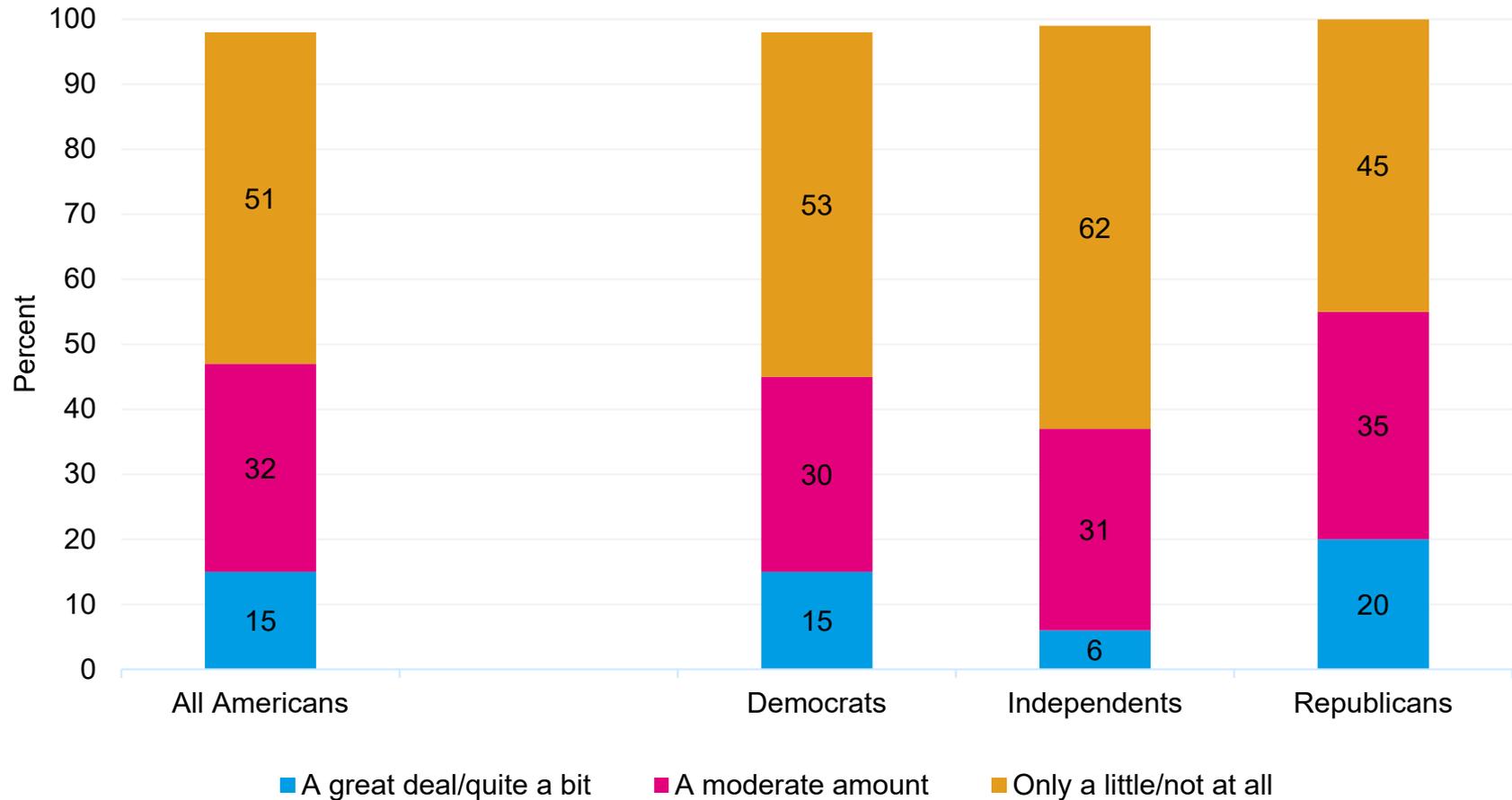
When you see news about the upcoming presidential election and you want to find out if it is true or not, where do you generally go first to check?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



However, few trust information from the federal government on elections. Political independents are least trusting.

How much do you trust information from the federal government about elections and politics?



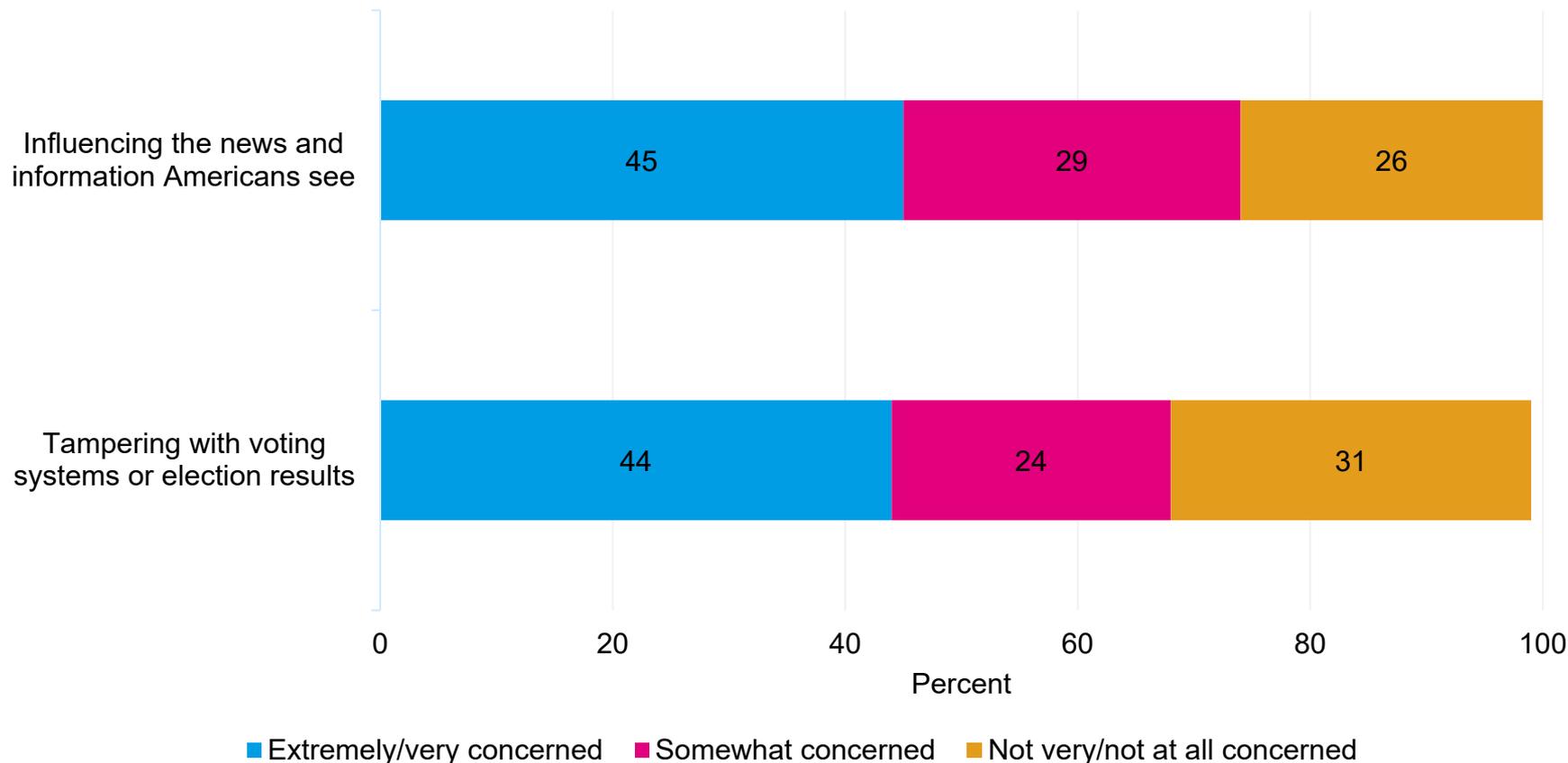
How much do you trust information from the federal government about the following topics? [Elections and politics]

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



Concerns about foreign government interference in the 2020 election are high.

How concerned are you about foreign governments interfering with the election by...



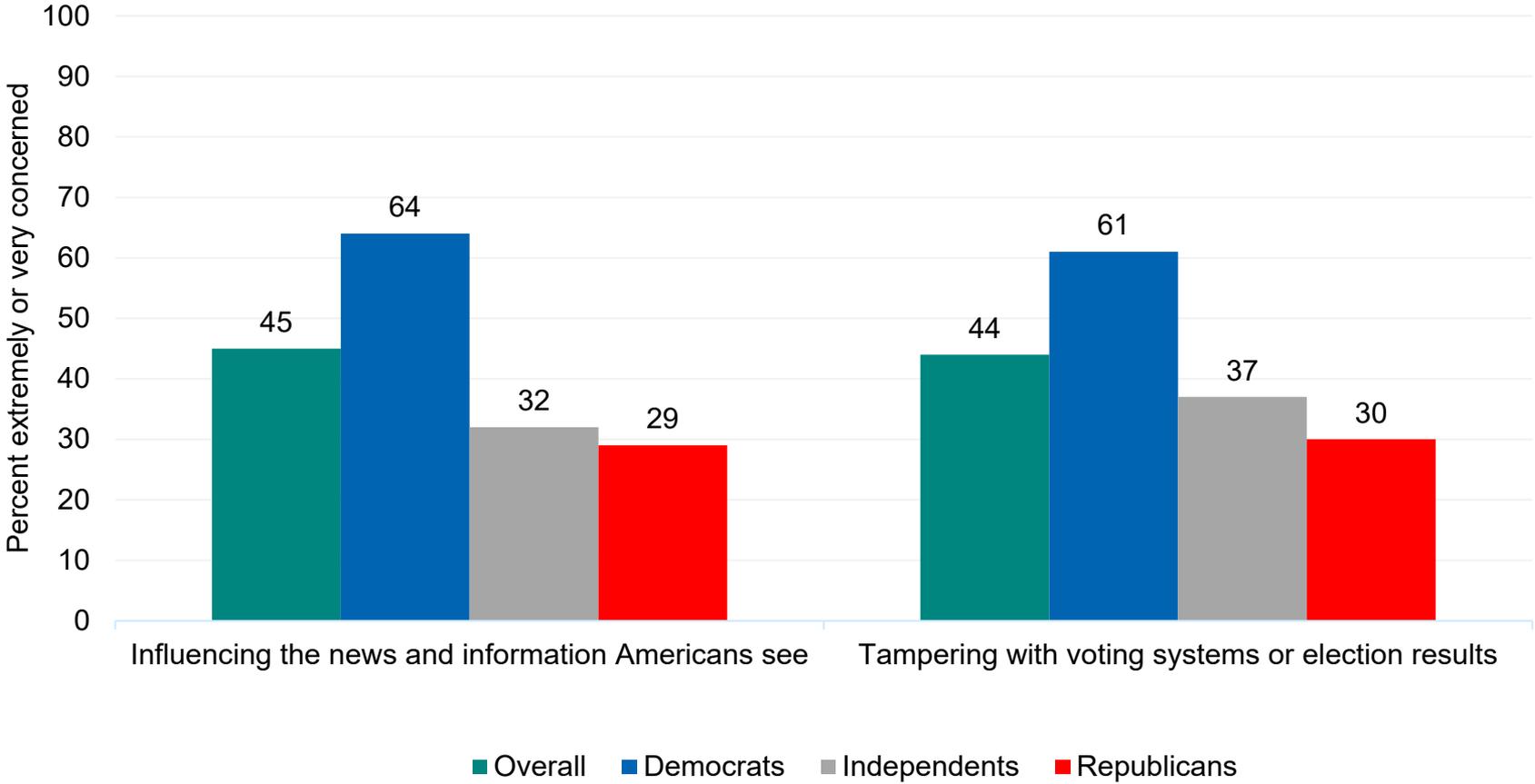
How concerned are you about foreign governments interfering with the 2020 presidential election by ...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



Democrats are more concerned than Republicans or independents about foreign interference in the election.

How concerned are you about foreign governments interfering with the election by...



How concerned are you about foreign governments interfering with the 2020 presidential election by ...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults

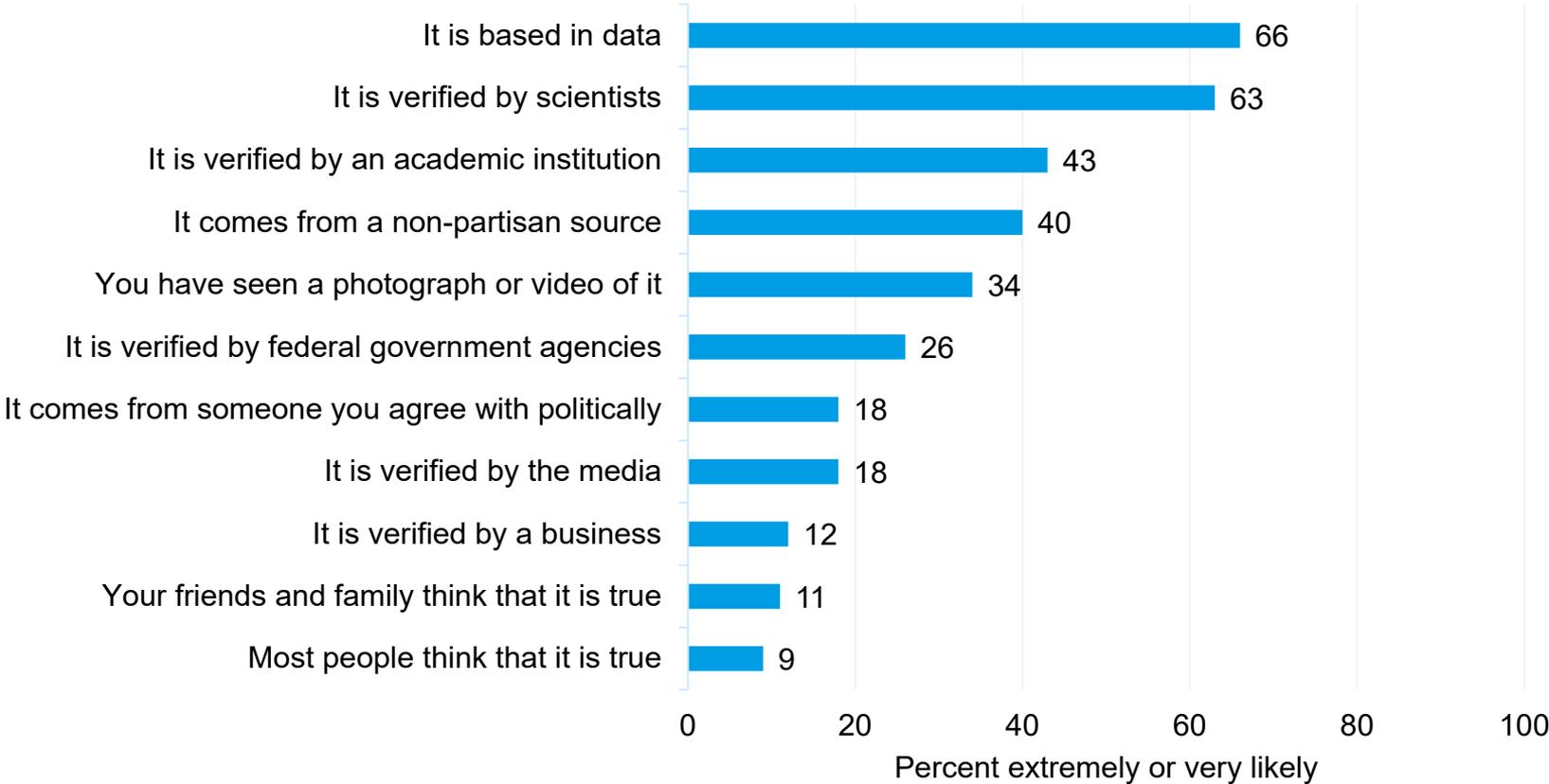


How Americans make sense of the information



Americans are most likely to consider information factual if it is based in data and verified by scientists.

How likely are you to consider information factual if...



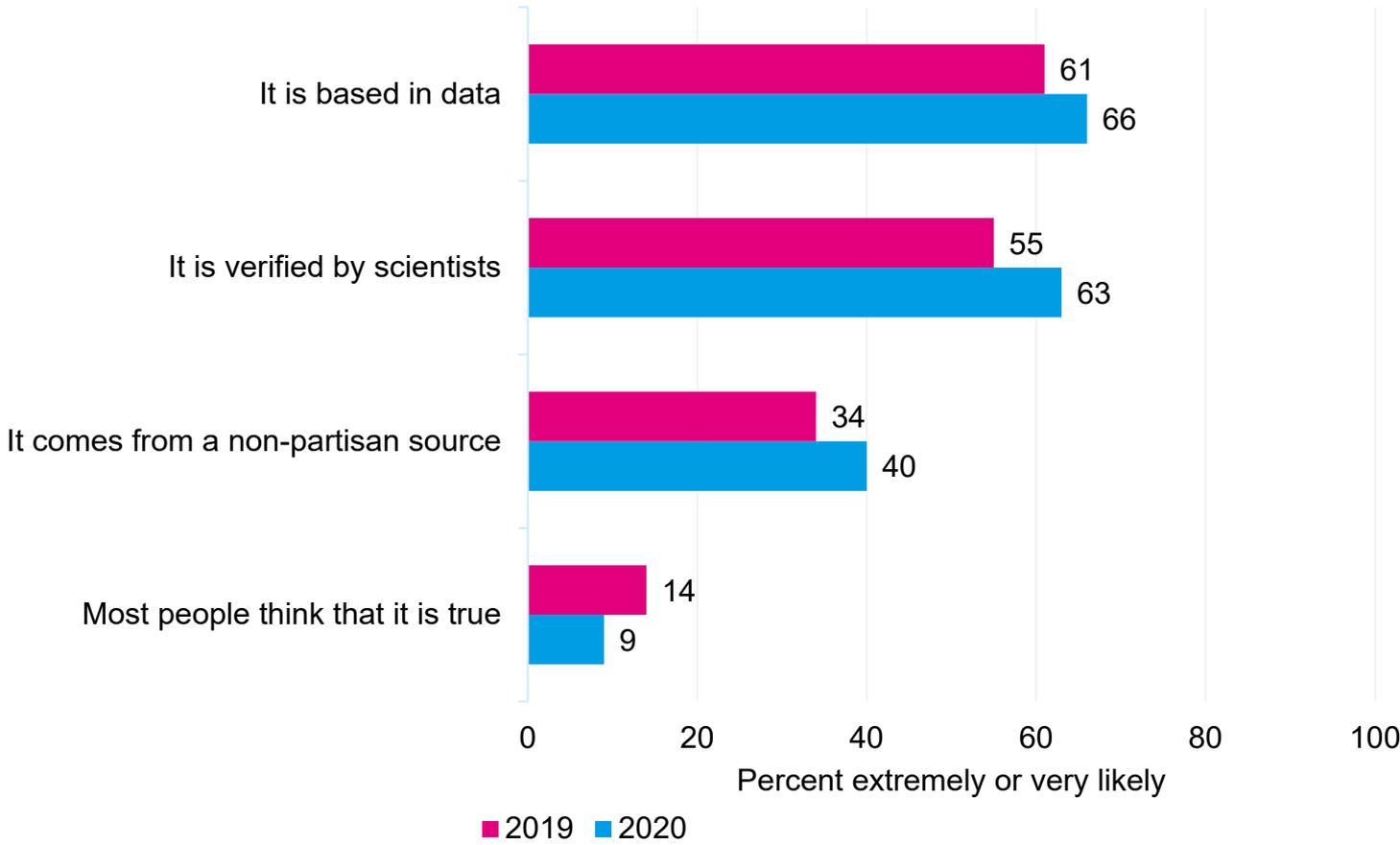
How likely are you to consider information factual if it has each of the following characteristics?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.



Since last year, more Americans consider information factual when it's based in data, is verified by scientists, or comes from non-partisan sources.

How likely are you to consider information factual if...



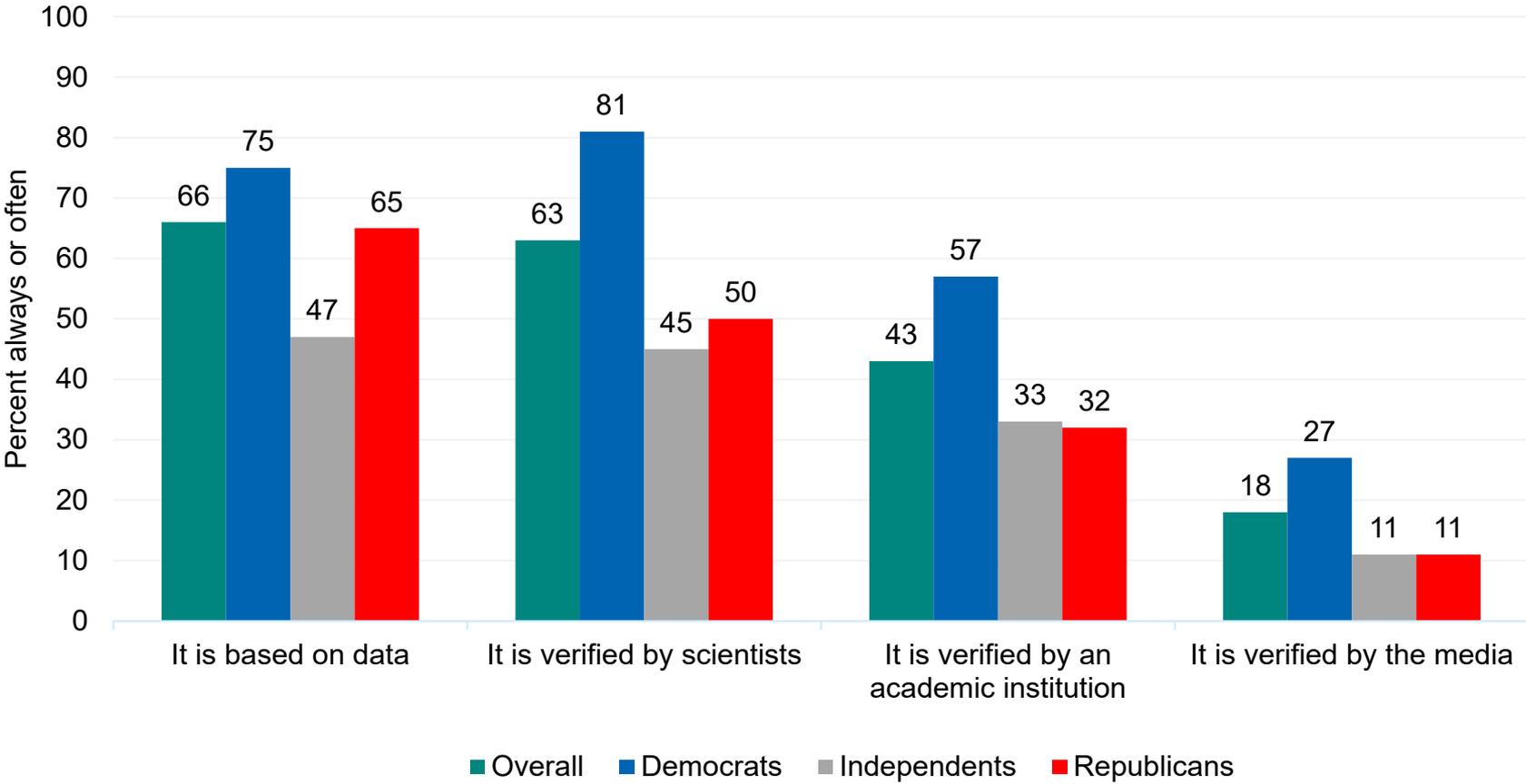
How likely are you to consider information factual if it has each of the following characteristics?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults



Democrats are more likely than Republicans and independents to say verification from scientists, academics, and the media, and being based in data are important.

How likely are you to consider information factual if...



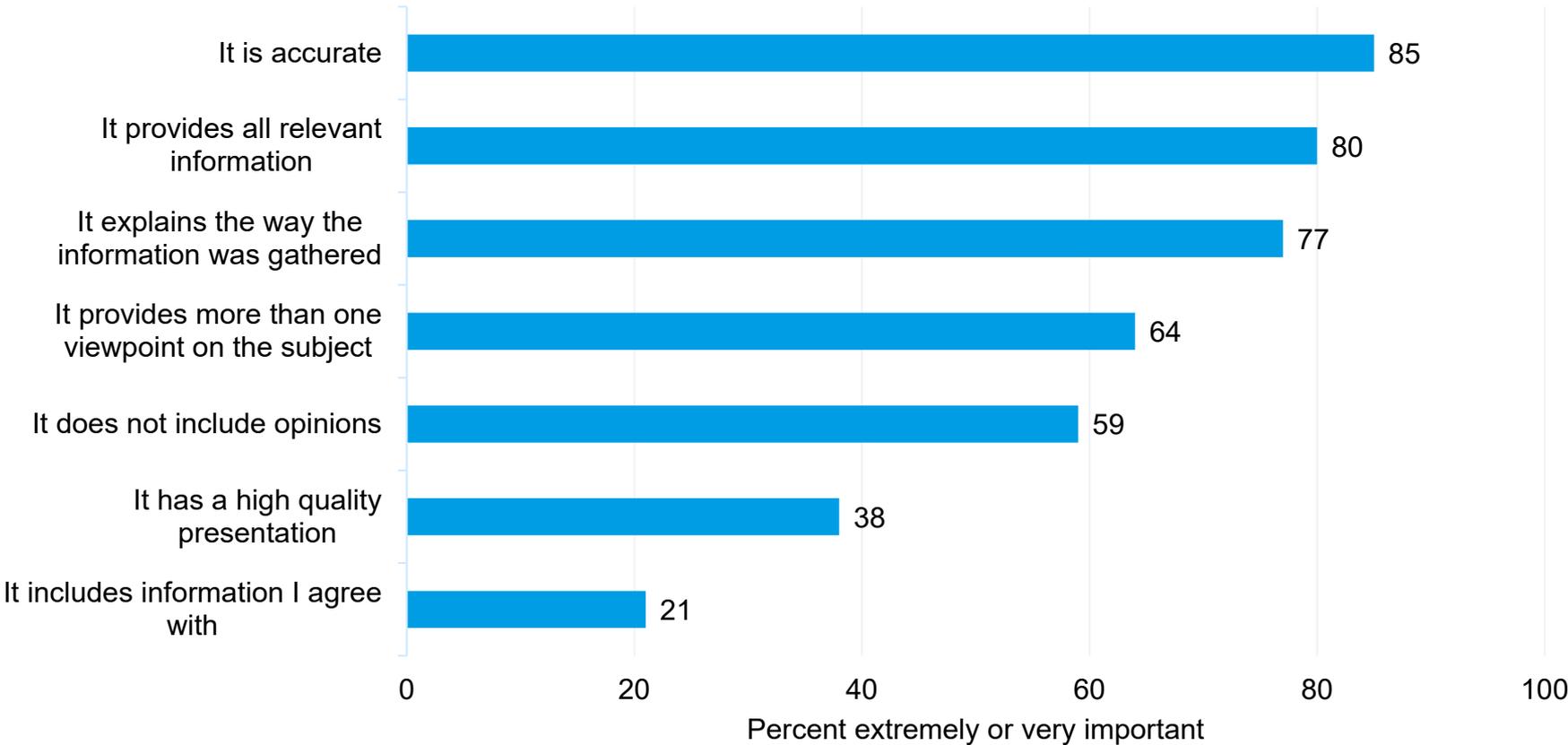
How likely are you to consider information factual if it has each of the following characteristics?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



Accuracy and completeness of information matter most in assessing factual information.

Thinking about information you consider factual, how important is each of the following factors?



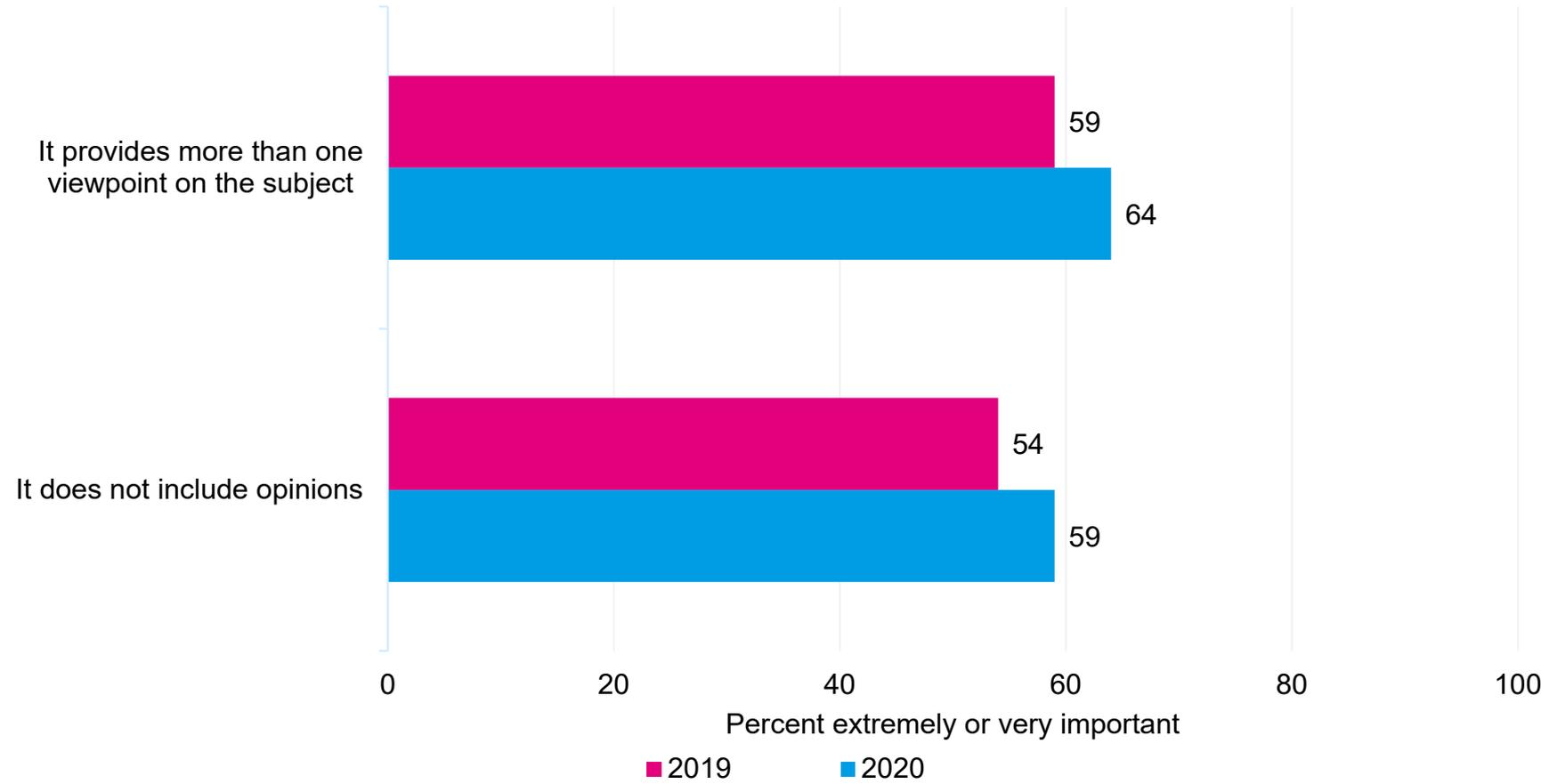
Thinking about information you consider factual, how important is each of the following factors?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



More Americans now think presenting multiple viewpoints and avoiding opinion are important to what they consider factual information.

Thinking about information you consider factual, how important is each of the following factors?



Thinking about information you consider factual, how important is each of the following factors?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults

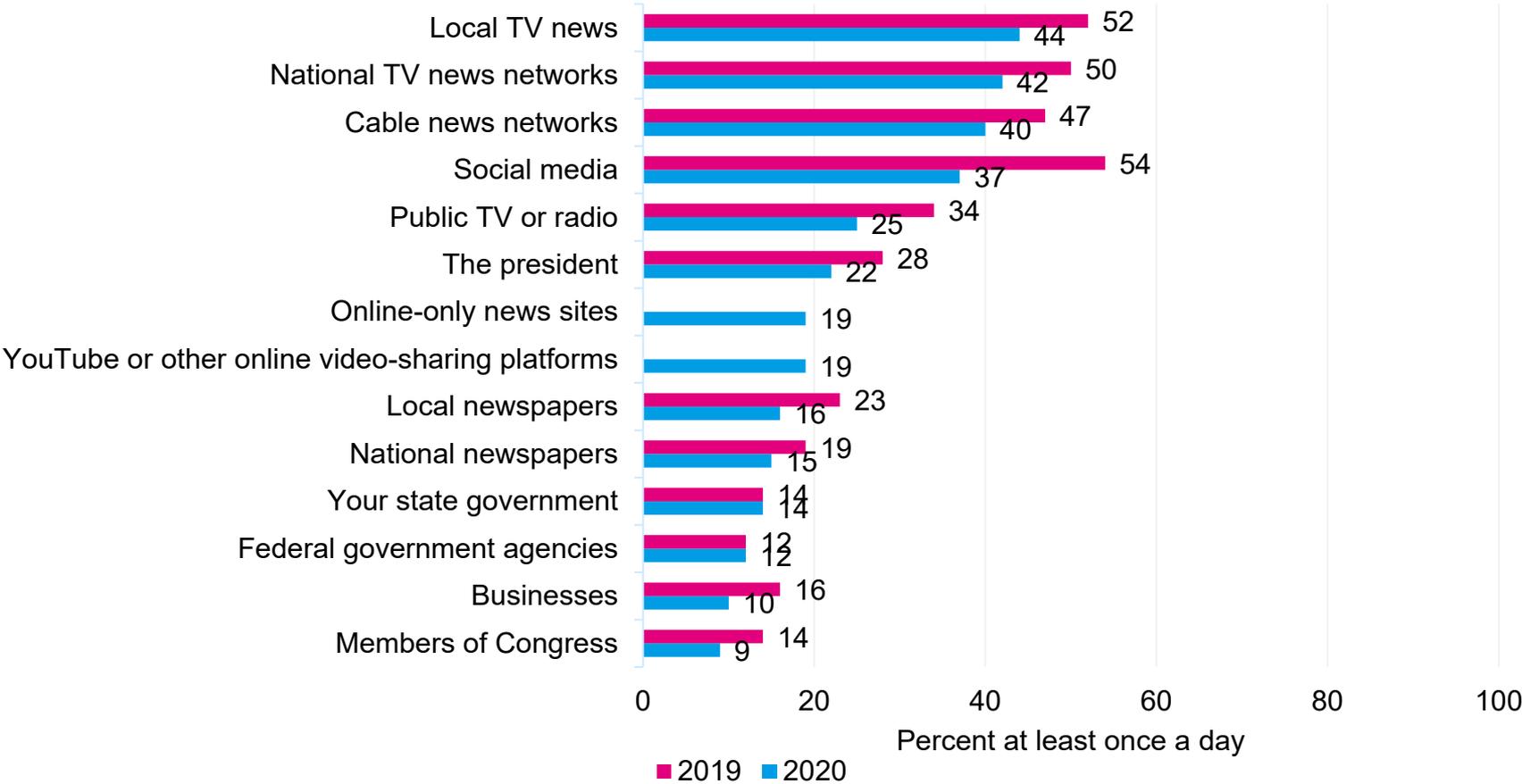


How Americans get information



Americans are getting information about the government from a variety of sources. Daily use of social media decreased considerably since 2019.

How often do you get information about the government from...



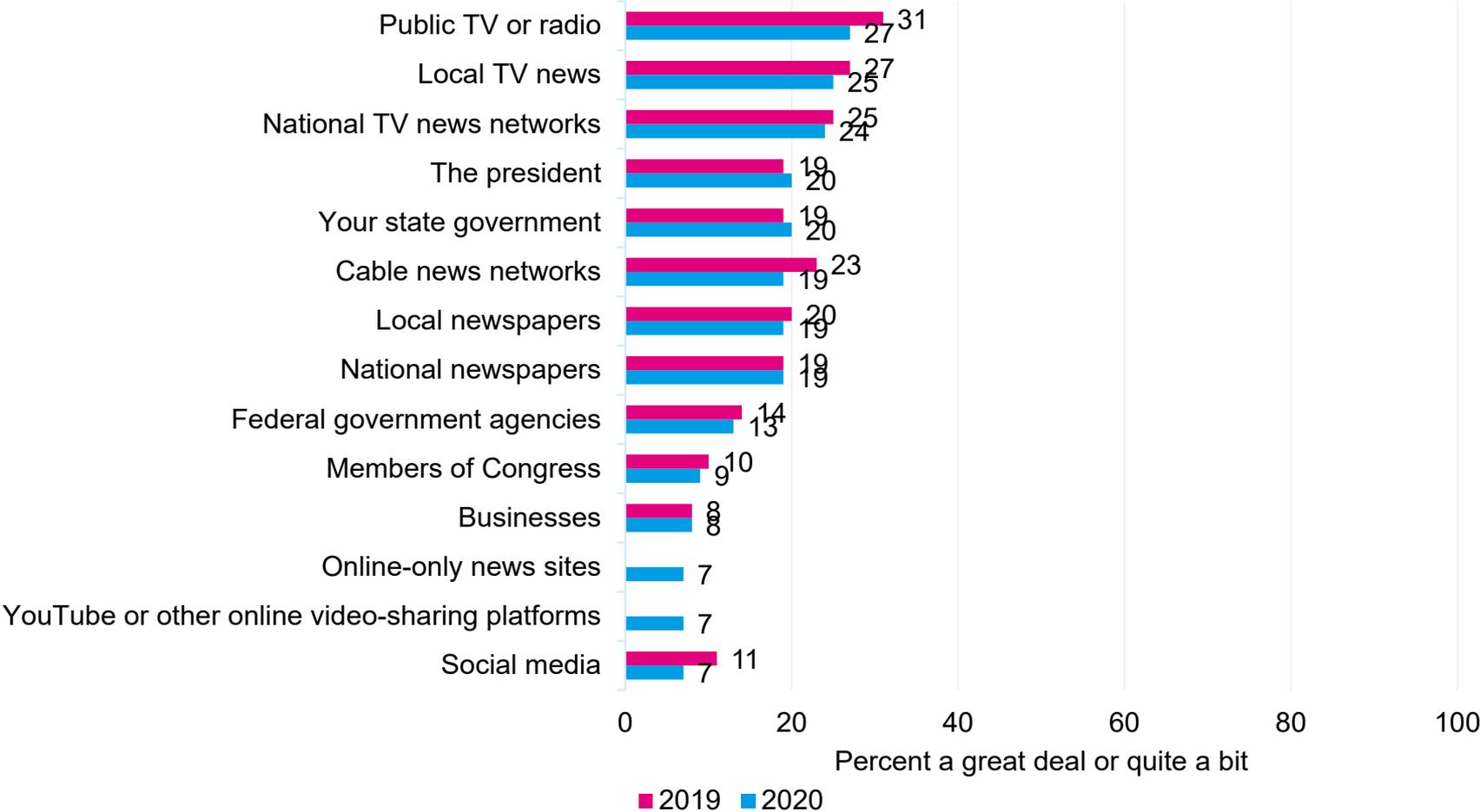
Thinking about some of the ways you get information about the government these days, how often, if at all, do you get information from ...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults



Public, local, and national TV news continue to be the most trusted sources of information about the government, but levels are still low.

How much do you trust information about the government from...



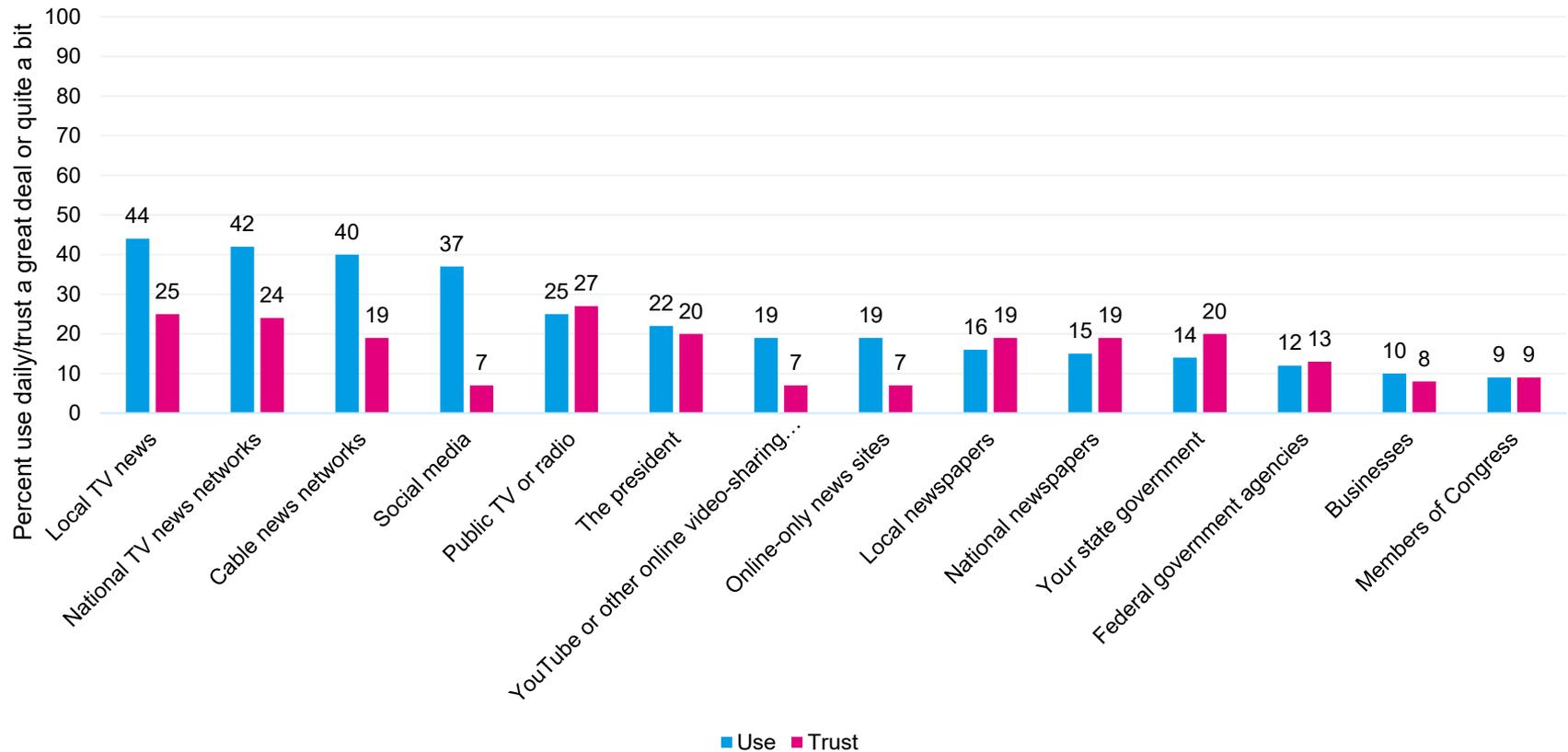
Regardless of how often you get information from these sources, how much do you trust information from them about the government?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults



Even the most used sources are not highly trusted. Social media in particular is used often but few trust it.

Comparing usage and trust...



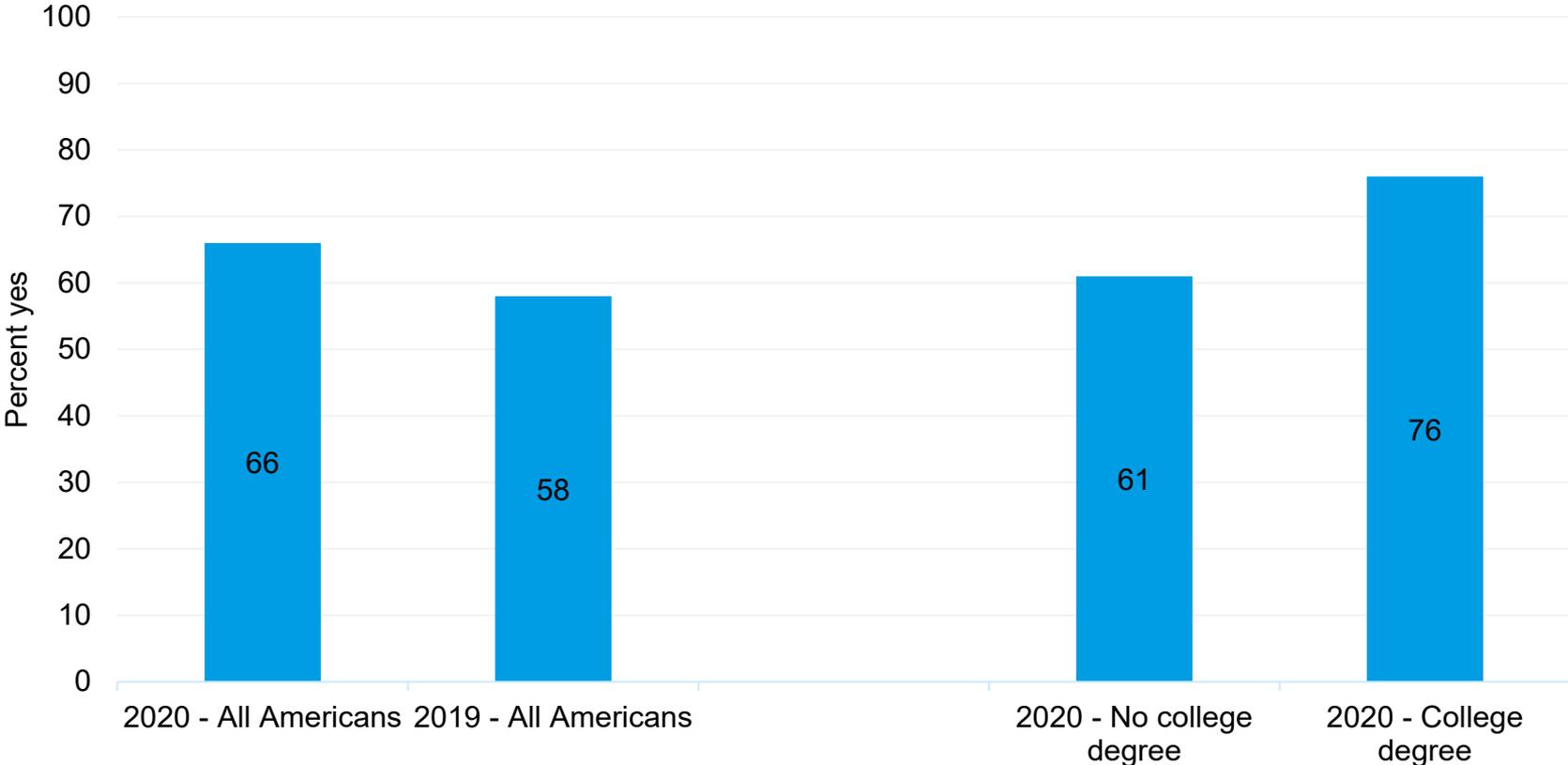
Thinking about some of the ways you get information about the government these days, how often, if at all, do you get information from .../Regardless of how often you get information from these sources, how much do you trust information from them about the government?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



More Americans, especially those with a college degree, are using federal government websites to look up information.

Have you used federal government websites like the CDC to look up information?



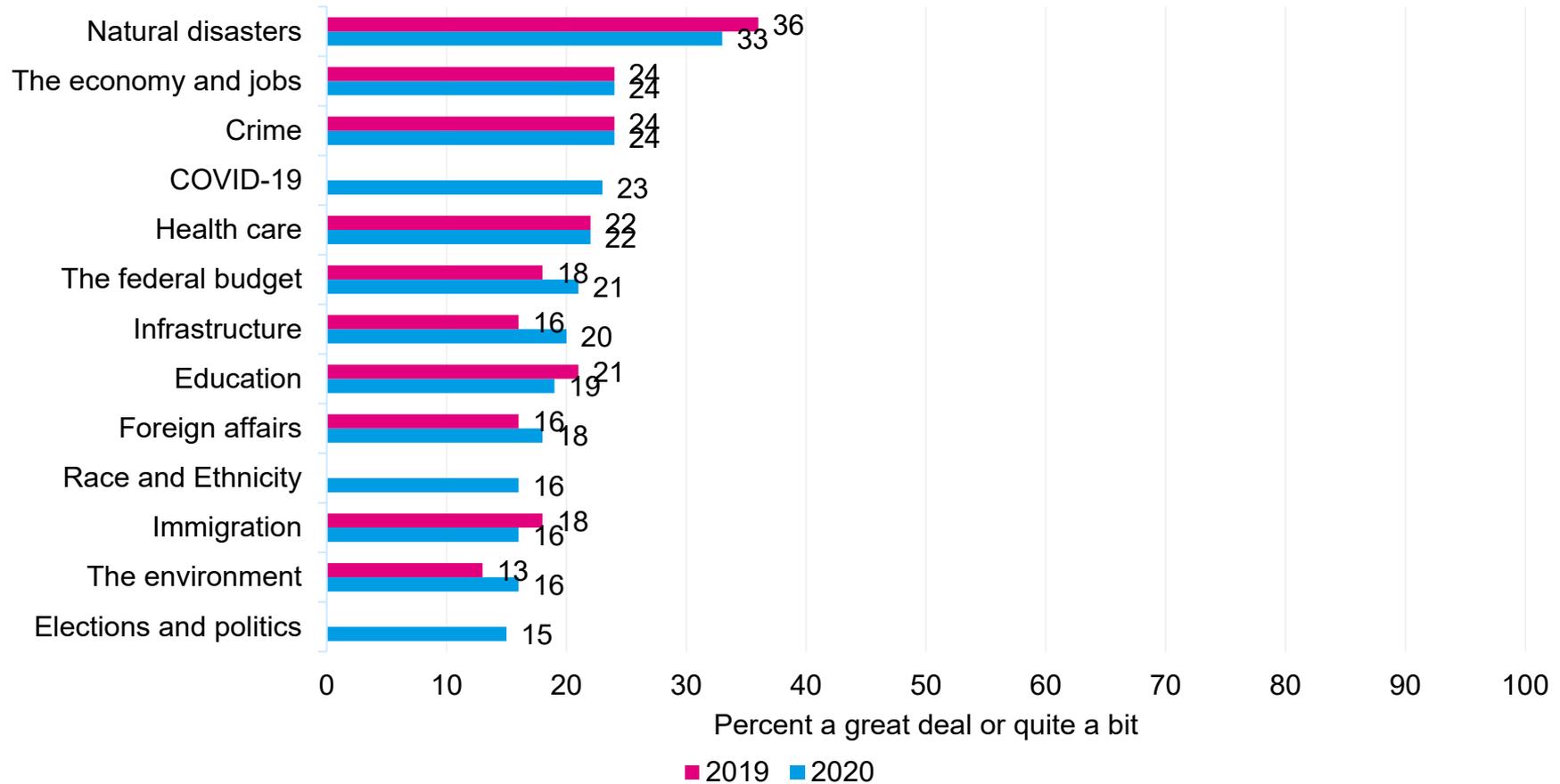
Have you ever used federal government websites (e.g. Census Bureau, IRS, Centers for Disease Control) to look up information?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults



But trust in government information on most topics remains low.

How much do you trust information from the federal government about...



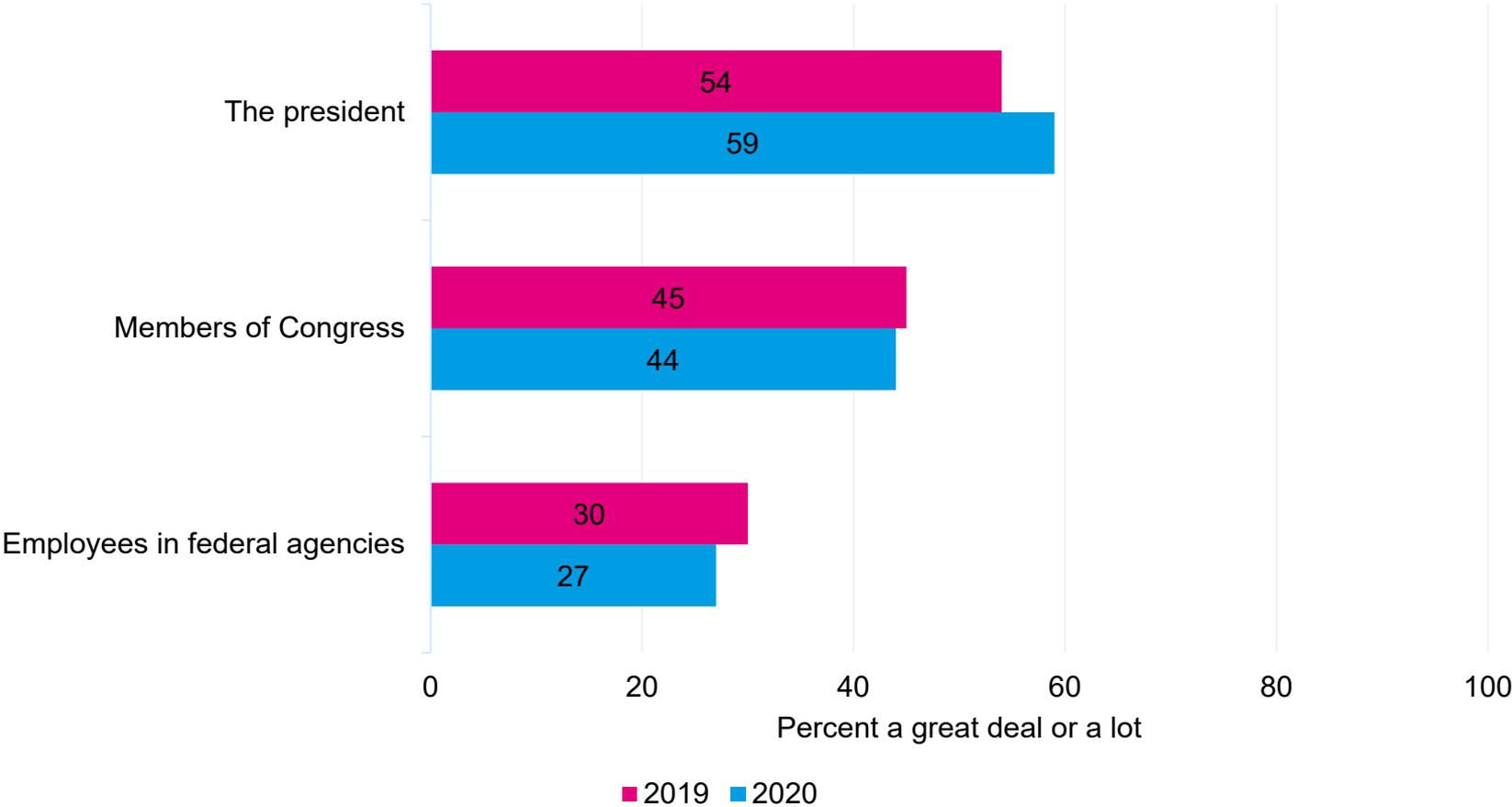
How much do you trust information from the federal government about the following topics?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults



A majority feel the political beliefs of the president have a lot of influence over the information provided by the government.

How much do the political beliefs of each influence information provided by the government?



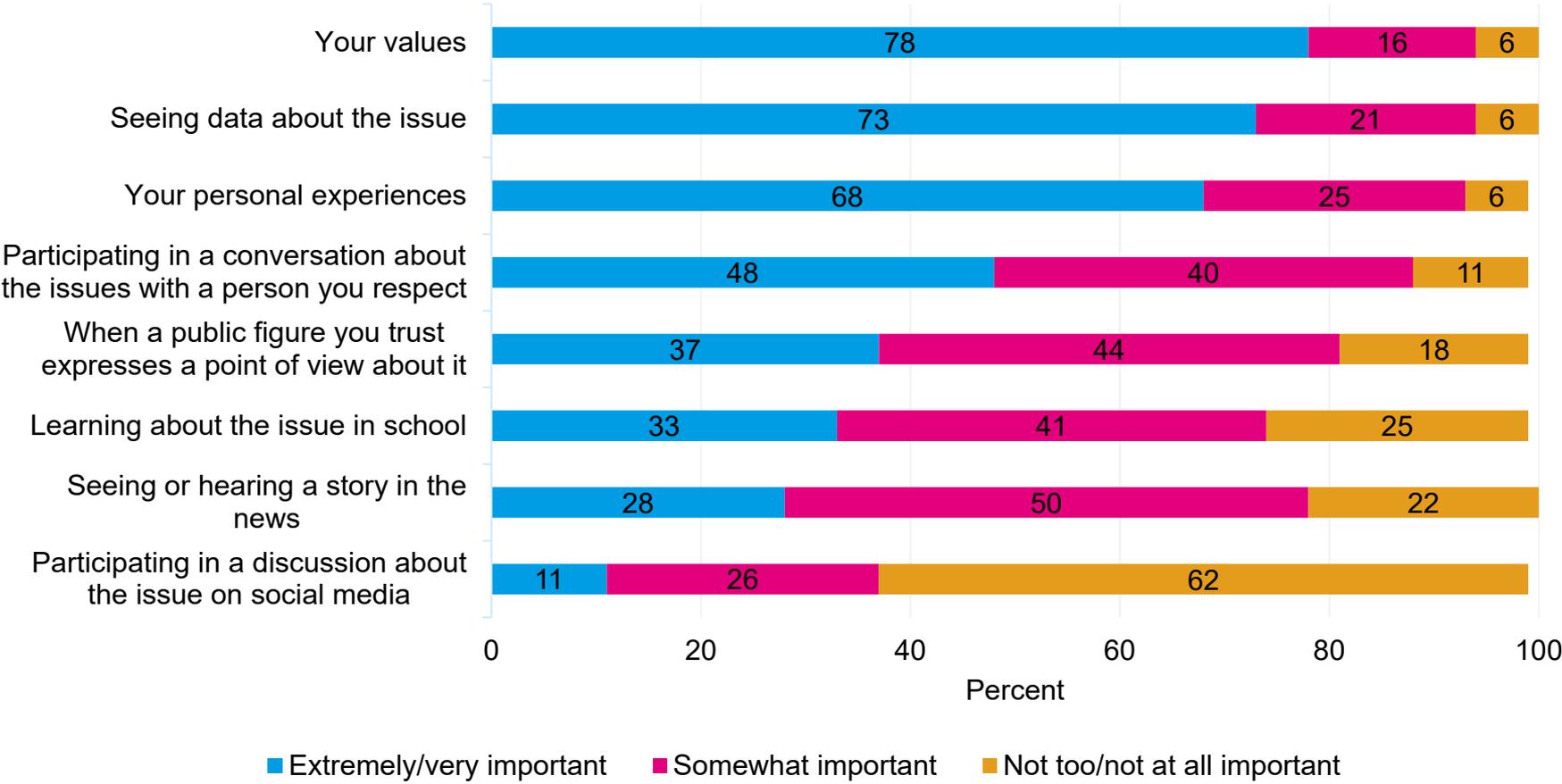
How much influence do you think the political beliefs of each of the following have over information provided by the federal government?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults and October 15-28, 2019 with 1,032 adults



Values, seeing data on an issue, and experiences are most important for forming opinions on issues

How important is each of the following in helping you form opinions on an issue?



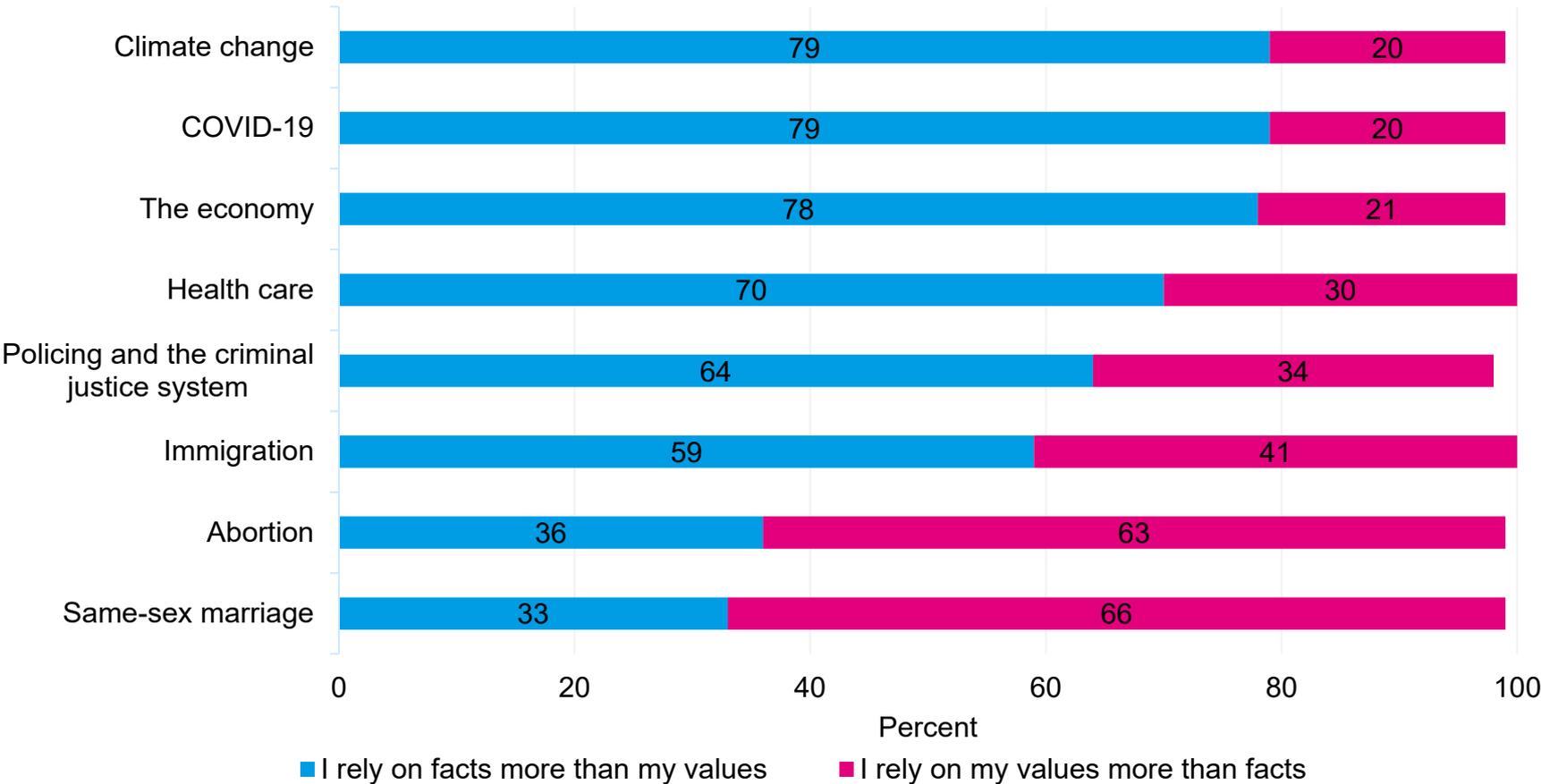
How important is each of the following in helping you form opinions on an issue?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



Americans rely more on facts than values when thinking about COVID-19, climate change, the economy, health care, policing, and immigration.

Which comes closer to how you think about each of the following issues?



Which comes closer to describing how you think about each of the following issues?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults



State of the Facts Poll 2020

- Poll conducted by The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and funded by USAFacts.
- Nationwide poll of 1,043 adults conducted September 15-25 using the AmeriSpeak Panel[®].
 - AmeriSpeak is NORC's probability based panel designed to be representative of all US households.
 - 966 via the web and 77 via telephone
 - Interviews conducted in English and Spanish
- Margin of error +/- 4.1 percentage points
- AAPOR Response Rate 3 of 5.4%
- Complete topline and methodology available at www.apnorc.org.



State of the Facts 2020: COVID-19

Key Findings

State of the Facts Poll 2020: COVID-19

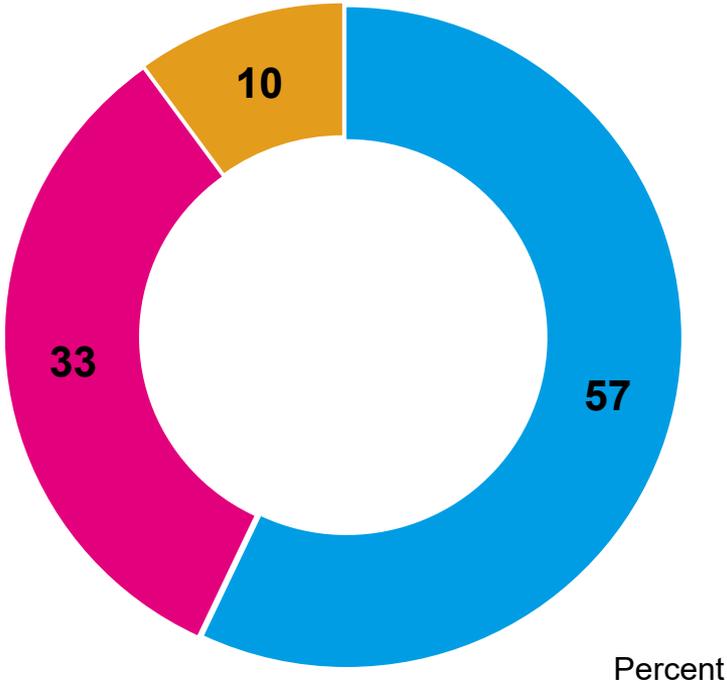
- People are highly engaged in COVID, with 57% paying attention very closely or extremely and another 33% somewhat closely.
- However, they are having mixed results finding reliable information. 30% say it is difficult to find factual information on COVID and 37% say it has gotten harder since the beginning of the pandemic.
- Americans are split on how easy it is to know if information about COVID is true or not. Information about treatments and schools reopening is the hardest to come by.
- People are hearing information from places they don't trust, and they rarely consult the most trusted sources. The media is the top source of COVID information (46% get information at least once a day), but only 18% place high trust in COVID info from them.
- Meanwhile, the most trusted sources—people's doctors and federal health officials—are consulted daily by only 5% and 21% of the population, respectively.

Are Americans Paying Attention to COVID-19?



More than half of Americans are closely paying attention to information about COVID-19.

How closely do you pay attention to information about COVID-19?



■ Extremely/Very closely ■ Somewhat closely ■ Not too/Not closely at all

Next, how closely do you pay attention to information about each of the following topics? [COVID-19]

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.

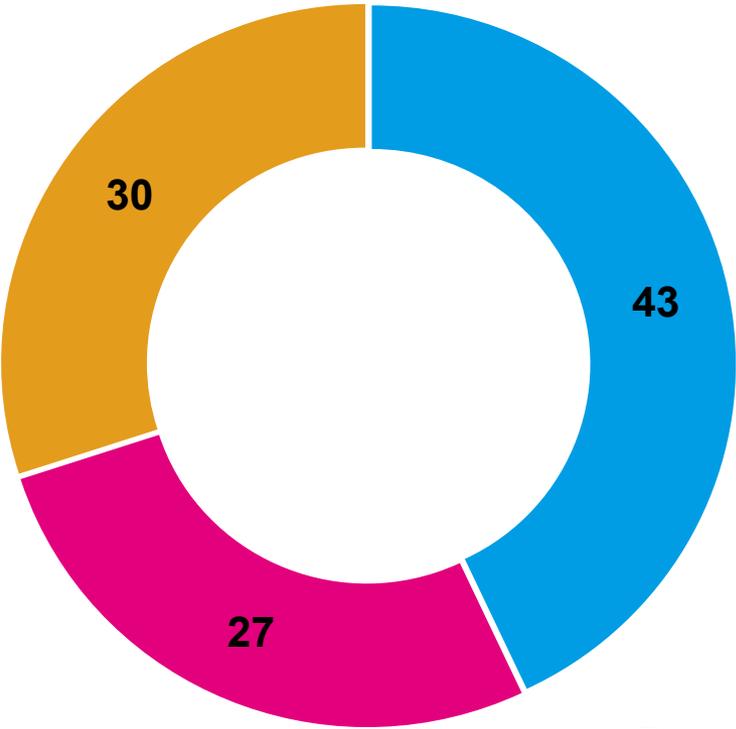


How Easy Is It to Find Information on COVID-19?



About a third of Americans say finding information about COVID-19 is difficult.

How easy or difficult is it to find information on COVID-19?



■ Very/Somewhat easy ■ Neither easy nor difficult ■ Somewhat/Very difficult

Percent

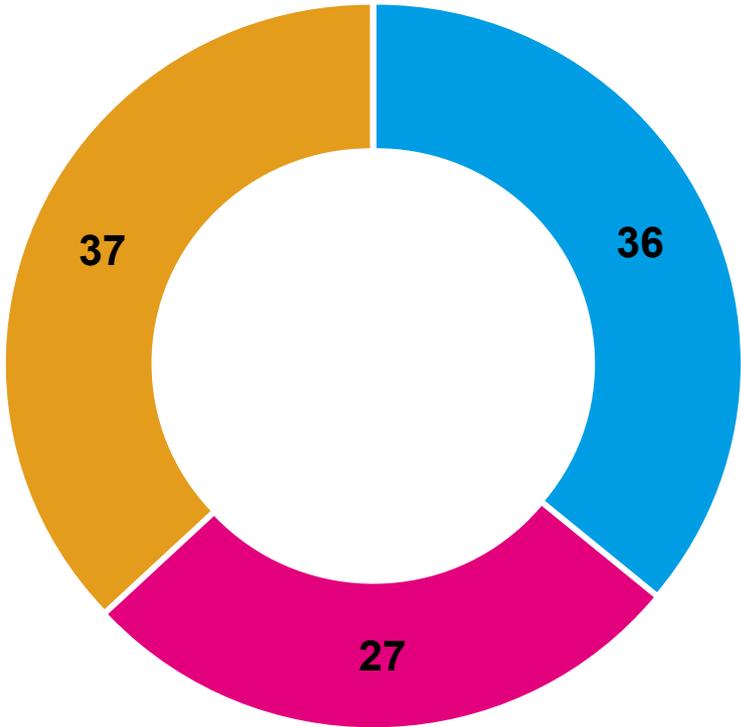
How easy or difficult is it for you to... [Find factual information about COVID-19]

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.



Americans are split on whether information is getting easier or more difficult to find since the start of COVID-19.

Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, has factual information become easier or more difficult to find?



■ Easier to find ■ Neither easier nor more difficult ■ More difficult to find

Percent

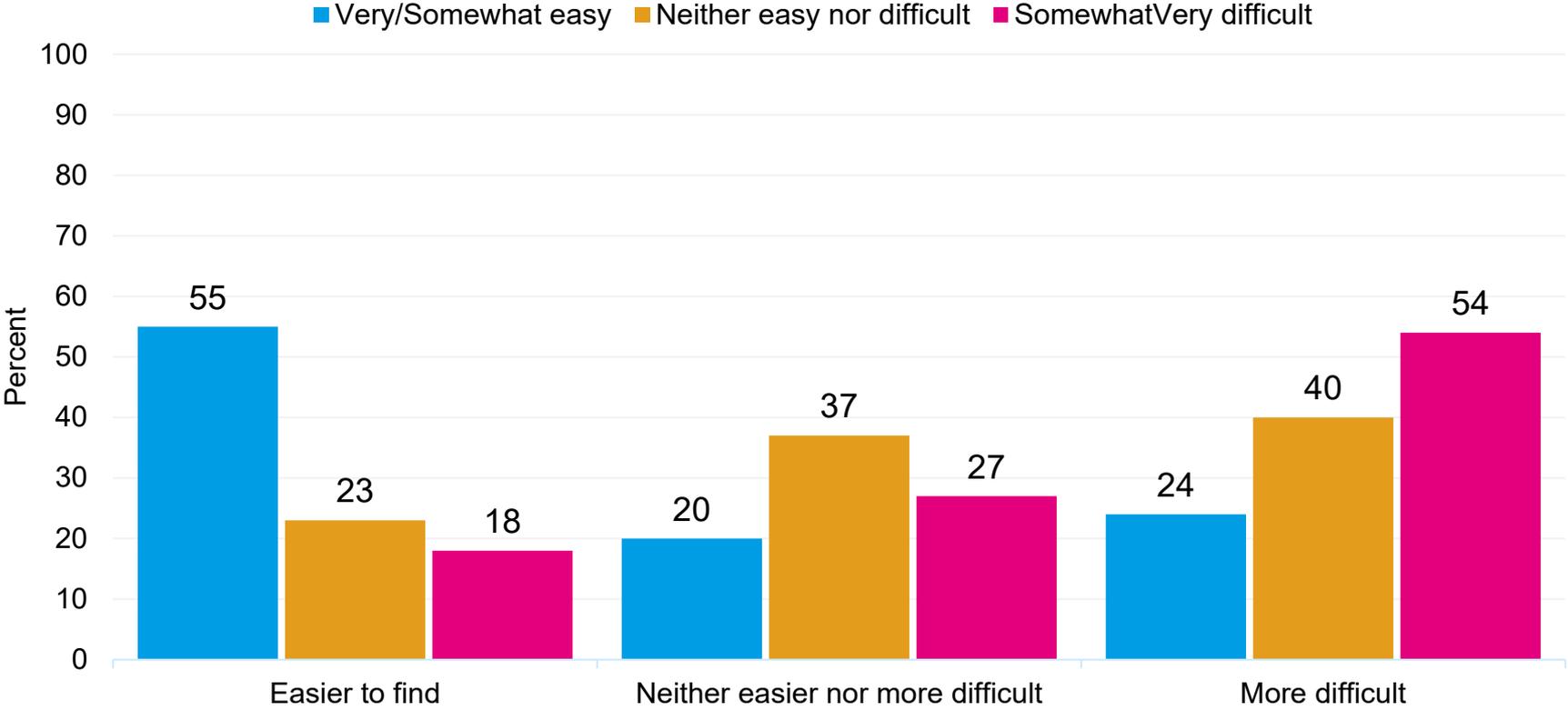
Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, do you think factual information about COVID-19 has become...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.



Those who say finding factual information on COVID-19 is easy say it has gotten easier, but those who say it is hard feel more in the dark than before.

Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, has factual information become easier or more difficult to find?



Since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, do you think factual information about COVID-19 has become... / How easy or difficult is it for you to... [Find factual information about COVID-19]

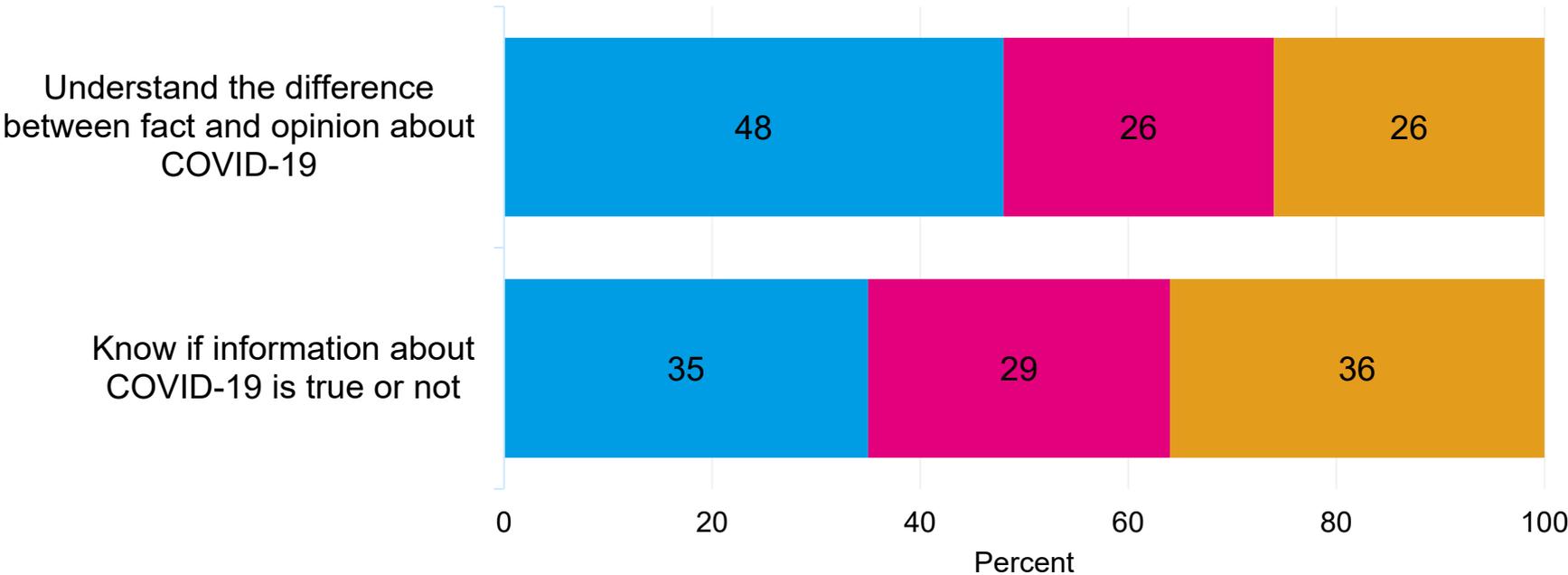
Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.



Americans are split on how easy it is to figure out if information about COVID-19 is true or not.

How difficult is it to do each?

■ Very/Somewhat easy ■ Neither easy nor difficult ■ Somewhat/Very difficult



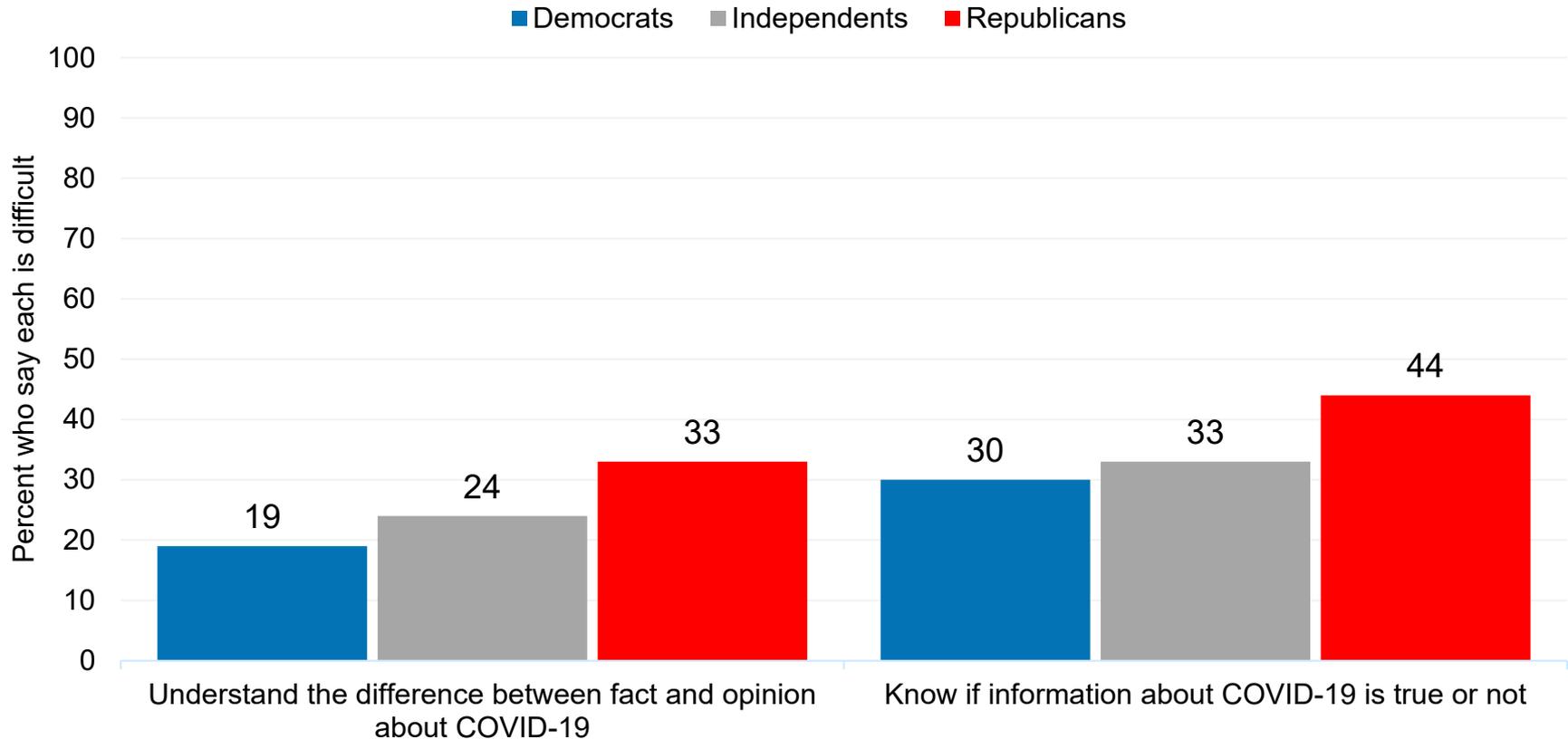
How easy or difficult is it for you to...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.



Republicans are more likely to say figuring out if information about COVID-19 is true or not is difficult.

How difficult is it to do each?



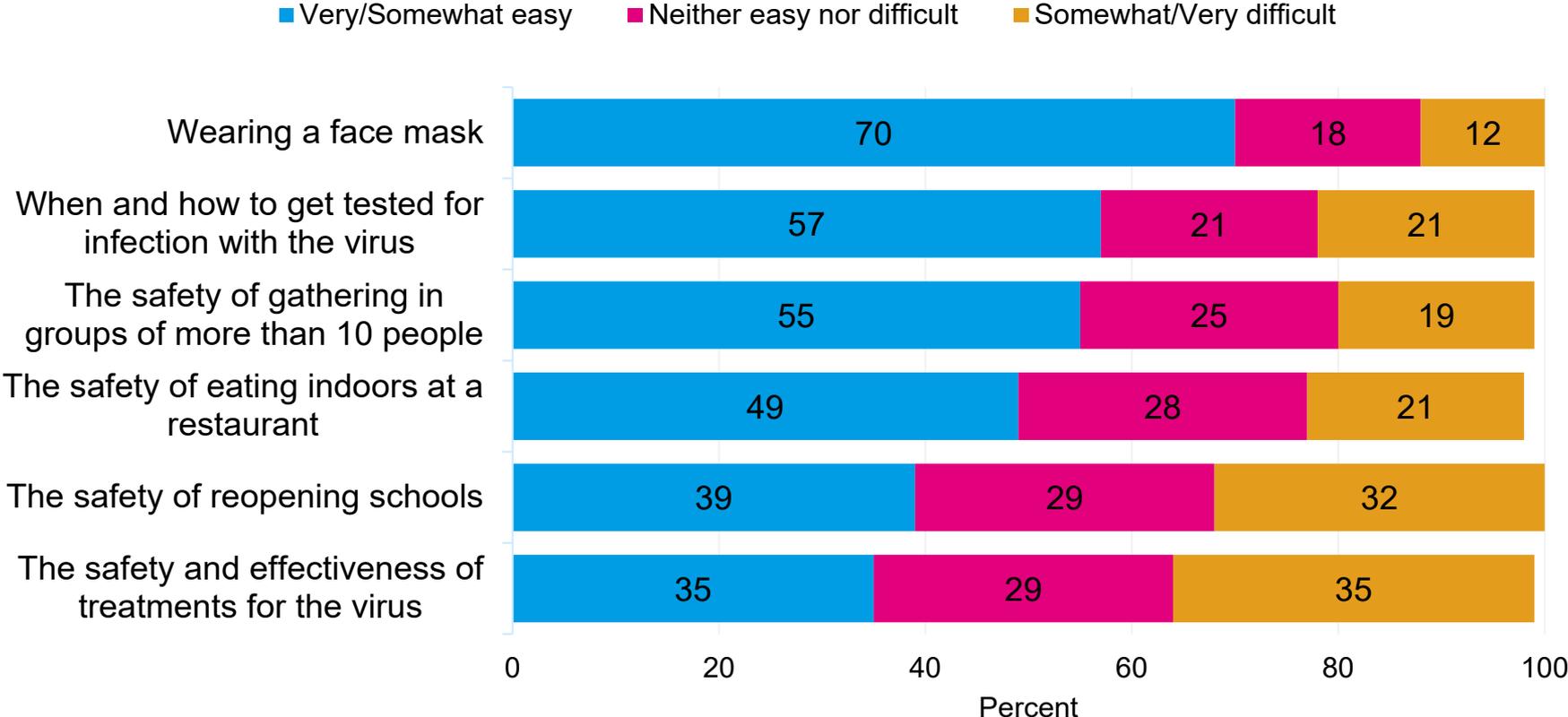
How easy or difficult is it for you to...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.



Americans think it easier to find information on wearing a mask and getting tested for infection than the safety of treatment and reopening schools.

How easy or difficult is it to find information to make each decision?



When it comes to making decisions about the following issues related to COVID-19, how easy or difficult is it for you to find the information you need?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.

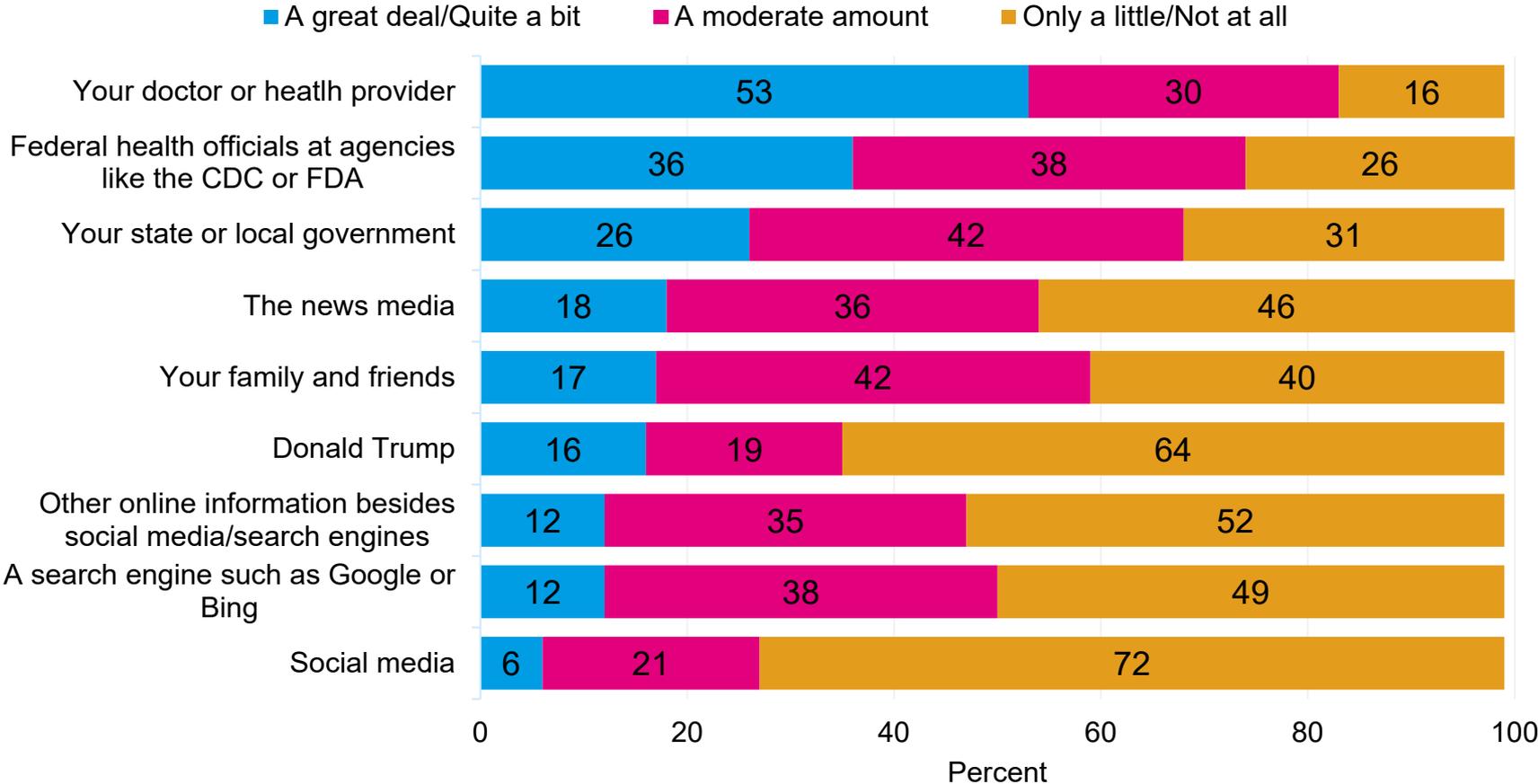


How Much Do Americans Trust Information on COVID-19?



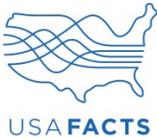
While more than half of Americans get daily information on COVID-19 from the news media, less than 2 in 10 trust it.

How much do you trust information about COVID-19 from each of these sources?



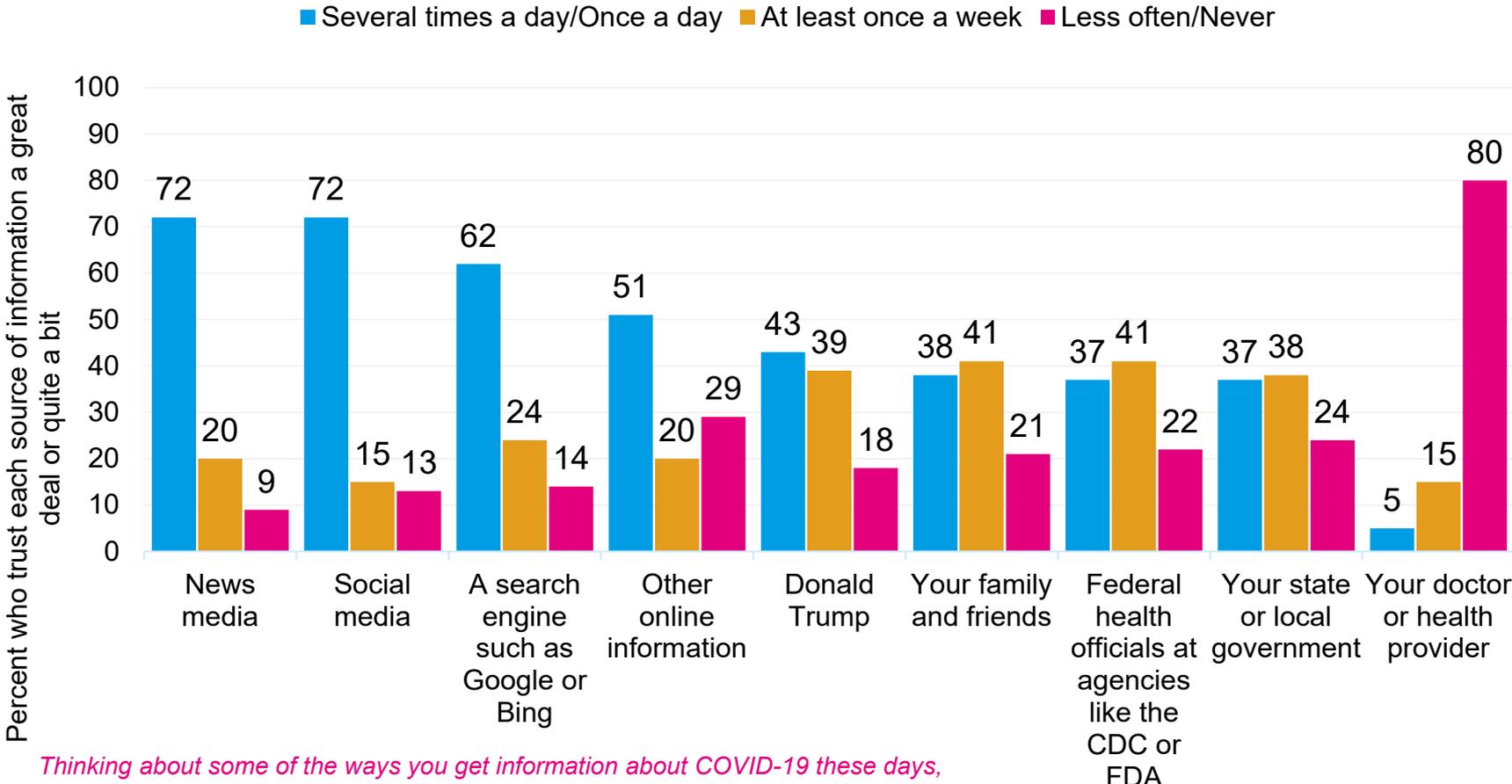
Regardless of how often you get information from these sources, how much do you trust information from them about COVID-19?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.



Most Americans who trust news media, social media, and search engines about information on COVID-19 get information from those sources daily.

How often do you get information about COVID-19 from...



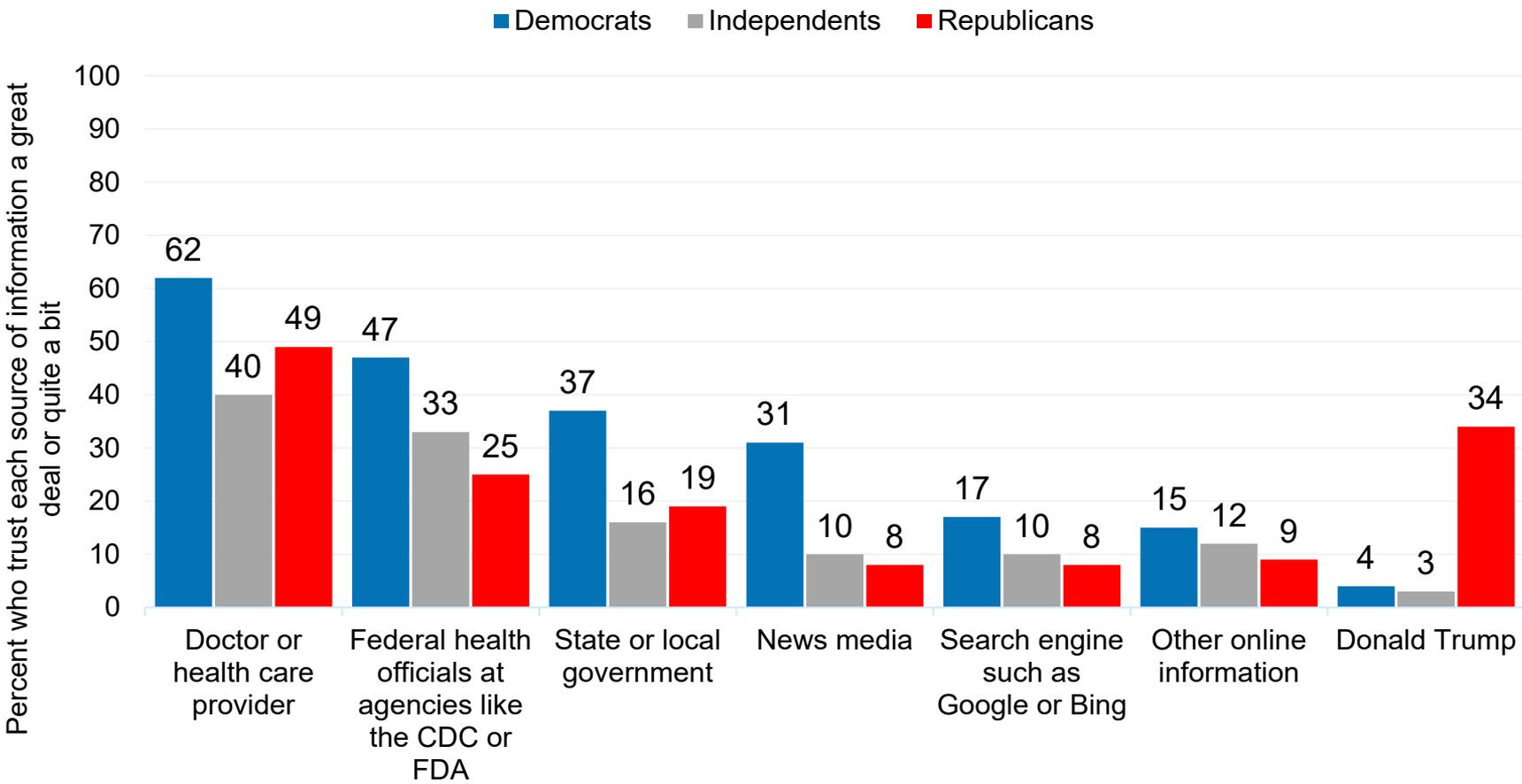
Thinking about some of the ways you get information about COVID-19 these days, how often, if at all, do you get information from... / Regardless of how often you get information from these sources, how much do you trust information from them about COVID-19?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.



There is a sharp partisan divide on what sources to trust for COVID-19 information.

How much do you trust information about COVID-19 from each of these sources?



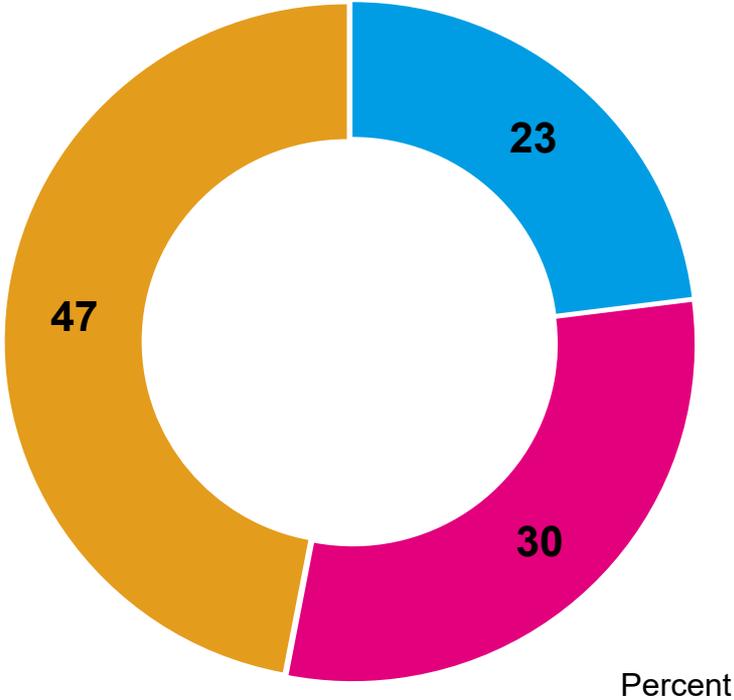
Regardless of how often you get information from these sources, how much do you trust information from them about COVID-19?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.



Nearly half of Americans have low trust in information about COVID-19 from the federal government.

How much do you trust information from the federal government about COVID-19?



■ A great deal/Quite a bit ■ A moderate amount ■ Only a little/Not at all

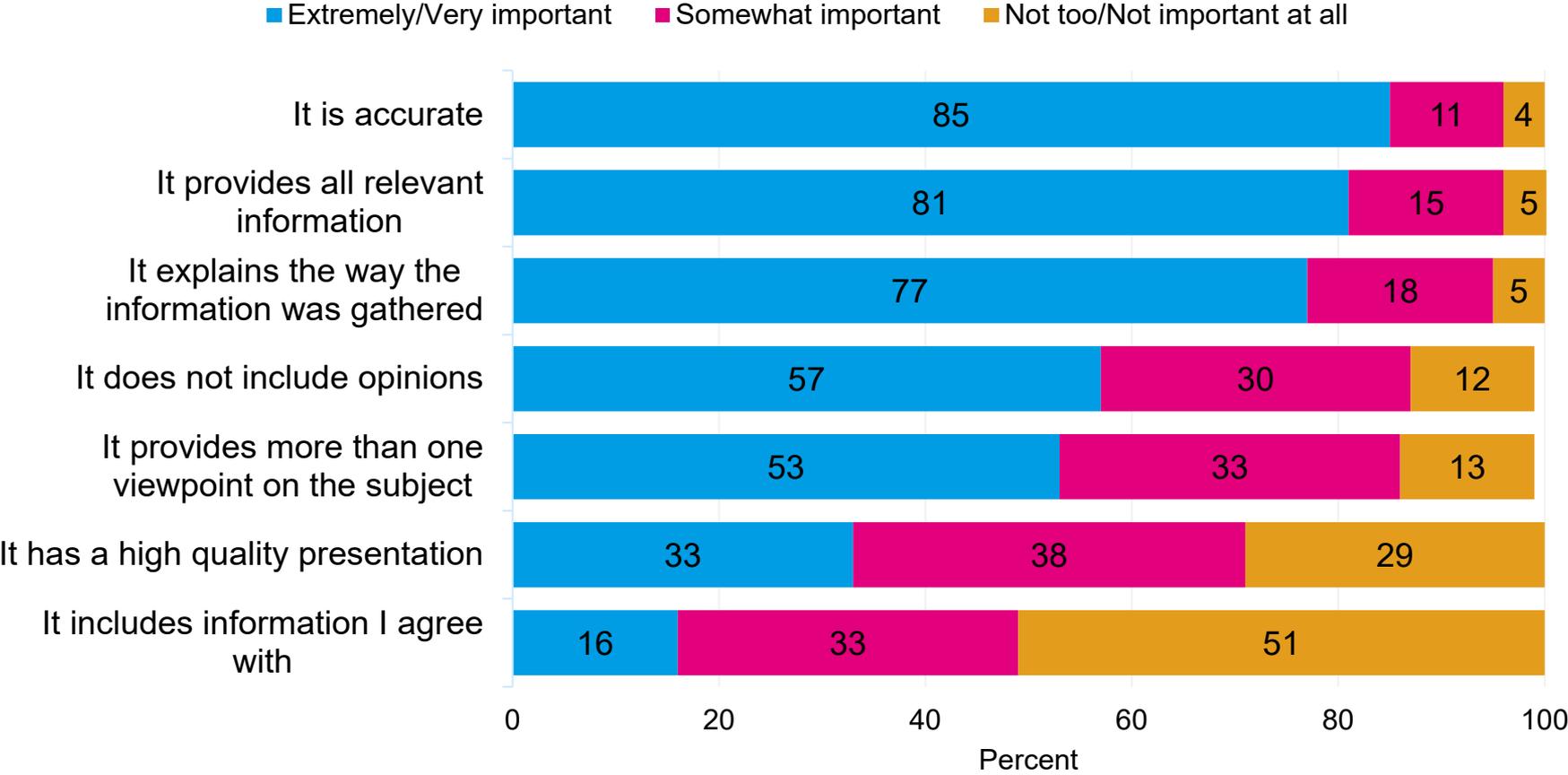
How much do you trust information from the federal government about the following topics? [COVID-19]

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.



Accuracy, full information, and an explanation of how the information was gathered are the factors most often associated with trustworthy sources.

How important is each factor to how trustworthy COVID-19 information is?



Thinking about the sources you consider trustworthy when it comes to information about COVID-19, how important is each of the following factors?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.

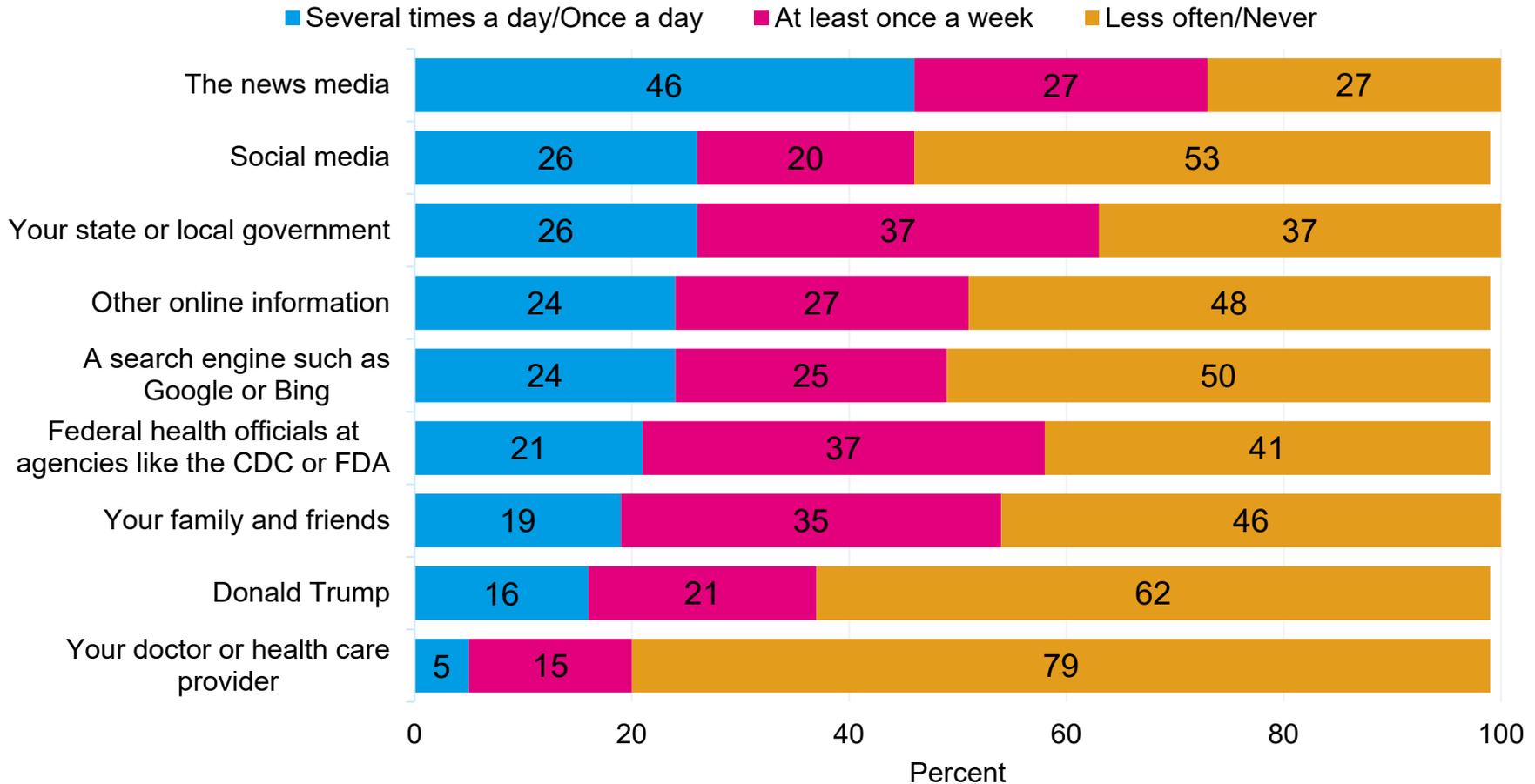


Where Are Americans Finding Information on COVID-19?



The news media is the most frequently used source of COVID-19 information.

How often do you get information about COVID-19 from...



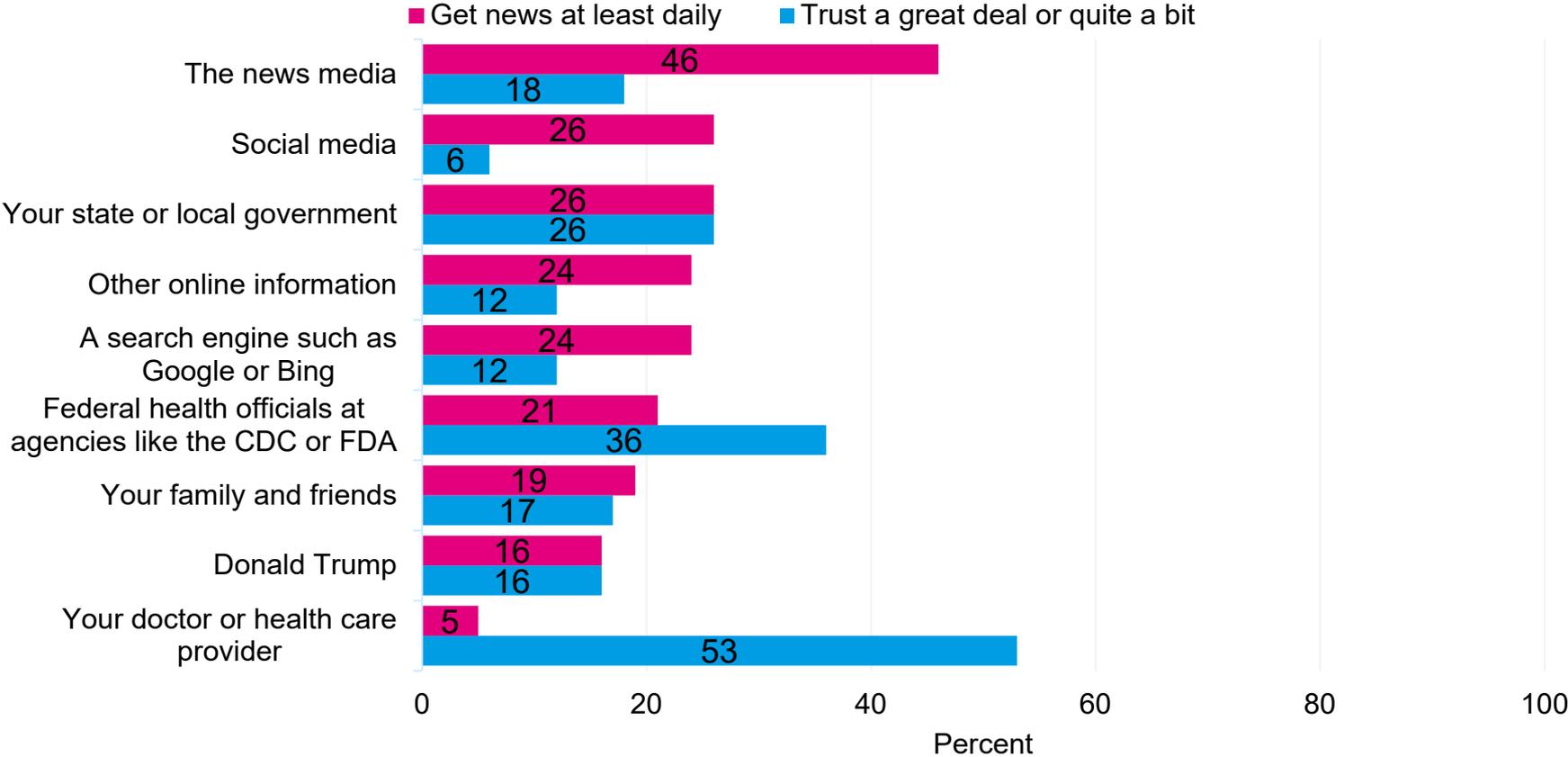
Thinking about some of the ways you get information about COVID-19 these days, how often, if at all, do you get information from...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.



Americans aren't necessarily getting information most often from the sources they trust the most.

How often Americans get information about COVID-19 from each source compared to how much they trust the information that source.



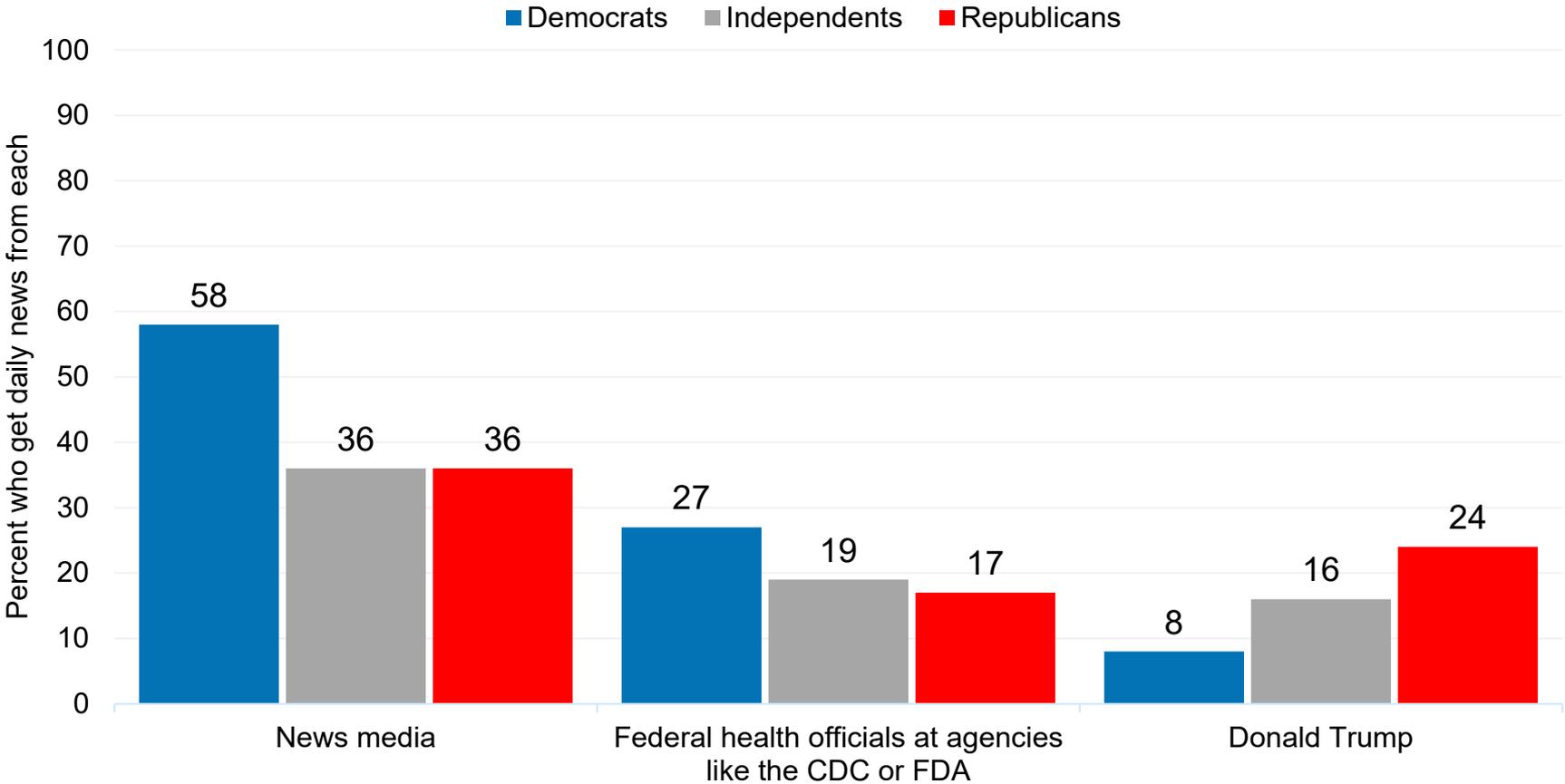
Thinking about some of the ways you get information about COVID-19 these days, how often, if at all, do you get information from... / Regardless of how often you get information from these sources, how much do you trust information from them about COVID-19?

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.



Democrats get information on COVID-19 from the media and federal health officials more often than Republicans, Republicans get it more often from Donald Trump.

How often do you get information about COVID-19 from...



Thinking about some of the ways you get information about COVID-19 these days, how often, if at all, do you get information from...

Source: AP-NORC/USAFacts poll conducted September 15-25, 2020, with 1,043 adults.



State of the Facts Poll 2020

- Poll conducted by The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and funded by USAFacts
- Nationwide poll of 1,043 adults conducted September 15-25 using the AmeriSpeak Panel[®]
 - AmeriSpeak is NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of all U.S. households.
 - 966 via the web and 77 via telephone
 - Interviews conducted in English and Spanish
- Margin of error +/- 4.1 percentage points
- AAPOR Response Rate 3 of 5.4%
- Complete topline and methodology available at www.apnorc.org.