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# Americans Still Prefer Watching to Reading the News – and Mostly Still Through Television

*Three-quarters of Americans who prefer watching the news opt for TV, but since 2016, slightly more watchers name the internet as their platform of choice*

**BY** *Amy Mitchell*

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# Americans Still Prefer Watching to Reading the News – and Mostly Still Through Television

*Three-quarters of Americans who prefer watching the news opt for TV, but since 2016, slightly more watchers name the internet as their platform of choice*

Americans continue to prefer watching the news rather than reading or listening to it, and their viewing loyalties have yet to migrate fully to the web.

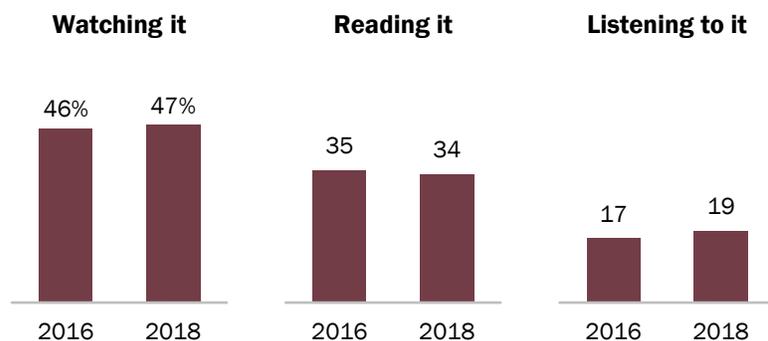
Instead, the majority of U.S. adults who prefer to watch the news opt for television as their primary news platform, according to a new Pew Research Center survey conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018, among 3,425 U.S. adults who are members of the Center's nationally representative American Trends Panel.

Overall, 47% of Americans prefer watching the news rather than reading or listening to it. That is unchanged from 46% in 2016 and outpaces the 34% who prefer to read the news and 19% who prefer to listen to it – both of which also remain on par with 2016 figures.

In addition to exploring the preferred format for news consumption, the study also measured which platform people preferred most for their news: print, television (through local, network or cable channels), the internet (through websites, apps or social media) or radio. Television continues to rank first as the preferred platform. Just over four-in-ten U.S. adults (44%) prefer TV, compared with about a third (34%) who prefer the web, 14% who prefer radio and 7% who prefer print. The only meaningful shifts since 2016 are a small increase in online and decrease in print news consumption.

## Watching remains the preferred mode of news consumption in the U.S.

*% of U.S. adults who answered each way to the following question: "Whether online or offline, do you prefer to get your news by \_\_\_?"*



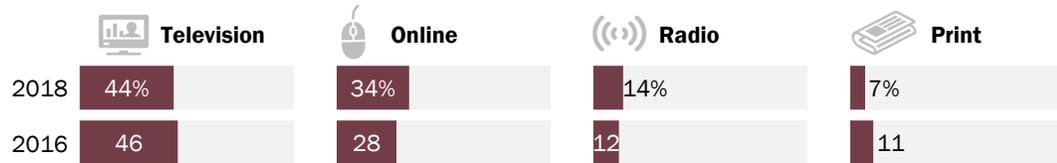
Source: Survey conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.

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## Television remains most preferred platform for news

% of U.S. adults who answered each way to the following question: “Which of the following would you say you prefer for getting news?”



Source: Survey conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.

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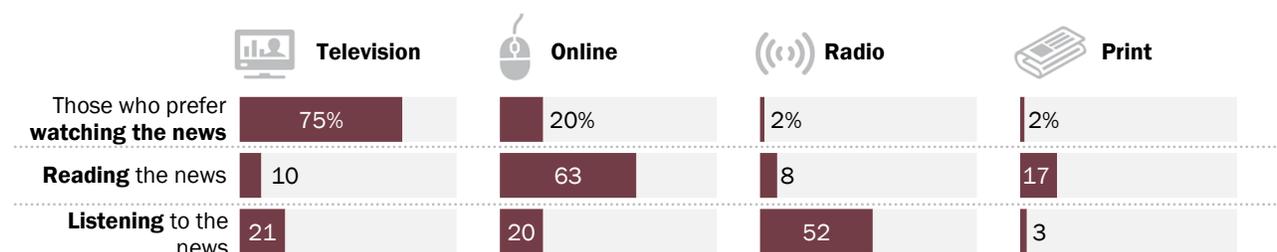
The responses become even more revealing when looking at the two questions together: the preferred format for getting news (reading, watching or listening) and the preferred platform as the way to access it (print, television, online or radio).

Despite many recent [online news video initiatives](#) and the fact that nearly all adults get [at least some news digitally](#), people who prefer to watch their news still also prefer television as their main platform for news.

Among the roughly half of U.S. adults who prefer to watch their news, the vast majority – 75% – prefer the television as a mode for watching; 20% of watchers prefer the web. On the other hand, most of those who prefer to read their news prefer the web as their platform to receive news (63%); 17% prefer a print product. Listeners vary a bit more; about half (52%) name radio as their preferred platform, 21% name television and 20% name the web.

## News watchers overwhelmingly prefer television, while readers prefer the web

Of those who prefer reading/watching/listening to the news, % who answered each way to the following question: “Which of the following would you say you prefer for getting news?”



Source: Survey conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.

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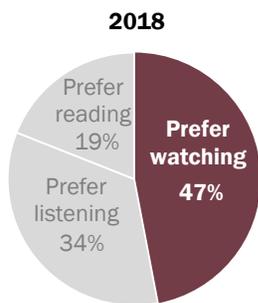
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## Since 2016, slightly more watchers name the internet as their platform of choice

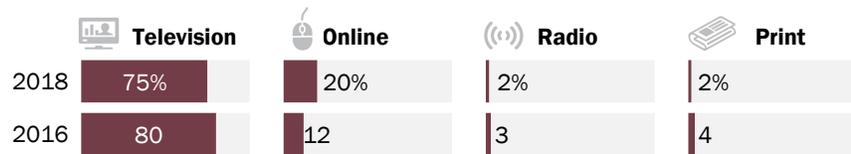
Compared with in 2016, when these questions were first asked, those who prefer to watch their news are now slightly more likely to also prefer to get their news online. One-in-five news watchers now name the internet as their preferred platform, versus 12% then.

The portion of readers and listeners who prefer the web has not changed significantly since 2016, when a majority of those who prefer to read their news (59%) already named the web as their preferred platform.

### News watchers prefer to use the television to get their news, not the web



*Of those who prefer to watch the news, % who answered each way to the following question: "Which of the following would you say you prefer for getting news?"*



Source: Survey conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.

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## Across all news formats, young adults lead the preference for digital

Adults younger than 50 are more likely than those ages 50 and older to prefer the internet as the platform for getting news, regardless of which format (reading, watching or listening) they enjoy most.

Fully 76% of those ages 18 to 49 who prefer to read the news, for example, also prefer the web, compared with 43% of those 50 and older. Similarly, about three times as many 18- to 49-year-old watchers and listeners prefer to get their news online as their counterparts ages 50-plus.

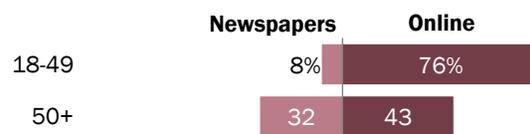
Among readers especially, the older age group has increased its preference for the web since 2016, though they still trail 18- to 49-year-olds. In 2016, 49% of those ages 50 and older who prefer to read their news also preferred a print paper, while 32% preferred the web.

These findings come in the context of [other research](#) by the Center which speaks to a growing reliance on the web for news and a decline in television news viewing. As [reported in September 2018](#), there is just a 6-percentage-point gap between those who say they often get news online and those who do so via television.

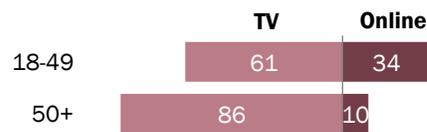
At least for now, though, Americans – especially older ones – have a penchant for watching news and getting that news on TV.

### Digital preferences driven by the young

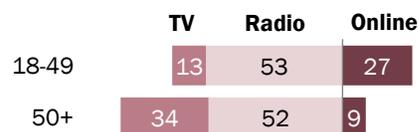
*Of those who prefer **reading** the news, % who prefer to get news from ...*



*Of those who prefer **watching** the news, % who prefer to get news from ...*



*Of those who prefer **listening** to the news, % who prefer to get news from ...*



Source: Survey conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018.

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Find related reports online at: [www.journalism.org](http://www.journalism.org).

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## Methodology

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults recruited from landline and cellphone random-digit-dial (RDD) surveys. Panelists participate via monthly self-administered web surveys. Panelists who do not have internet access are provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection. The panel is being managed by GfK.

Data in this report are drawn from the panel wave conducted July 30-Aug. 12, 2018, among 4,581 respondents. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 4,581 respondents is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

Members of the American Trends Panel were recruited from several large, national landline and cellphone RDD surveys conducted in English and Spanish. At the end of each survey, respondents were invited to join the panel. The first group of panelists was recruited from the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey, conducted Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014. Of the 10,013 adults interviewed, 9,809 were invited to take part in the panel and a total of 5,338 agreed to participate.<sup>1</sup> The second group of panelists was recruited from the 2015 Pew Research Center Survey on Government, conducted Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015. Of the 6,004 adults interviewed, all were invited to join the panel, and 2,976 agreed to participate.<sup>2</sup> The third group of panelists was recruited from a survey conducted April 25 to June 4, 2017. Of the 5,012 adults interviewed in the survey or pretest, 3,905 were invited to take part in the panel and a total of 1,628 agreed to participate.<sup>3</sup>

The ATP data were weighted in a multistep process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents' original survey selection probability and the fact that in 2014 some panelists were subsampled for invitation to the panel. Next, an adjustment was made for the fact that the propensity to join the panel and remain an active panelist varied across different groups in the sample. The final step in the weighting uses an iterative technique that aligns the sample to population benchmarks on a number of dimensions. Gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region parameters come from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 American Community Survey. The county-level population density parameter (deciles) comes from the 2010 U.S. decennial census. The telephone service benchmark comes from the July-December 2016 National Health

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<sup>1</sup> When data collection for the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey began, non-internet users were subsampled at a rate of 25%, but a decision was made shortly thereafter to invite all non-internet users to join. In total, 83% of non-internet users were invited to join the panel.

<sup>2</sup> Respondents to the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey who indicated that they are internet users but refused to provide an email address were initially permitted to participate in the American Trends Panel by mail, but were no longer permitted to join the panel after Feb. 6, 2014. Internet users from the 2015 Pew Research Center Survey on Government who refused to provide an email address were not permitted to join the panel.

<sup>3</sup> White, non-Hispanic college graduates were subsampled at a rate of 50%.

Interview Survey and is projected to 2017. The volunteerism benchmark comes from the 2015 Current Population Survey Volunteer Supplement. The party affiliation benchmark is the average of the three most recent Pew Research Center general public telephone surveys. The internet access benchmark comes from the 2017 ATP Panel Refresh Survey. Respondents who did not previously have internet access are treated as not having internet access for weighting purposes. Respondents were also weighted according to their previously reported usage of nine different social networks for news consumption. Panelists were weighted using their previous responses to these questions from Wave 28 (August 2017). For panelists who did not respond to Wave 28, values for these items were imputed using chained equations and classification and regression trees (CART). These variables were then weighted so that respondents' past social media news usage matched the distribution that was observed in Wave 28. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish, but the Hispanic sample in the American Trends Panel is predominantly U.S. born and English speaking.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	4,581	2.5 percentage points
Forms 1-3	3,425	2.9 percentage points
Prefer watching news	1,452	4.4 percentage points
Prefer reading news	1,342	4.6 percentage points
Prefer listening to news	618	6.8 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The July 2018 wave had a response rate of 84% (4,581 responses among 5,475 individuals in the panel). Taking account of the combined, weighted response rate for the recruitment surveys (10.1%) and attrition from panel members who were removed at their request or for inactivity, the cumulative response rate for the wave is 2.5%.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves are removed from the panel. These cases are counted in the denominator of cumulative response rates.

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**2018 PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL  
WAVE 37 JULY  
READING WATCHING TOPLINE  
JULY 30 – AUGUST 12, 2018  
TOTAL N=4,581**

**ASK FORM 1-3 [N=3,425]:**

Now, thinking about your news habits...

NEWS\_PLATFORM How often do you... **[RANDOMIZE]**

	<u>Often</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Hardly ever</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
a. Read any newspapers in print?					
Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018 [N=3,425]	16	25	30	29	*
Aug 8-Aug 21, 2017 [N=4,971]	18	25	32	25	*
Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=4,654]	20	28	31	21	*
Aug 21-Sep 2, 2013 [N=5,173]	27	27	27	19	*
b. Listen to news on the radio?					
Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018 [N=3,425]	26	31	23	20	*
Aug 8-Aug 21, 2017 [N=4,971]	25	31	22	21	*
Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=4,654]	25	34	24	17	*
Aug 21-Sep 2, 2013 [N=5,173]	26	30	27	18	*
<b>NO ITEM C</b>					
d. Watch local television news?					
Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018 [N=3,425]	37	27	22	14	0
Aug 8-Aug 21, 2017 [N=4,971]	37	27	21	15	*
Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=4,654]	46 <sup>5</sup>	27	17	10	*
Aug 21-Sep 2, 2013 [N=5,173]	46	26	17	11	*
e. Watch national evening network television news (such as ABC World News, CBS Evening News, or NBC Nightly News)?					
Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018 [N=3,425]	25	25	24	26	*
Aug 8-Aug 21, 2017 [N=4,971]	26	25	25	25	*
Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=4,654]	30	27	25	17	*
Aug 21-Sep 2, 2013 [N=5,173]	31	28	24	18	*
f. Watch cable television news (such as CNN, The Fox News cable channel, or MSNBC)?					
Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018 [N=3,425]	30	23	23	24	0
Aug 8-Aug 21, 2017 [N=4,971]	28	27	23	22	*
Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=4,654]	31	27	24	18	*
Aug 21-Sep 2, 2013 [N=5,173]	24	28	26	21	*

<sup>5</sup> In the Spanish language version of the questionnaire, "local television news" was mistranslated as "television news" for NEWS\_PLATFORM item D. This affected the 66 respondents who took the survey in Spanish (4% of the sample after weighting). The effects of this mistranslation were minimal and do not affect the report's substantive conclusions.

	<u>Often</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Hardly ever</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
<b>NEWS_PLATFORM CONTINUED...</b>					
g. Get news from a social media site (such as Facebook, Twitter, or Snapchat)?					
Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018 [N=3,425]	20	27	21	32	0
Aug 8-Aug 21, 2017 [N=4,971]	20	27	20	33	0
Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 <sup>6</sup> [N=4,654]	18	26	18	38	*
h. Get news from a news website or app?					
Jul 30-Aug 12, 2018 [N=3,425]	33	31	18	18	*
Aug 8-Aug 21, 2017 [N=4,971]	33	31	19	17	*
Jan 12-Feb 8, 2016 [N=4,654]	28	28	18	26	*

**ASK IF GETS NEWS FROM MORE THAN ONE PLATFORM IN NEWS\_PLATFORM (NEWS\_PLATFORMa-h=1-3). DO NOT ASK IF ONLY GETS NEWS ON TV AND NO OTHERS (IF ONLY NEWS\_PLATFORMd-f=1-3) [N=3,416]**

NEWS\_PREFER Which of the following would you say you prefer for getting news?

**[SHOW THOSE THAT WERE AT LEAST "HARDLY EVER" IN NEWS\_PLATFORM NEWS\_PLATFORMa-h=1-3); SHOW "Watch news on television" if NEWS\_PLATFORMd=1-3 OR NEWS\_PLATFORMe=1-3 OR NEWS\_PLATFORMf=1-3] IF ONLY ONE OPTION SELECTED IN NEWS\_PLATFORM, AUTOPUNCH HERE AND DO NOT SHOW RESPONDENT THIS QUESTION. IF ONLY SELECTED THE TELEVISION ITEMS NEWSPLATFORMD-F AND NO OTHER PLATFORM, SKIP QUESTION AND AUTOPUNCH INTO NEWS\_PREFER=3**

Jul 30- Aug 12 2018		Jan 12- Feb 8 2016
7	Reading news in a print newspaper	11
14	Listening to news on the radio	12
44	Watching news on television	46
10	Getting news from a social media site (such as Facebook, Twitter or Snapchat)	9
24	Getting news from a news website or app	20
1	No Answer	1
1	Did not get news on any platform	1

<sup>6</sup> In the Wave 14 January 2016 survey, this question item read "Get news from a social networking site (such as Facebook or Twitter)?".

**ASK FORM 1-3 [N=3,425]:**

STREAMNEWS How often do you watch news on a TV using a streaming device (such as Roku, Apple TV, or a gaming console)?

Jul 30- Aug 12 <u>2018</u>	9	Often
	11	Sometimes
	15	Hardly ever
	64	Never
	*	No Answer

**ASK ALL:**

NEWS\_FORM Whether online or offline, do you prefer to get your news by... **[RANDOMIZE]**

Jul 30- Aug 12 <u>2018</u>	34	Reading it	Jan 12- Feb 8 <u>2016</u>	35
	47	Watching it		46
	19	Listening to it		17
	*	No Answer		2