

# Most Americans get science news from general outlets more say specialty outlets more accurate

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At a time when science information is increasingly at the center of public divides, most Americans say they get science news no more than a few times per month, and when they do, most get it by happenstance

rather than intentionally, according to a new Pew Research Center study. About one-third (36%) of Americans say they get science news at least a few times per week, 30% typically seek it out and only 17% of Americans report doing both.

The survey, conducted May 30-June 12, 2017, among a nationally representative sample of 4,024 adults ages 18 or older, finds that a 54% majority of Americans regularly get their science news from general news outlets - those that cover a range of news topics. This is higher than any of the 10 source types asked about in the survey.

However, Americans consider a handful of specialty sources—specifically science and technology museums, science magazines, and science documentaries - as more likely to get the facts right about science. Roughly half of U.S. adults say each of these specialty sources gets the facts right about science most of the time, compared with just 28% who say this of general news sources.

Most Americans (57%) say that the media do a [good job](#) covering science news overall. Nonetheless, solid portions of the public see a range of problems in coverage of scientific research stemming from the media, researchers, and even the public themselves. For example, 43% of Americans say it is a big problem that the [news media](#) are too quick to report findings that may not hold up. Other problems in the public mind: researchers publish so many studies that it is hard to tell high from low quality (40% say this is a big problem); the public not knowing enough about science or jumping to conclusions about how to apply research findings to their lives (44% and 42%, respectively). But when asked to choose between just two options, 73% of Americans said that the bigger problem lies with the way news reporters cover scientific research, rather than the way researchers publish their findings (24%).

The 17% of Americans who are active science news consumers (those

who tend to seek out science news and consume it at least a few times a week) are engaged with [science information](#) in various ways. They turn to more types of providers for science news, are more likely to discuss science news, and of those who use [social media](#), they are more likely to follow science pages or accounts. They are also more likely than other Americans to have been to a park, museum or other informal science learning venue in the past year, to have a science-related hobby, or to have participated in a citizen science activity such as collecting data samples or making observations as part of a science research project.

"With significant science-related issues at the center of public debates, there are ongoing questions about how the public gets information about science topics," said Pew Research Center Director of Science and Society Research Cary Funk. "We find a core group of Americans who are active science news consumers and this group is distinctive in how they use and evaluate science news. Some science-related information also reaches a large segment of the public through other avenues, including informal learning venues, such as museums, and science-related entertainment media."

Among the study's notable findings:

- While most social media users see posts about science on these sites, a smaller group -26% - say they follow science pages or accounts. Some 44% of users say that they see, at least sometimes, science news on these sites that they would not have encountered elsewhere. But about half (52%) say they mostly distrust the science posts they see on these platforms, compared with 26% who mostly trust science posts on social media.

vRepublicans and Democrats (including independents who lean to each party) are equally likely to be active science news consumers (17% and 18%, respectively) and show similar levels

of interest in science news. Political divides emerge, though, in judgments about how the news media cover science. For example, about two-thirds (64%) of Democrats say the news media do a good job covering science compared with 50% of Republicans.

- Most Americans encounter science-related content through entertainment media; 81% say they at least sometimes view one or more of three types of shows and movies: criminal investigations, hospitals and medical settings, or science fiction. While most Americans believe such shows and movies sacrifice realism for entertainment, most say such programming does not harm their own understanding of science. For example, 57% of U.S. adults say criminal investigation shows and movies make no difference to their understanding of science, technology and medicine; 30% say they help and just 11% say they hurt their understanding.
- About six-in-ten Americans (62%) report having been to an informal science learning venue such as a park, zoo, or science and technology museum in the past year; 18% report having a science-related hobby; and 16% say they have participated in a citizen science research activity, whether helping to collect data samples for a science research project, contributing to an online crowdsourcing activity, or participating in a maker movement or hack-a-thon.

"Despite wide political divides in views about some science-related issues, such as climate change and energy, U.S. adults from both sides of the aisle are quite similar in their levels of interest, consumption, and tendency to get science news from general news outlets," says Amy Mitchell, director of journalism research. "At the same time, however, we see political divides in judgments about [science news](#) as roughly two-thirds of Democrats say the [news](#) media do at least a somewhat good job

in covering [science](#), while Republicans are more evenly divided - figures which are in sync with party line views about the [media](#) overall."

**More information:** [www.journalism.org/2017/09/20/...d-information-today/](http://www.journalism.org/2017/09/20/...d-information-today/)

Provided by Pew Research Center

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