

Methodology

This essay is based on in-depth focus groups conducted in May 2023 with U.S. adults who are not highly engaged with politics. The groups were conducted to gather insight into how people who are not particularly engaged with politics think about their relationship to the political system, how (if at all) they participate in politics, and why they may choose not to pay close attention to political information. Participants were also asked questions about their views of the political parties, political candidates and voting.

These focus groups were conducted to inform a broader survey project to understand [how Americans interact with politics](#). These groups were designed to speak to broad themes among adults who may not be considered “politically engaged.” Quotations were chosen to be illustrative of the themes that were discussed in the groups, but do not necessarily represent the majority opinion in any particular group. Quotations have been lightly edited for grammar and clarity.

About the groups

Six focus groups were conducted by PSB for Pew Research Center between May 16 and May 31, 2023. The sessions were conducted live, online for 90 minutes and were moderated by researchers from PSB. Most groups were conducted with four to five participants, and each group was designed to include a mix of people from different areas of the country. Overall, the groups were recruited for a mix of gender, education, race and ethnicity, age and political leaning.

Each group was conducted with a detailed discussion guide drafted by researchers at Pew Research Center in collaboration with PSB. Most of the content in the discussion guide was identical across all groups, with a small amount of time allocated to questions specific to the characteristics of a group (e.g., in the Republican and Republican-leaning group, asking questions about that party – and the same for the Democratic and Democratic-leaning group). All eligible participants were paid an incentive of \$150 for their participation in the focus group.

Recruitment criteria

PSB worked with L&E Research to ensure respondents matched the recruitment parameters outlined by the Center. All participants had to meet the following three criteria to be eligible to participate:

- Must not follow what’s going on in government and political affairs “most of the time”
- Must not be a strong Democrat or strong Republican

- Must be living in the United States, and not in the D.C. Metro area

Five groups were recruited with the following criteria:

Group	American adults who do not closely follow politics and do not strongly identify with either of the two parties who are ...
1	Ages 18-29
2	Ages 30-35
3	Ages 55 or older
4/5	Republican-leaning independents (or weakly affiliated) <i>Note: A second group with this criterion was conducted because an insufficient number of participants – only two – arrived for the first scheduled group.</i>
6	Democratic-leaning independents (or weakly affiliated)

All in all, 27 adults participated in the focus groups. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 71. All but one were born in the U.S. (one is a naturalized citizen). There were roughly similar numbers of men and women across the groups. Most of the 27 focus group participants were non-Hispanic White, with some Hispanic and Black participants. Participants were from 22 states, including states in each major census division. Participants included people from counties where President Joe Biden won the 2020 vote by wide margins, counties where former President Donald Trump won the vote by wide margins and locations where the 2020 presidential race was very close. Education levels ranged from primary education to postgraduate training.

Focus group discussion topics

Each focus group was asked a similar set of questions. These covered the following topics:

- **Views on politics and government:** Questions covered views of the political system in general and what participants like and dislike about politics. The moderator also touched on participants' local community and social networks.
- **Personal engagement levels:** Questions in this theme covered personal relationships participants may or may not have with the political system. The moderator asked about awareness of political news, what topics participants are personally interested in, and why they choose not to be more engaged with politics. Participants were also asked about voting and how politics has impacted their lives.

- **Views of parties and politicians:** Questions in this arena covered views of the two-party system, why respondents might support one party over the other, and opinions about politicians and political candidates.
- **Change and the political system:** The moderator asked respondents about what changes participants might like to see to make the political system better. The moderator also asked participants about what it might take for them to become more politically engaged in the future.

Note: This product includes quotes that researchers identified as good representations of several of the broad themes and opinions voiced by this set of focus group participants. This is designed to be a snapshot of how some Americans who are not particularly engaged with politics feel about the system. These focus group participants do not necessarily represent the broader population of all less engaged Americans.