

The Role of Journalism in a Democracy

For this session, we are pleased to welcome Robert Delaney, a reporter for the South China Morning Post, who will lead us in a discussion of “The Challenge Facing ‘Real’ News.” To prepare for this seminar, please read and view the following and then give some thought to these questions:

1. Who is the audience for journalism today? What are the commercial realities facing professional journalists?
2. What is the power of the political bully pulpit with regard to news sources?
3. Do public broadcasting outlets (PBS, NPR, etc.) fill in where commercial outlets fall short?
4. With the plethora of news organizations available to the consumer, how should we choose?
5. What is the role of the reporter today? Specifically, for whom does the reporter work?
6. What is the role of advertising in the content of journalism today?

To prepare for the seminar, Robert requests we read the following materials and view a video, which is identified at the end of this document.

Newsonomics: Nine midsummer lessons from a unique moment in press, and American, history: A step back to look at the news lessons of this summer.

By [KEN DOCTOR @kdoctor](#) Aug. 4, 2017

<http://www.niemanlab.org/2017/08/newsonomics-nine-midsummer-lessons-from-a-unique-moment-in-press-and-american-history/>

This hardly seems like a beachy, devil-may-care summer. Among fears of North Korean missiles, new Russian menace, and a highly unpredictable Administration, we are a nervous people. For the news media, it’s been a year of two tales. Never has the press been so pilloried, relentlessly, from on-high. Never, as well, has the value of never-say-die enterprising reporting proven so effective at filling in facts and truths amid campaigns of misdirection and *almost*-comical prevarication. Let’s step back for a midsummer break, considering 9 lessons we may take away from this unique moment in press, and American, history.

Readers are the future of paying for high-quality journalism.

Exhibit A: The New York Times. This year, the Times crossed into milestone territory. Now more than sixty percent of all the Times’ revenue comes from its readers, almost double the percentage it was in the good old days of bountiful print advertising.

While advertising — or the “ad subsidy” has newsies were wont to call it a decade ago — looked as if it would provide durable support of big, well-paid newsrooms forever, that reality shifted, and vanished, in fewer than 10 years.

Make no mistake: Advertising — and now digital advertising, which contributes 42 percent of all Times ad revenue —

remains a fundamental support of the Times enterprise. But it’s secondary to reader revenue, and in that formulation, the Times has both regained confidence and convinced even Wall

Street investors that it has a bright future. Its share price again rocketed after its second-quarter earnings report last week, surpassing \$20 a share for the first time since 2007. It's since fallen back into the \$19 range, but it's clear that investors have made a separation between the Times and other public "newspaper" companies.

They were clearly wowed by [these numbers](#):

- A 9 percent increase in revenue for the second quarter overall — even as print advertising dropped 11 percent.
- Ad growth of \$1 million, as digital ad growth of 23 percent offset that big print loss.
- Digital-only subscriptions, up 93,000 for the quarter, brought in \$83 million — up 46 percent over last year's second quarter.

Though the Times' overall revenue still tilts more than 60 percent print, it's much closer to becoming a "digital" company than the newspaper companies around the country that used to be counted as its peers. That's what investors now see.

There will always be a tougher son-of-a-bitch standing behind you, ready to eat your lunch (and profits).

Sinclair Broadcast Group has emerged as a new force in national media. If its acquisition of Tribune Media's 42 TV stations passes final FCC muster, the company would be able to reach households in 72 percent of America. To be sure, a motley assortment of merger opponents — from media diversity-advocating Free Press to Christopher Ruddy's Newsmax — have become increasingly noisy, but given the anti-regulation tilt of the new FCC, it's unclear Sinclair's buy will be stopped.

John Oliver's [searing takedown](#) of Sinclair has only opened up the question of what the impact of such reach would be in the 81 markets Sinclair would serve, with its 200 stations. There are fewer journalism watchers out there, and their diet is national. Who follows the actual news reporting quality of the country's 700+ news stations? Still, the acquisition portends greater politicization of local news.

One more question arises: Is Sinclair more of a partner or a competitor to Fox? Currently, the company owns 54 local Fox affiliates and would add 16 if it closes the Tribune Media deal. Clearly, Sinclair aims to be a *national* power. In buying Circa, the one-time darling of news aggregation innovation (and a fine application, but one whose apparent limits doomed it, Sinclair grabbed the cool name, though seems to employ little of the cool tech. Now [Circa aims to be a new national news play](#), building both an aggregation (from all those stations) and original reporting business that can receive huge promotion every day, throughout most of the country.

[In Circa, Sinclair sees a way to attract "independent-minded" millennials \(and Sean Hannity\)](#)
July 5, 2017

Build a new digital brand in 2017? Sure, that's tough, but if it's a long-term, deep-pocketed play, Sinclair can be a player. Already, Circa's [becoming a Trump favorite](#) for leaks favorable to the White House. As Fox News continues its dramatic descent — this week's [Wheeler case](#) making it even clearer that it's [more a political propaganda play than a "news outlet"](#) — we could well be witnessing an unexpected new front in right-wing media wars.

How wounded is Fox, and how ready is Sinclair to contest it, hiring away remaining high-profile talent? Sure, Sinclair CEO Chris Ripley [denies](#) an interest in starting up a *national cable* Fox

competitor. That could change, or the combination of a fleet of local stations and Circa may be a better way to compete.

Everything's got a price tag.

Digital First Media has now sold three significant properties in the last 16 months. In the spring of 2016, the private equity–owned DFM sold the Salt Lake Tribune to the Huntsman family and allowed four civic-minded leaders to snatch back the once-proud Berkshire Eagle and its cousins. In June of this year, Hearst bought the New Haven Register and its associated papers. While Alden Global Capital, DFM's owner, used UBS as its exclusive banker in trying to sell the whole company two years ago, [failing](#) to do so as final negotiations hit a snag with Apollo Global Management, it's now put out the word to multiple newspaper brokers: Bring us buyers. As print advertising continues to decline in double digits, Alden may be running into a profit wall. Its DFM management has squeezed every cost in the book, and continues to charge subscribers more and more for each smaller and smaller print edition. Look at its fast-dwindling subscription numbers, market to market, and you see the product. We've gone from theory, which I've long expressed, to practice: Doubling the price of news products while halving the products is literally killing the business. So DFM will — at least for some of its [97 titles](#) — take less than the 4-4.5 multiple of EBITDA that it wanted from Apollo to sell. Yes, Alden continues to squeeze 25 percent-plus margins from its beleaguered properties, but knows the window on those profits is closing.

If the sellers are clearly more willing, the question arises anew: Which investors, in the Jeff Bezos/John Henry/Glen Taylor/Alice Rogoff wealth circles or civic buyers in the Berkshire style, may pop up? How much brand equity is left in these flagging newspapers? From San Jose to Orange County to Denver to Saint Paul and upstate New York, who do you know who wants to get their hands dirty?

Texting news could be addictive.

Check out the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's oh-so-simple feature: [Send a text to 572-51](#) and you get...art.

Art museums have something in common with news companies: Both have lots more stuff than they can place before the eyes of viewers. SFMOMA has more than 35,000 pieces in its collection, so more than 90 percent are nowhere to be seen. For newspapers, it's worse. The Washington Post publishes 400 pieces a day, the Times 200, and even their most ardent readers miss most of them. Then there are hundreds of thousands of articles — some newly relevant — in the archives.

So maybe it's worth playing with text retrieval. Quartz [raised that to an art](#) with its first app. Certainly, this could be a fertile area of experimentation.

We may long for the Macedonian news fakers.

We may think of 2016 as the beginning of the Fake News Wars, but in truth, the issue was well-known, and well-discussed, on the web earlier. Only Donald Trump's election sounded — too late — the alert on it and Facebook's unintended and awkward complicity in it. We've since heard about a crazy quilt of fakers, from more sophisticated Putin-funded operations to those [Macedonian teens](#) apparently just trying to make a few more denar.

Now, though, we can be more concerned. For a sense of what we might be in for, check out the [recent chilling Radiolab episode](#): "Simon Adler takes us down a technological rabbit hole of strangely contorted faces and words made out of thin air. And a wonderland full of computer

scientists, journalists, and digital detectives forces us to rethink even the things we see with our very own eyes.”

The cure for the journalistic blues remains...better journalism.

It's been a tough year for The Wall Street Journal. The nation's two other high-quality national dailies, the Times and the Post, have generated huge circulation bumps, while the Journal hasn't. Worse, it's seen defections; the highest-profile of those was long-time Journal editor Rebecca Blumenstein, who [moved](#) to the Times as a deputy managing editor in February, leaving the #2 slot at the Journal. Editor-in-chief Gerald Baker, a Murdoch loyalist, has “lost the room,” one peer rival summed it up for me recently, noting that both the Times and Post remain in the process of picking up top disgruntled Journal talent. While the Post and Times have driven the news agenda, the Journal has remained on the sidelines.

On Thursday, Journal reporters Erica Orden, Aruna Viswanatha, and Byron Tau broke the [story](#), followed quickly by the Times and Post, that the Kushner Companies, in which Trump son-in-law Jared remains a principal owner, had received a subpoena from New York federal prosecutors, “regarding its use of an investment-for-immigration program.” The good news for the Journal newsroom — and for its readers like me — is that the Journal has been stepping up its game on the tangle of issues around the troubled Trump presidency. We need the Journal, with its depth of financial reporting expertise, to help do the untangling.

All's fair in love and content re-use.

In an unexpected turn, the News Media Alliance (the trade group of daily newspaper publishers) is newly confronting the big guys for using their content with no or too little compensation. This week, I [broke the story](#) of the six daily companies (Tronc, Advance, McClatchy, BH Media, Cox and the Philadelphia newspapers) demanding that LexisNexis “cease and desist” from using their news content in the booming media monitoring business. Sources told me Thursday that the Associated Press, long a player in the “use of content” wars, may be close to its own agreement with LexisNexis, and that could serve as a wider model for publishers.

LexisNexis's \$3 billion media monitoring business provides politicians, stars, big brands, and who-knows-who-else any mention of themselves or their competitors (or anything else) that can be captured by keywords and AI mined data and then sent via alerts and reports. The publishers' basic complaint: As the machines divine meaning out of the rampaging flow of news, they're not being adequately compensated for it. Sure, the tech can scan requisite headlines and stories. “One of the problems with the fair use doctrine is that most of the value of a piece of news is usually evident in the headline or lede — the part that is redistributed as abstracts and often under fair use — so the originator may get no revenue,” one highly experienced practitioner in the field noted to me today.

[Newsonomics: For the newspaper industry's next feat, can it get Donald Trump to give it antitrust protection?](#)

[July 17, 2017](#)

The LexisNexis demand letter, coupled with the News Media Alliance's [attempt](#) to collectively negotiate with Google and Facebook, makes it look as if the newspaper industry is fed up and won't take it anymore. Yet these two actions may be just nibbling around the edge of the

question. What we don't hear from the news industry: A new theory of the case. What should fair use look like in the digital age?

Of course, it's a much bigger question than the news industry's alone. As Lina Khan's "[Amazon's Antitrust Paradox](#)" has ricocheted its way through the chattering classes ([well-captured](#) by Steve Pearlstein recently in the Post, "Is Amazon getting too big?"), the questions of BIGness and of antitrust bother more people. Khan's arguments make the point that the *public interest* is missing from traditional consideration of antitrust. That's public interest as compared to consumer interest, when goods are unfairly priced high by market domination, or advertiser interest, where their pricing is similarly forced unfairly higher. Only in the EU, which has taken on Google more directly, is public interest a part of the legal and societal conversation. We can make the parallel arguments that "fair use" — applied to both LexisNexis and to Google and Facebook, among other content cannibalizers — needs updating.

The metro news business reforms...slowly.

Some readers decried my [coverage](#) of the Tronc/civic boosters fight over the Chicago Sun-Times as two bald men fighting over a comb. But I continue to believe that legacy newsletter brands, however humbled, can be revived, and that the brand provides a powerful base to do that. At the same time, look at the coming additions to the Chicago news scene:

[With its new editor on board, ProPublica Illinois' ambitions are starting to take shape](#) [March 1, 2017](#)

[ProPublica Illinois](#) just published its [first story](#), in partnership with the Chicago Tribune. It will begin regular publication in September. One project will be to work with City Bureau on a [data project](#). The Sun-Times and WBEZ will be partners for upcoming projects.

Then, WBEZ itself is stepping up its game. Later this month, Steve Edwards will [return](#) to the station as VP and chief content officer. He's tasked with building up the station's local news presence; while WBEZ, which launched *This American Life* and other boundary-breaking shows, has been a leader in cultural programming, it's lagged big-city peers like WNYC, KPCC, and KQED in creating a real regional newsroom. Chicago Public Media CEO Goli Sheikholeslami also plans to [bolster the news staff](#) to 90 within three years. Like other big stations, WBEZ has seen a bump in membership, to 85,000 from 65,000 in 2014. That fund fuels the news investment. Put it altogether and we see the reshaping of one city's local news landscape.

What's OLD is new again.

As Ken Burns' "[The Vietnam War](#)" documentary is set to revive so many memories, both iconic *Life* and *Time* covers will remind us of how those magazines act as historical markers in American history. *TimeLife* itself has meant lots of history, compilations, year-books, a business of print-based memory that often populated living room bookshelves. And, now, *TimeLife* has embraced that most modern of old-is-new marketing devices to sell more stuff.

Just [announced](#): the inaugural *TimeLife* newsletter:

To celebrate over 50 years of work in books, music, and classic TV we're starting our own newsletter!

If you're receiving this e-mail you're a fan of classic music and TV. And you know that at *TimeLife*, we LOVE the classics. We love classic variety shows, we love oldies and rock and roll, we love great sitcoms, we love classic country, and we love classic comedy.

The newsletter will bring you feature stories and news about your favorite classic performers and TV shows. And, we're not going to hide it, we'll also be telling you about new DVDs, CDs, and other collectible items.

Now, that's a way to use the best "new" lead generation publishers have rediscovered in the paid digital content age. As the New York Times sees newsletters drive double the number of conversions of ordinary traffic and the Washington Post sees exploding traffic from its 70 or so newsletters, everyone's getting in on the craze. What does your inbox look like?

Future of the BBC: why the ‘market failure’ model is a flop in broadcasting

August 25, 2015 11.01am EDT

Author: [Justin Lewis](#) Professor of Communication, Cardiff University

<https://theconversation.com/future-of-the-bbc-why-the-market-failure-model-is-a-flop-in-broadcasting-45022>

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Partners

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For any fans of the BBC – and that would include [the 59% of Britons](#) who say it is the source they are most likely to turn to for accurate news coverage or, for that matter, the 34% of Americans who told Pew last year they turn first to the BBC for their news – then the [government’s green paper](#) on the future of the UK’s public broadcaster will come as worrying news.

At the heart of the green paper is a belief that public funding should only apply to those areas where the market fails to deliver. It is worth reminding ourselves where this philosophy has prevailed and what it has produced.

Up until the 1960s broadcasting in the US was run purely as a commercial enterprise, lightly regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Programming was constructed around the needs of advertisers (who paid the bills) who had a preference for light, mildly entertaining fare that could be regularly interrupted with commercial messages.

US president John F Kennedy’s first chair of the FCC, Newton Minow, in a [memorable speech to commercial broadcasters](#), castigated US broadcasting for its poor quality, formulaic and ad-filled content. The US television landscape, he said after having spent a week watching American TV, resembled a “vast wasteland” – repetitious, uninformative and cajoling. The UK system, meanwhile, run very much along public service principles, was entering a golden age of serious popular drama, biting satire, innovative comedy, news, current affairs and documentary programming rarely seen in the US.

Democratic administrations, looking enviously across the Atlantic, decided to introduce public service broadcasting into the US system, creating PBS and NPR. Under pressure from commercial broadcasters, however, they adopted the kind of [“market failure” model](#) that appears to inform the current government’s thinking. Public television, in particular, was there to provide what that market did not.

US television a ‘vast wasteland’.

Worthy but dull

With the possible exception of children’s programming (notably Sesame Street), this pushed PBS away from making popular programmes. It quickly gained the reputation for being high-brow, worthy but dull. Its financial dependence on government also laid it open to budget cuts whenever politicians found its programmes too questioning or critical. This made PBS increasingly risk averse. So, for example, while Year Zero, John Pilger’s famous documentary

about the genocide in Cambodia, aired on primetime on ITV, [PBS refused to show it](#) in the US. Many worry that our government's threat to reduce BBC funding is having a [similarly chilling effect](#).

BBC in his sights: culture secretary John Whittingdale. PA / PA Wire/Press Association Images
Politically compromised and under-funded, PBS does its best, but it pales by comparison with the BBC. While the BBC is the [most popular British broadcaster](#) – on TV, on radio and online – [PBS is marginal](#) to American broadcasting.

Some would argue that this doesn't matter, that US commercial broadcasters produce plenty of high-quality, innovative programmes. Having lived in the US for 12 years, I would ask anyone who thinks this to do what Newton Minow did, and sit down for a week in front of a TV in America – or even worse, to listen to the radio. This is the wealthiest media market in the world; it is far richer than the UK and yet the original, critically acclaimed shows it produces (think *The Wire* or *The West Wing* – or even well-crafted sitcoms such as *Friends*, *Big Bang Theory* or *Parks and Recreation*) are very much the exception rather than the rule.

Many of the critically well-regarded US shows are made on subscription channels such as HBO that are only really viable in a market as lucrative as the US. The rest, with endless repeats, commercials and hollow canned laughter, is so formulaic and derivative that it makes *Bake Off* and *Strictly Come Dancing* seem positively uplifting. As for radio, the BBC alone offers more high-quality and diverse programming than the entire commercial network in the US.

Crowd-pleasing TV

There are many areas where a sensibly regulated market works well, but the evidence suggests that broadcasting is not one of them. So, for example, our [wealthiest broadcaster is Sky](#), yet few could argue that Sky produces anything like the range of high-quality output produced by the BBC. British broadcasting is a huge success story precisely because it has a well-funded public service, commercial-free broadcaster at its core.

Focus on royalty. PA / PA Archive/PA Images

One of the reasons for this is that the programming produced by commercial broadcasters is designed to please advertisers – after all it is they, rather than the people watching, who pay the piper. The wishes of advertisers – who prefer mildly entertaining, easily interrupted content – are not the same as the preferences of audiences.

So, for example, when BBC and ITV show the same event live, people [overwhelmingly choose to watch the BBC](#). This is, in part, because of its reputation as a national broadcaster, but also because, given the choice, people prefer their TV commercial-free. The “market failure” model takes away this choice.

The success of UK television, in other words, is because of its mixed ecology, with strong public service and commercial channels, a system that offering far more choice and high-quality programming than a monotone, commercial model with a weak public service provider. With a smaller BBC, [commercial broadcasters could make more money to provide more programmes](#). But to suppose that they would do as good a job as the BBC is to take a huge risk. As the Americans would say: if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Americans' Attitudes About the News Media Deeply Divided Along Partisan Lines

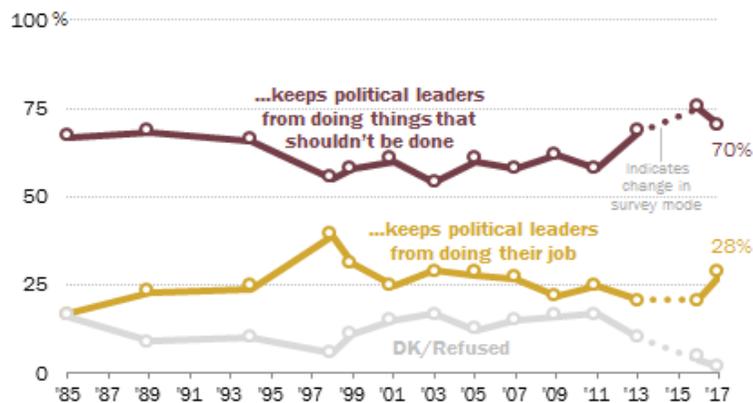
Democrats are 47 points more likely than Republicans to Support News Media's Watchdog Role

BY [MICHAEL BARTHEL](#) AND [AMY MITCHELL](#)

<http://www.journalism.org/2017/05/10/americans-attitudes-about-the-news-media-deeply-divided-along-partisan-lines/>

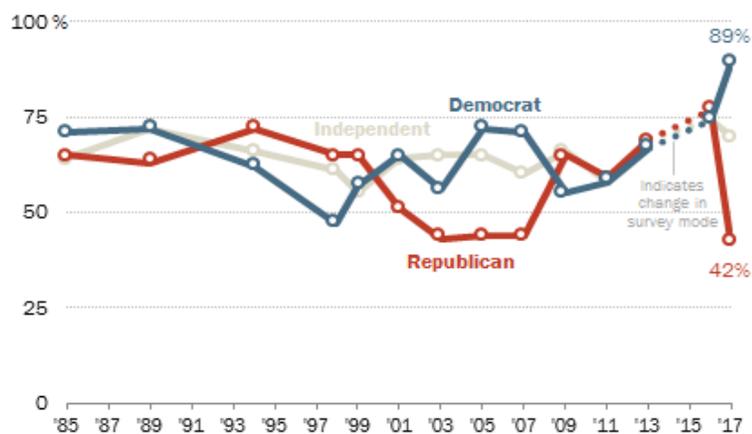
Overall, a majority of the public supports news media's watchdog role ...

% of U.S. adults who think that criticism from news organizations ...



... but 2017 reveals sharpest divide ever measured

% of U.S. adults who think that criticism from news organizations keeps political leaders from doing things that shouldn't be done



Note: Dotted line indicates a change in mode. Polls from 1985-2013 were conducted via phone. In 2016 and 2017, the polls were conducted on the American Trends Panel, which is online.

Source: Survey conducted March 13-27, 2017. For dates of other surveys, see Methodology. "Americans' Attitudes About the News Media Deeply Divided Along Partisan Lines"

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Democrats and Republicans, who already tend to place their [trust in different news sources](#) and rely on different outlets for [political news](#), now disagree more than ever on a fundamental issue of the news media's role in society: whether news organizations' criticism of political leaders primarily keeps them from doing things they shouldn't – or keeps them from doing their job. Today, in the early days of the Trump administration, roughly nine-in-ten Democrats (89%) say news media criticism keeps leaders in line (sometimes called the news media's "watchdog role"), while only about four-in-ten Republicans (42%) say the same. That is a 47-percentage-point gap, according to a new online survey conducted March 13-27, 2017, among 4,151 U.S. adults who are members of [Pew Research Center's nationally representative American Trends Panel](#). The gap stands in sharp contrast to [January-February 2016](#), when Americans were asked the same question. Then, in the midst of the presidential primary season, nearly the same share of Democrats (74%) and Republicans (77%) supported the watchdog role.

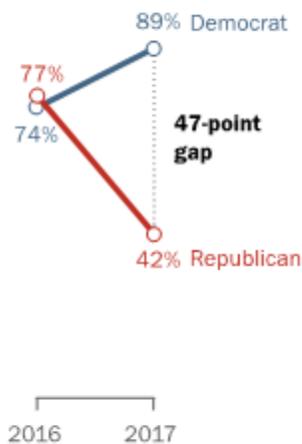
Pew Research Center has asked this question since 1985. While Republicans have been more likely to support a watchdog role during Democratic presidencies and vice versa, the distance between the parties has never approached the 47-point gap that exists today. The widest gap up to now occurred during the George W. Bush administration, when Democrats were 28 points more likely than Republicans to support a watchdog role. It should be noted that prior to 2016, the question was asked by telephone rather than the web, which [can elicit slightly different response patterns](#).¹ Even taking possible mode effects into account, though, this year's difference is so stark that it would still be the largest gap in the Center's polling on this question.

This partisan split is found in other attitudes about the news media, though none in so dramatic a fashion as with the watchdog role. Compared with 2016, Democrats and Republicans are more divided on whether the press favors one side in its political coverage, on how much trust they have in national news media, and on how good a job national news organizations are doing in keeping them informed.

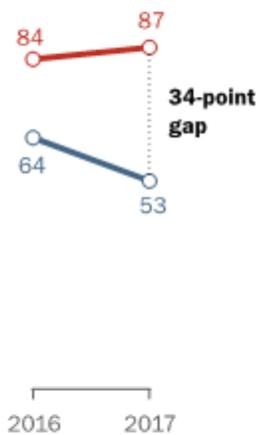
Parties show more disagreement on attitudes about news media

% of U.S. adults who say ...

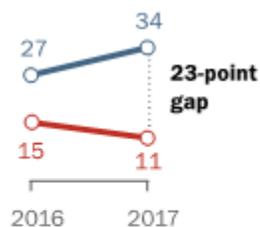
Media criticism of political leaders keeps them from doing things they shouldn't



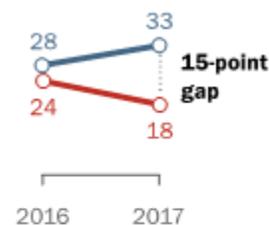
News organizations tend to favor one side



Information from national news organizations is very trustworthy



National news media do very well at keeping them informed



Note: Independents not shown.

Source: Surveys conducted March 13-27, 2017, and Jan. 12-Feb. 8, 2016.

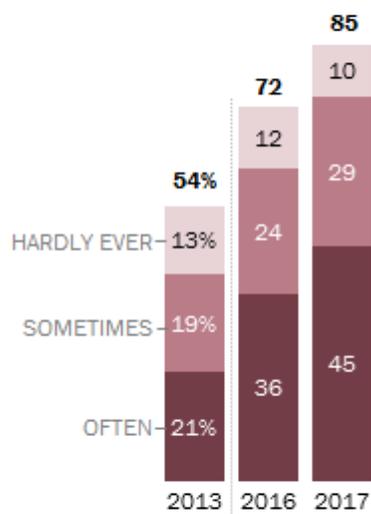
"Americans' Attitudes About the News Media Deeply Divided Along Partisan Lines"

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The divide in news media attitudes also extends to Americans' behaviors around news. Most prominently, Americans are also paying closer attention to national news now than in 2016, with that increase driven by Democrats. Overall, four-in-ten Americans report following national news very closely, up from a third the year before. Among Democrats, about half (49%) say they follow it closely, also up from a third in 2016.

Continued rise in use of mobile devices for news

% of U.S. adults who get news on mobile devices ...



Source: Survey conducted March 13-27, 2017.

"Americans' Attitudes About the News Media
Deeply Divided Along Partisan Lines"

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Democrats are also driving an increase in use of mobile devices for news. Nearly half of U.S. adults (45%) often get news on a mobile device. That is 9 percentage points above just a year ago, when 36% often got news this way, with significant growth occurring among Democrats but not Republicans. What's more, an increasing share of Americans also prefer getting news on mobile over a desktop computer. Among those who get news on both types of devices, nearly two-thirds (65%) say they prefer mobile.

Finally, one aspect of news consumption is little changed in either party: the role of friends and family as sources of news. Fifteen percent of Americans have a lot of trust in news that comes to them from friends and family (slightly lower than the trust levels for local and national news organizations), and 16% of online news consumers often get news there from people close to them (about a third as many as do so from news organizations). These figures are on par with 2016 and show less partisan divide than other measures – just a 5-percentage-point gap, for instance, in trust of information from family and friends. There was a slight uptick in the share of Americans who say the political news they get from friends and family represents just one side rather than a mix (40%, up from 35% in 2016), with Democrats and Republicans equally likely to say this.

These findings are a part of Pew Research Center's [ongoing examination](#) of Americans' attitudes about the news media and consumption habits around news, including [findings reported earlier this year](#) that, even amid these partisan divides, strong majorities of both

Republicans and Democrats feel the relationship between the press and the Trump administration is unhealthy and getting in the way of Americans' access to political information.

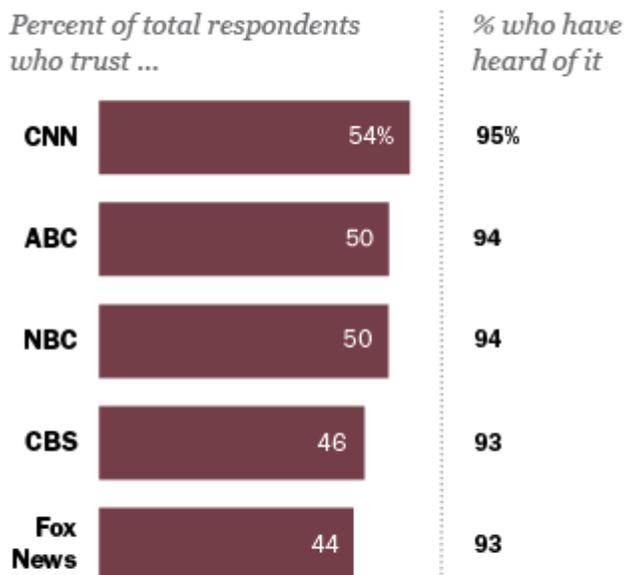
Which news organization is the most trusted? The answer is complicated.

BY [AMY MITCHELL](#)

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/10/30/which-news-organization-is-the-most-trusted-the-answer-is-complicated/>

Our recent report, [Political Polarization and Media Habits](#), finds that trust and distrust in the news media varies greatly by political ideology. Many readers asked us: Among the 36 news organizations we asked about, which one do Americans trust most? The answer is more complex than it may seem and can be measured in a number of different ways. Here's a breakdown:

News Sources Trusted By Largest Percentage of Online Adults



American Trends Panel (wave 1). Survey conducted March 19–April 29, 2014. Q20, 21a. Based on web respondents.

1

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The full population picture

doesn't tell the whole story. If you look simply at the total percentage of online adults who say they trust a news organization for news about government and politics, several mainstream television outlets rise to the top. CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox News are all trusted by more than four-in-ten web-using U.S. adults. These high numbers, though, are intertwined with the fact that more than nine-in-ten respondents

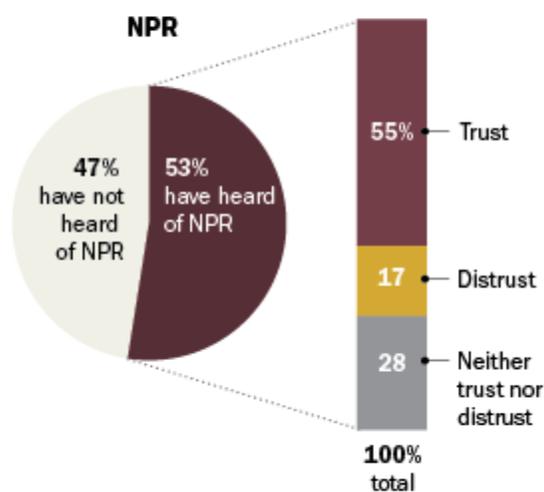
have heard of these five news sources. Trust and distrust were only asked of sources respondents had heard of, thus, the better known a source is, the more Americans in total who can voice trust or distrust of that source. A source like The Economist, on the other hand, is known by just 34% of respondents and so could never have a trust level exceeding 34% — even if everyone who had heard of it trusted it.

2 Is a news organization not trusted? Or just not well known?

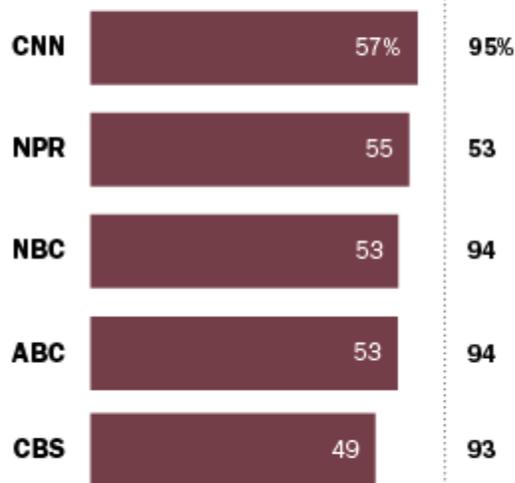
known? An alternative way to analyze the data is to look at the percent of trust among those who have heard of the news organization. This approach means that lesser-known outlets may be seen as equally trusted as better-known outlets. By this metric, several of the best-known sources sit toward the top, joined by some less familiar sources. NPR, for example, is on par with many of the mainstream television outlets on this measure. Among the panelists who have heard of NPR, 55% trust it. The same is true of 57% of those who have heard of CNN and 53% of those who have heard of NBC and of ABC.

News Sources Trusted By Largest Percentage of Online Adults Who Have Heard of Them

Shown below is the calculation of trust only among those who have heard of NPR



Among respondents who have heard of ... % who say that they trust it

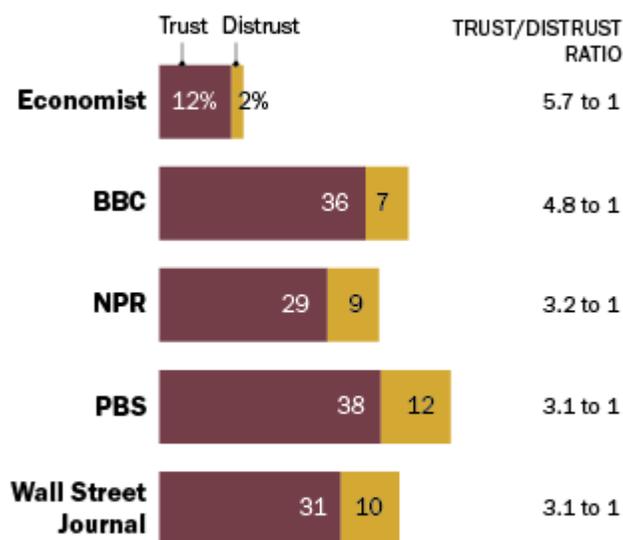


American Trends Panel (wave 1). Survey conducted March 19–April 29, 2014. Q20, 21a-21b. Based on web respondents.

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News Sources With Greatest Ratio of Trust to Distrust

Percent of total respondents who trust and distrust the sources



American Trends Panel (wave 1). Survey conducted March 19–April 29, 2014. Q20, 21a-21b. Based on web respondents. Ratios are calculated based on percentages to the second decimal place.

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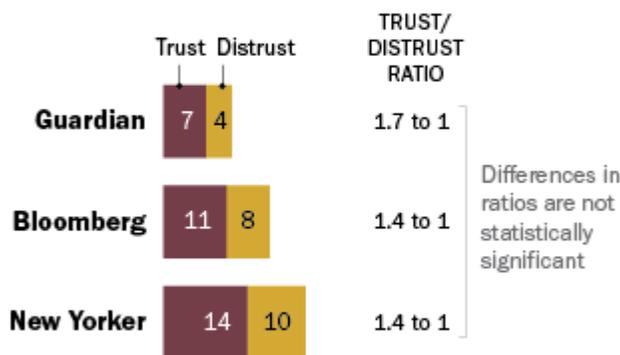
What about the ratio of trust

to distrust? Another way to think of trust is to compare trust *and* distrust in a news source. In other words, what is the ratio of people who trust a news outlet to those who distrust it? This ratio is based just on those who have rated the sources as trusted or distrusted, regardless of how well known the source is.

The result is a different list of news brands: The Economist, BBC, NPR, PBS and The Wall Street Journal are among those with the highest ratio of trust to distrust – even if the overall percentages of those who trust them are smaller than for some other sources. Only 34% of online Americans, for example, have heard of The Economist, but there is far more trust (12%) than distrust (2%) when it comes to news about government and politics (20% neither trust nor distrust The Economist). The BBC is recognized by a greater portion of respondents (76%), but is similarly more trusted (36%) than distrusted (7%).

Trust v. Distrust Differences Across News Sources Are Often Small

Among this sample of three news organizations, percent of all respondents who trust/distrust each one



American Trends Panel (wave 1). Survey conducted March 19–April 29, 2014. Q20, 21a-21b. Based on web respondents. Ratios are calculated based on percentages to the second decimal place.

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Beware of drawing

distinctions. They may not be significant. Any effort to draw distinctions between different news sources must keep in mind that survey data are subject to a margin of sampling error, and one should use appropriate caution. We will not characterize one source as more trusted than another if the differences between them are so small that they could have occurred just by chance as a result of sampling error. Moreover, many small differences may pass a test of statistical significance but be substantively meaningless. This is the reason why, in the [graphics that you see in our report](#), we group sources in broad categories such as “Sources Trusted by more than 50% of Panelists” and “Sources More Trusted than Distrusted.” For example, The Guardian, Bloomberg and The New Yorker sit next to each other in the “more trusted than distrusted” section of the adjacent chart. Statistically, their ratios of trust over distrust are equivalent (1.7, 1.4 and 1.4, respectively).

Two other important links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvtNyOzGogc>

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/sinclair-faces-fcc-resistance-over-tribune-purchase-1523387359>