

Trust in the Press as an Institution

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Abstract: *Based on the publicly available longitudinal World Values Survey, this study presents strong evidence to support the idea that media or news systems as institutions are experienced unevenly across the world and with fluctuating degrees of trust and mistrust. In general, we saw trust drop significantly in about half of the countries studied. In countries with a democratic-corporatist tradition, such as Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands, levels of trust fluctuated but over time remained relatively stable. In addition, our multilevel analysis points to at least a strong association between trust in political institutions and trust in the Press. Confidence in the media has substantially eroded in countries that went through political transition, regime change, and massive political uncertainty.*

Our analysis, therefore, found substantive support for what we tentatively term as the Trust Nexus to describe an erosion of trust in the Press that appears to be connected to a broader public disenchantment with and widespread sense of disdain for social institutions and more specifically in this instance for political institutions. In this view, both media trust and political trust are bound by a common destiny; they are caught in an inescapable relationship that can turn out to be a downward spiral of trust—or a race to the bottom—in some contexts or an upward spiral (or a virtuous circle; Norris 2000) in others. When interpreting these results, however, it has to be taken into account that the WVS data does not entitle us to draw conclusions about directions of causality because each wave has surveyed different samples of respondents.

1. INTRODUCTION

Trust is a sociological reality (Lewis & Weigert, 1993) that is not only a sociological event within a person but is systemic between social institutions by being both irreducible and multidimensional. This sociological perspective suggests that groups and even entire cultures may experience trust – or mistrust - in a broader socially shared context. Social relationships depend on trust that when absent, experience chaos and fear which increases situational complexity. Conversely, trust motivates loyalty and produces simplicity. In fact, the value of trusted information is that it produces rational action rather than confusion, or random action. This is because causal relationships within the information become predictable. Rational prediction can be replaced by trust to reduce complexity by being viewed as reliable over time. However, the myriad required contingencies around rational prediction in a chaotic environment can paralyze action. Distrust, on the other hand, requires a course of action based on suspicion, monitoring, and safeguards. Similar actions must be taken when confronted by the unknown. If a source of information does not make the unknown known in a rational, reliable way, trust is withdrawn, especially if this is the expected function of the source. The emotional bond between the consumer of information and the provider is betrayed when emotional investments have been made that do not return value. A typical reaction to this betrayal may be characterized as emotional indignation. The violation of trust brings severe emotional pain to all stakeholders when information that has been historically viewed as reliable fails to be correct.

Beyond the cognitive, or rational aspect of trust, and its emotional aspect is the behavioral aspect of trust in which individual or group routines are changed. Behaviors are modified to avoid the betrayal in the relationship that causes cognitive dissonance and emotional pain. When the cognitive process is omitted blind faith or fixed hope can remain. Those who omit this cognitive process are likely to experience greater emotional pain from the sense of betrayal that results. On the other hand, the combination of a high level of rationality – often displayed as mutually beneficial contracting of transactions - with a high level of emotionality – experienced as a care or sense of satisfaction with those transactions - produces ideological trust. Yet when the rational or transactional side of the equation consistently begins to break down, the resulting emotionality is negatively impacted, resulting in a sense of betrayal of trust.

On a larger cultural scale, when the transacting partner is a long trusted cultural institution, in this case, a free Press, a consistent perception that it cannot be relied upon to deliver independent, “unbiased” information as promised, then it begins to be viewed as an unreliable contracting partner with society at large, resulting in a sense of betraying and erosion of trust in that institution. With trust as the foundation of the relationship between individuals and institutions, betrayal collapses the relationship.

This dynamic has been reported as a part of the longitudinal World Values Survey in which the decline of trust in the Press as an institution has global implications, particularly from a generational perspective. While the survey clearly shows an erosion of trust in the Press within the U.S., similar trends are evident in other parts of the world as well, indicating a worldwide phenomenon over the past 33 years. Some research links the erosion in trust in the Press as an institution to similar declines in political and social institutions (Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, & Steindl, 2018). While there may be a common link in this institutionally based trust decline, there is little research indicating the cause of phenomena. Therefore, in this article, we aim to show that a significant driver of mistrust in the Press relates directly to inaccuracies. This leads to a hypothesis to be discussed in this paper:

Hypothesis: Declining trust in local and national Press corps political reporting is undesirable, which could potentially lead to national political instability.

This paper is divided into nine sections. First the authors discuss the Press as an institution. The Press was intended to be a part of American society and so was referenced in the constitution. This is briefly discussed. Then the impact or perception of inaccuracy in the Press is discussed in relation to a declining trust based on World Values Survey (WVS) data. The impact of this misinformation is discussed next. The impact of misinformation and disinformation is described. In the next sections, the results obtained from the longitudinal data in the WVS are discussed. The impact of errors in the Press is then followed by the conclusion.

2. THE PRESS AS AN INSTITUTION

Any institution that forms individual or public opinion that results in actions is emotionally, cognitively, and rationally relevant to an individual or group. This power is sometimes attributed to the Press to the extent that it is referred to as the fourth branch of the government (Cater, 1959). The idea of the fourth branch is enforced when the difference between news making and policy making becomes blurred. The news media may take over the role of political communication to the dismay of listeners who are more interested in apolitical and non-biased information about what is happening rather than having an entity reshape or filter the news according to an ascribed narrative. The situation is exacerbated when the media is perceived to influence political outcomes resulting in winners and losers (Banducci & Karp, 2003; Hall & Taylor, 1996), or when headlines are changed to appease readership or better align with bespoke narratives. The media should appeal to a variety of audiences who can interpret the meaning behind events themselves, rather than interpret events for a limited audience that aligns with the chosen interpretation (Cook, 2006). If this were the case, it would be more common that media outlets shared or complimented each other on journalistic abilities when they occur. Furthermore, universal condemnation would occur when a journalist from any outlet is denied access to newsworthy information. Instead, the perception may be that the news outlet pursues facts to support the story they had in mind to write or that their audience likes to hear. If the integrity of the information presented is in question or if the audience perceives the media as intending to preside over social or political life, disappointment and betrayal could be a common reactions. Furthermore, if the news media has control over what is defined as news, the opportunity for interpretation of significance may be incongruous with listeners or readers interests, further diminishing trust in the institution. If one of the functions of the news is to provide accountability to public figures and their actions, then the tendency of a partisan Press that gravitates to political intervention, to a certain reporting of the news events, to agendas of interest to the network in order to drive more customers to their site, and to cater to certain political figures who want to use a “friendly” outlet for their political purposes, then the ability for that particular media outlet to provide an unbiased view eventually comes into question. The credibility of media outlets could improve if they did not give certain stories more momentum or appear to be subordinate to a political official. The negative momentum is increased as smaller news organizations pick up the stories causing a trickle down impact on coverage.

The opportunity for news is varied (Cook, 2006). There are large news organization conglomerates and there are community Facebook pages that allow any person to be a reporter. In any of these platforms, the same news could

be reported. Some news agencies are intentionally political with a particular purpose to maintaining influence or making a political gain through the manipulation of public opinion. In other cases, the outlet is decidedly apolitical. Ultimately, news consumers have many outlets from which to get the news, as a result, consumers also have the ability to get the news from outlets that more closely match their point of view. If this is so, then why is confidence in the Press declining? It is not because consumers cannot find the outlet that aligns with their interests.

3. THE U.S. CONSTITUTION AND THE PRESS

The role of the organized Press is a part of the system of government guaranteed by the United States Constitution (Gerald, 1948). The Press has significant power over public opinion and history has shown that it can be a powerful check and balance to the executive branch of the U.S. government. Exposing wrongdoing through investigative journalistic means is what was intended as the function of the Press as supported by the First Amendment of the Constitution. Decisions by the Supreme Court over time have clearly supported the function of the Press.

Even stronger protections are in place to guarantee free speech with court cases continuing to be filed with regard to libel. Consistent court rulings have made it clear that public figures cannot sue a publisher for libel unless the accuser can show that the publisher maliciously printed an untruth (Rosenbloom v. Metromedia, Inc., 403 U.S. 29, 1971; Curtis Publ. Co.v. Butts, 388 U.S. 130, 1967; New York Times Co. v. Sullivan, 376 U.S. 254, 1964). While most of the provisions in the Bill of Rights protect individual freedoms, the Free Press Clause provides the publishing business, the only organization protected in the Bill of Rights, explicit constitutional protection. Essentially, the Press is a fourth institution of government, even though it is outside of the government, charged with being an additional check on the three official branches of government (Stewart, 1974). On the one hand, the Constitution guarantees that the branches can be an open 'market-place' for ideas, and on the other hand, the free Press makes sure that the branches are accountable for performing their duties on behalf of the people they represent. When the free Press does not perform its role according to the intent of the Constitution that protects it, the public in a democratic society is not protected from the government that could stray from the constraints intended by its design.

4. EFFECT OF INACCURACY ON TRUST

While the Press in the United States is an institution protected by the constitution, it is not guaranteed influence or unlimited presence. Without readers or customers, an open and free Press cannot survive financially. Given that trust in the Press has declined over a period of years, what is the biggest driver of this decline? Is the decline recoverable? And, as the hypothesis implies, is the recovery desirable? Audiences are losing confidence in the news media. These audiences have choices that include many diversified media outlets, however, they may choose to not give as much time to news outlets as they used to. In effect, the free Press may be given less attention than it used to have as people spend time doing other things. The reputation of a news organization directly correlates to economic profit. With the decline in trust several news organizations have reduced their staff by significant numbers (CNN layoffs, etc.).

Audiences take risks when they expose themselves to media information. Readers or viewers may not have the time or the ability to verify the information that they are exposed to. This is a significant part of the value proposition of the media source that was chosen. This trust is broken if the media audience finds that their investment was of a low or no value because the media source was misleading. In fact, now the audience needs to spend the time and energy to correct and recover from the misinformation which will require an additional investment. If the investment is not made then contradictions begin to accumulate and news becomes noise.

The degraded performance of the Press over time has diminished trust in the Press (Müller, 2013). Corrupted information that does not conform to expectations or professional norms has even caused audiences to have antipathy or a sense of disdain for the Press (Hopmann, Shehata, & Strömbäck. 2015; Ladd, 2010). An increasing cynicism in the ability of the Press to perform its constitutionally protected duties continues to grow as the public is increasingly unsure that the information they are getting is true or accurate. A significant amount of media coverage concerns political figures. When political figures are wrong with their prognostications and the Press vindicates or omits coverage of them the audience could perceive journalistic capabilities to be absent or intentionally misleading, or even corrupted.

5. IMPACT OF MISINFORMATION

As the Press begins to cover the political institutions in a country with bias towards a particular political organization, the trust in the Press begins to decline. The Press should be seen as independent from political influence in order to maintain its objectivity and avoid outside political influence. As political influence gains a foothold in the media, it causes the consumer of the Press to distrust the information the Press delivers and pushes these consumers to media outlets that align with their political views. This reaction removes them from well-rounded information drawing the entire picture of the political scene. This leads also to ignorance on the part of the consumer as they start only consuming partisan news. As this trend continues and the Press becomes even more partisan, false information supporting one political stance and denying the other is more prevalent misleading the consumer thereby causing further ignorance of the facts.

Technology has afforded consumers many channels of 'fake' and inaccurate information. Consumers in search of facts are pushed to other sources, many of which are social media based. The trustworthiness of social media platforms is corrupted as journalistic standards may also not be in play in the creation of content. Furthermore, these sites are not considered to be publishers and so are regulated differently. A community Facebook site might relay the news that comes from the inhabitants of a community very quickly, however it may not be accurate as it is opinion-based rather than journalistic. To be clear, misinformation is inaccurate information that is unintentionally spread while disinformation is inaccurate information that is intentionally spread. Both mis- and dis-information can be spread via a Facebook community news site. Inaccurate information may cause needless distress or influence decision making. For example, information about a blizzard that is true or not, may cause a run on milk in the local grocery stores. This might make it difficult for those who need milk but were not able to get it because of stock-outs.

The power of information can also be used to deceive and mislead people. It can be a manipulation of the hearer's decision making process that is propelled by an emotional reaction. Ultimately, then, all information that is shared is oriented around an emotional response. Otherwise there is no opportunity for manipulation. An example of this is when information is released that reduces the value of the stock market. There have been a number of situations where something that was said caused significant changes in the value of stocks. For example, in 2013 there was a rumor circulated by the Associated Press that there was an explosion in the White House and that the president was hurt. Stocks plummeted, even though the information was not true (Nguyen, Yan, Thai, & Eidenbenz, 2012). The S&P lost \$92 BN in value in three minutes. In this case, the impact can be easily measured. Other cases incorporate causality that is more difficult to trace. In 2013 the World Economic Forum indicated that the issue of *misinformation spread* was voted as one of the top ten globally significant issues of the year (Farida, 2014). The effects of misinformation are felt beyond the discovery of the inaccuracy. Decisions continue to be made regardless of the status of the information. Furthermore, the rate at which information diffusion is enabled by network infrastructures of which there are many, and they are accessible.

A study done by Wu, Morstatter, Hu, and Liu, (2016) resulted in the SIR model. This model was a proposal that reflects on mis- and dis-information as an infectious disease based on how it propagates harm. In this model there are three categories of participants; the susceptible to be infected (S), the infected and infectious (I), and those who have recovered and are vaccinated against an infection (R). In this model, those who have been infected with inaccurate information pass on the information to susceptible people some of whom believe the information. The recovered person does not pass this information on because they know the danger associated with passing on inaccurate information. At some point the susceptible person will accept the incorrect information and begin to propagate it to others. The lifecycle of a user of information is illustrated below.



Figure 1. The lifecycle of an information user

Information diffusion becomes an epidemic when the incorrect information travels widely, or becomes 'viral'. This tipping point occurs when the threshold of acceptance of the information happens, through trust, almost simultaneously in mass quantities. Sometimes waves of incorrect information from news outlets are exposed to a population. This information remains in the news cycle until the audience recovers from it as illustrated in the figure below, and then another wave of misinformation follows. Not everyone is infected that is susceptible. Not everyone who is susceptible recovers. The change in status to 'recovered' may relate to the harm that forces lessons to be learned from actions taken using incorrect information.

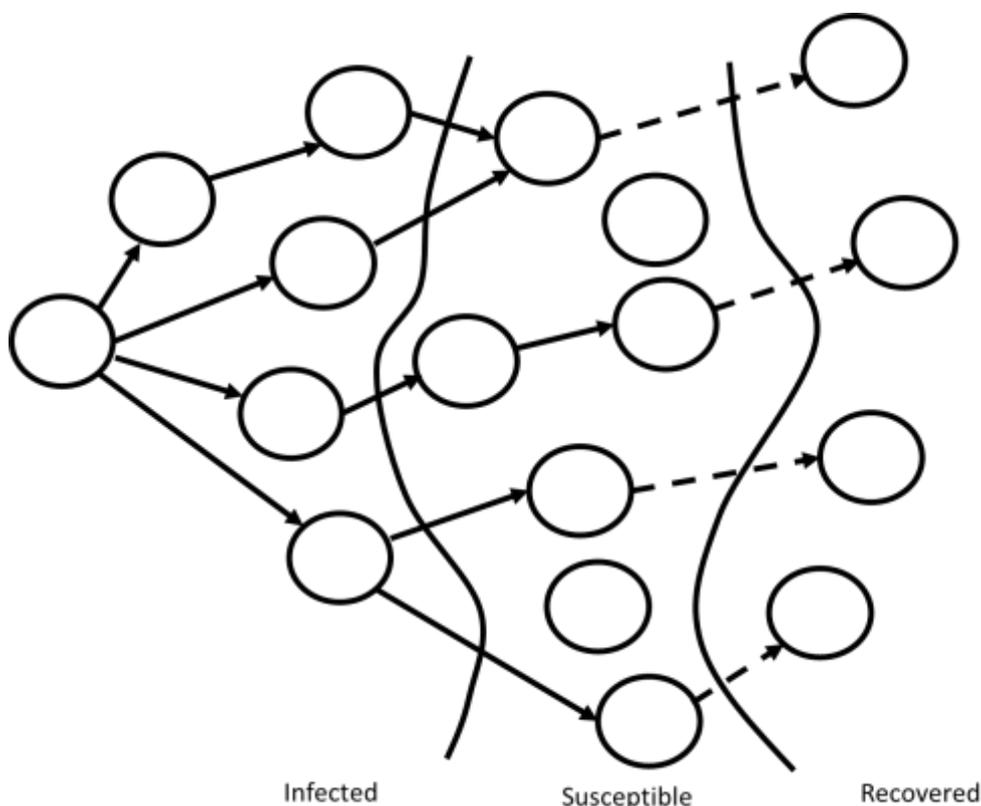


Figure 2. A wave of misinformation reaction across a population

The news agencies align their efforts and disseminate the information only as long as they are able to keep the interest of their audience. The interest of new outlets is not the facts but rather the attention of the audience. This short term strategy works for several news cycles until trust and interest fatigue sets in. A non-recoverable scenario ensues where the audience begins to leave. Many will not return as trust has been broken. The news outlet tries to release other more interesting information to recover lost market share, but are not able to and the loss of an audience becomes a trend with an end in sight. At this point news organizations reduce their costs because the audience has lost its interest in the information and has gone elsewhere, or has stopped listening. At this point, consumers have acquired a higher level of misinformation detection and so are not as easily wooed back.

Spreaders of misinformation have also been identified and labelled. They are more easily identified going forward as the listener has been able to assign characteristics to the type of outlet. This technique makes them more proactively recognizable and they are not given the attention they want as a result from the beginning. Spreaders of misinformation can be stopped through the propagation of facts and accountability for spreading misinformation. This was the original intent of journalism and freedom of the Press in the constitution of the United States.

6. THE DATA

To explore the trends across a significant time frame, data from the World Values Survey was used in this study. The results were drawn from groups during waves of studies. Each wave is released separately, however, in this longitudinal study the trends within groups are seen over multiple waves. This unique view allows for much greater

visibility into the trends over time. The World Values Survey is the world's only major longitudinal cultural study using nearly 100 countries encompassing about 90 percent of the global population utilizing the same questions to all. The study uses 400,000 respondents and covers the major demographic variation including all genders, age groups, and income levels. The World Values Survey strives to help researchers and policy makers better understand regional and global attitudes on religion, equality, gender, politics, and well-being. The World Values Survey also avoids grouping results in pre-distinguished categories such as cultural dimensions which allows for better analysis of the data. Several key aspects of the study are now explained.

Longitudinal aspect. Culture changes slowly, often generationally necessitating using data that spans decades. The World Values Survey has been conducted six times since 1981 with a seventh wave commencing between and 2017-2019. Our data covers the first six waves of the World Values Survey from 1981 – 2014 encompassing 33 years of data. Wave seven was not completed as of the writing of this paper.

Cohorts. The World Values Survey offers a breadth and depth of research data allowing us to look at groups by age and by region. We investigated the attitudes of countries regarding trust in the Press across five generations including; Turn of the Century, Silent, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennial. Furthermore, we grouped each generation and country into Ingleheart-Welzel's cultural map as seen below.

To explore the trends across a significant time frame, data from the World Values Survey database was used in this study. The results were drawn from groups during waves of studies. Each wave is released separately, however, in this longitudinal study the trends within religious groups are seen over multiple waves. This unique view allows for much greater visibility into potential trends over time. The World Values Survey strives to help researches and policy makers better understand regional and global attitudes on religion, equality, gender, politics, and well-being. The World Values Survey also avoids grouping results in pre-distinguished categories such as cultural dimensions which allows for better analysis of the data. Several key aspects of the study are now explained.

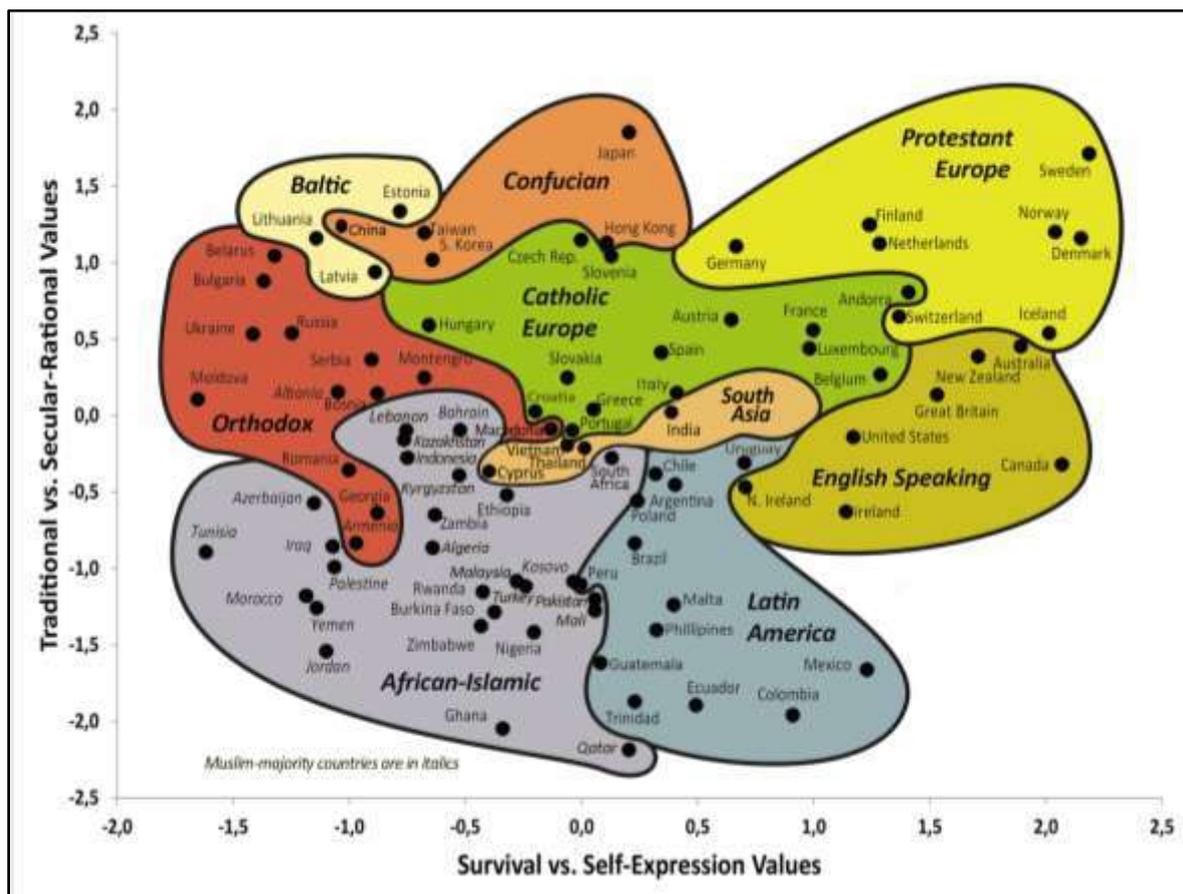


Figure 3. Ingleheart-Welzel's cultural map

Results

Wave One data shows a clear descending trend between generations when it comes to trust in the Press as an institution. Both Protestant Europe and Latin American regions have less trust in the Press with each subsequent generation. English speaking regions had a slight stabilization between the Silent and Boomer generations. Overall, Protestant Europe has less trust in the Press over their English and Latin counterparts.

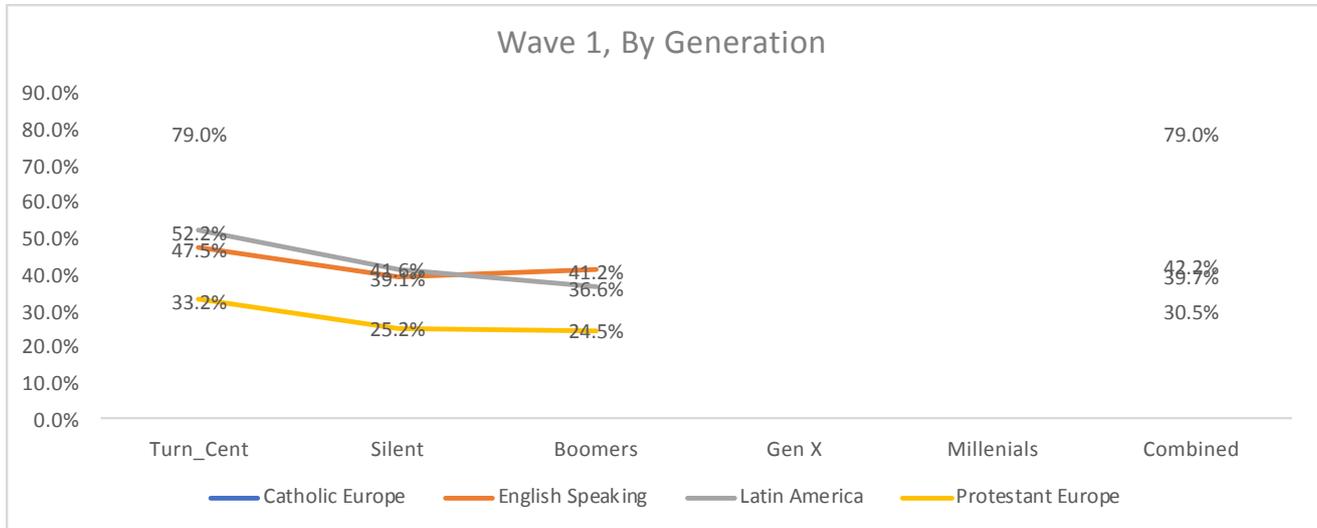


Figure 4. Wave 1 – (1981-1984)

Wave Two had relatively little data, but the data shows a slight lessening of trust between generations for both Latin and Catholic groups however a strong increase in trust between Boomers and Gen X in the Catholic regions.

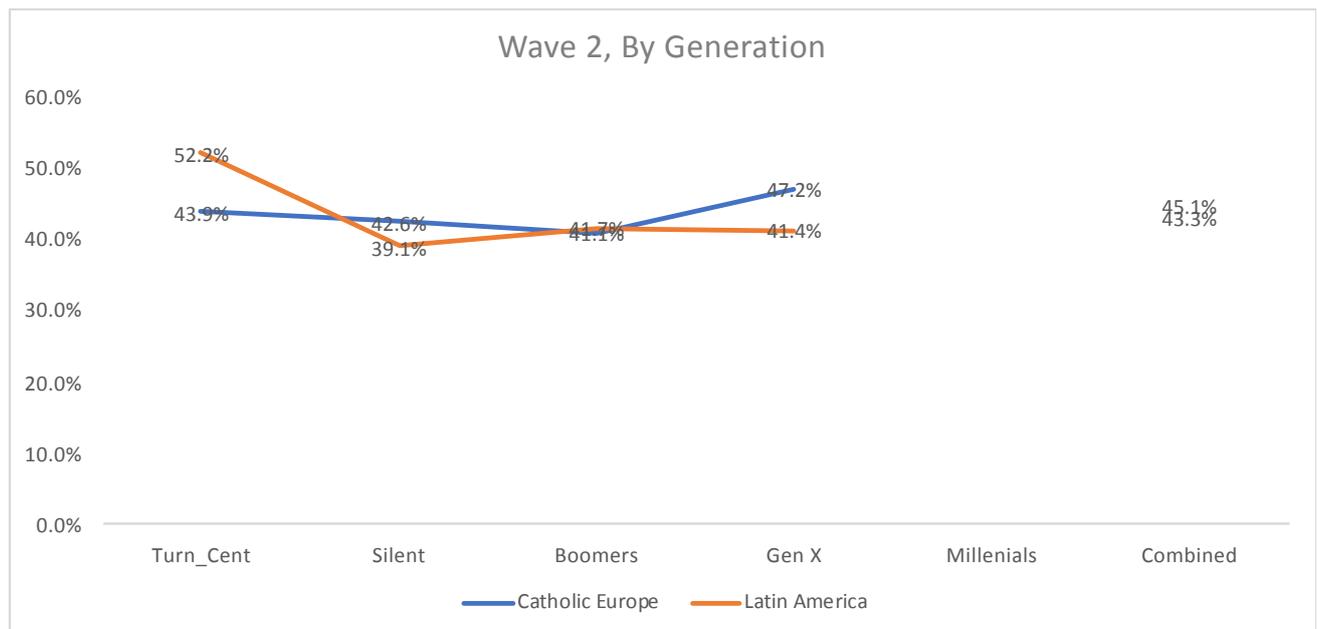


Figure 5. Wave 2 (1990-1994)

Wave Three has more robust data than the previous waves. Overall we see stable or declining trust between the Turn of the Century, Silent, and Boomer generations throughout all groups with a slight rise in trust for the Gen X generation in all regions outside the Orthodox regions. What is more interesting is the large disparity of trust in the Press between regions. The Baltic states having the most trust in their Press followed by the Latin, Orthodox, and Catholic Europe regions. Protestant Europe and English speaking regions had the lowest trust in their Press by nearly half of their Baltic counterparts.

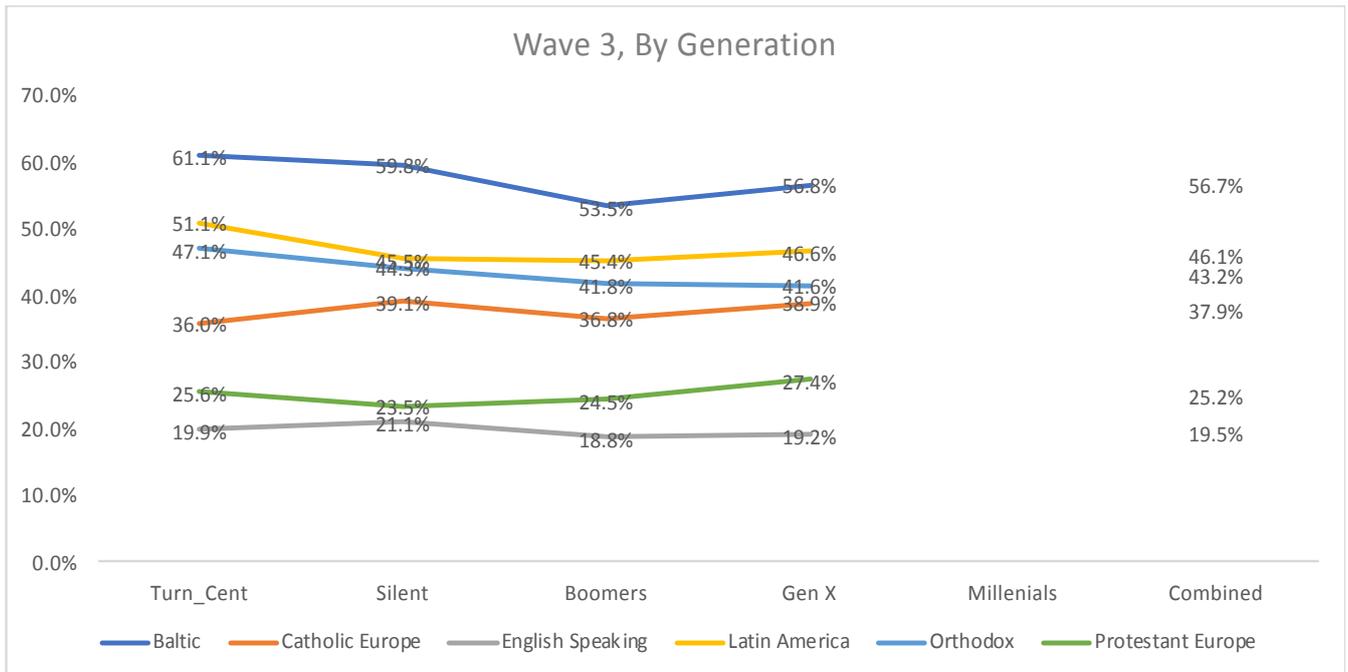


Figure 6. Wave 3 (1995-1998)

Wave Four had nearly the same trending as did Wave Three with the notable exception of Protestant Europe. Protestant Europe had a strong overall positive shift for all generations, nearly doubling their trust in the Press. The disparity between regions in regard to trust also narrowed over Wave Three with most regions meeting in the middle – some gaining trust while others reduced trust.

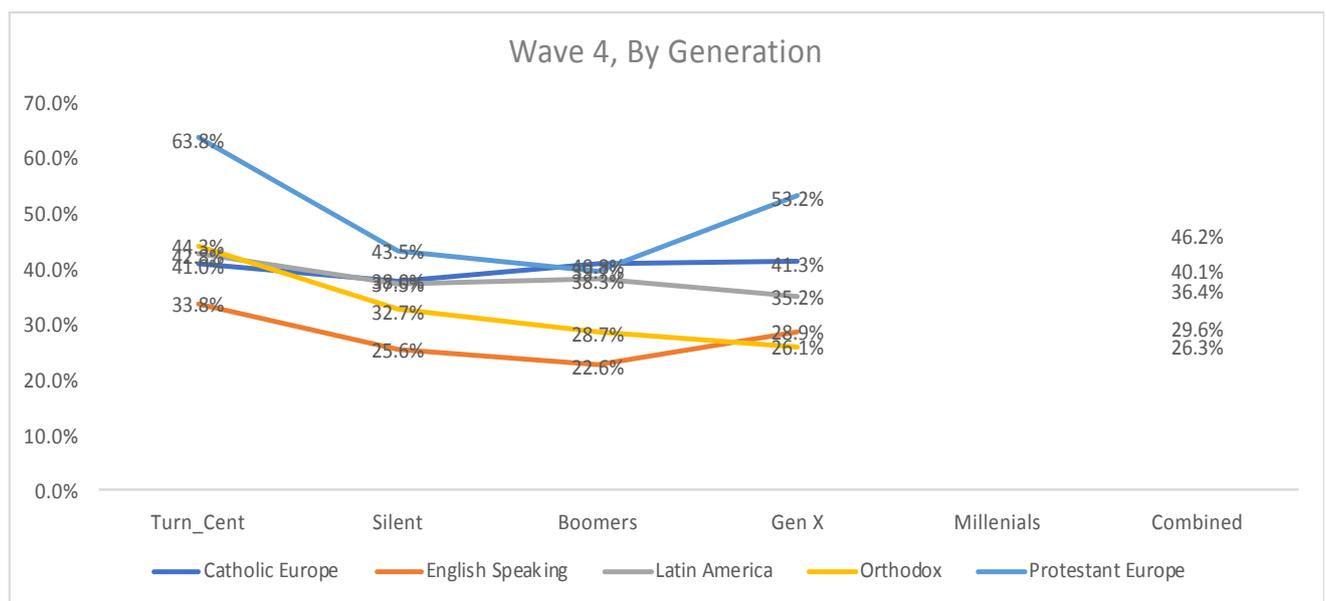


Figure 7. Wave 4 (1999-2004)

Wave Five grouped most regions relatively close together with the notable exception of the English speaking regions. The trust in the English speaking regions was significantly lower than elsewhere in the world. The trust between generations in all cases was relatively similar showing agreement across all age groups.

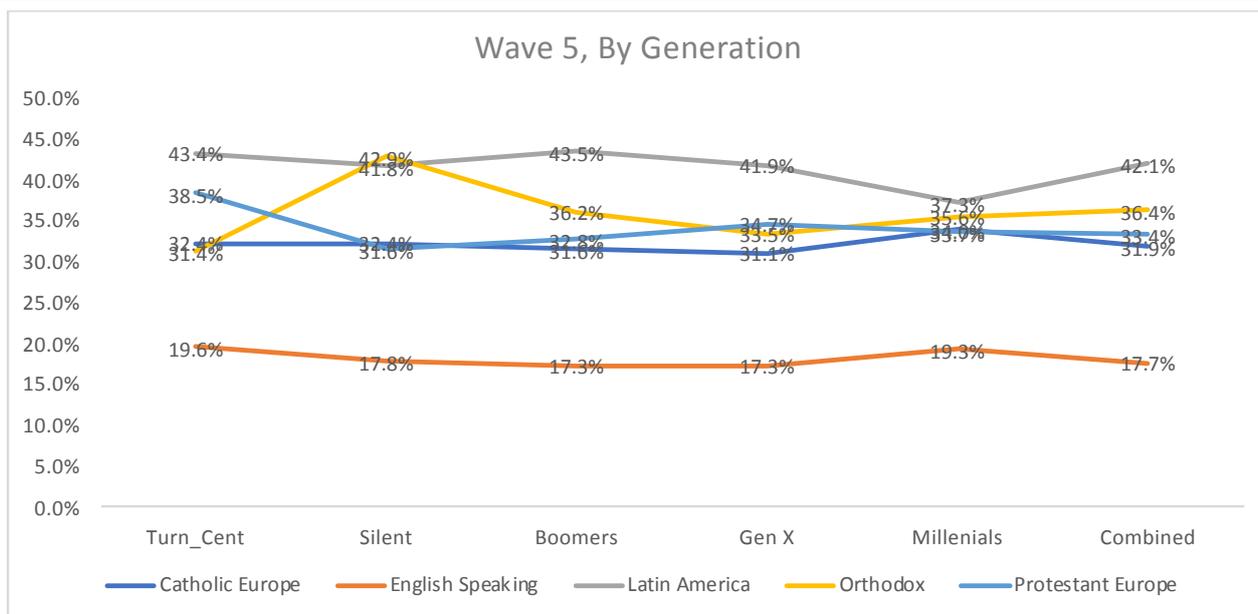


Figure 8. Wave 5 (2005-2009)

Wave Six showed an interesting new trend. Overall the Boomers and Gen X generations kept their opinions of the Press relatively stable from Wave Five, the Turn of the Centry and Silent generations had a gain in trust of the Press while millennials had a decline in the trust of the Press. This is often the generational trend. The millennial generation often trusts much less than do the older Turn of the Century and Silent generations.

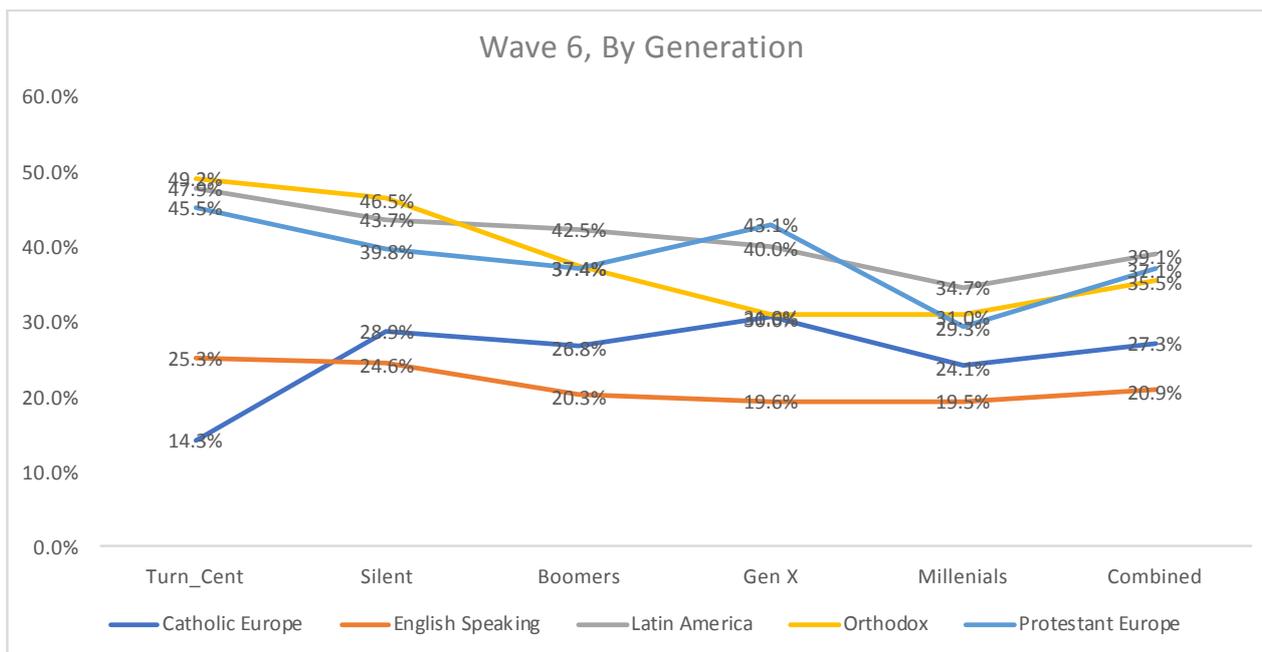


Figure 9. Wave 6 (2010-2016)

7. ERRORS IN THE PRESS

The PEW Research Center conducted a study entitled, “Public Evaluations of the News Media: 1985 to 2009” that was released on September 12, 2009 (PEW, 2009). This study showed that the public’s assessment of the accuracy in the Press was at its lowest level over the previous two decades. The ten year old report also indicated that only 29% of Americans thought that the Press presents accurate facts. Only 18% said that the new organizations look at the story from both sides. In 1985, 55% of Americans said that Press was accurate, while 34% said the journalists

looked at both sides of the story. There is also evidence to show that the Press had begun to be politically polarized during the time period of the study. Only 26% of respondents said that news stories were not politically biased with the number of respondents who said that stories were independent of powerful people was at an all-time low of 20%. Further, the number of respondents who thought that news organizations were willing to admit their mistakes was at 21%, also an all-time low.

Even political parties hold significant differences in their views of reporting accuracy depending on the news organization in question. For example, 44% of Republicans and 75% of Democrats thought CNN was accurate in their reporting. While television is the dominant source of news for the public, at 71%, in 2008 more people for the first time obtained international and local news from the internet than from newspapers, and that number soared in the decade that followed .

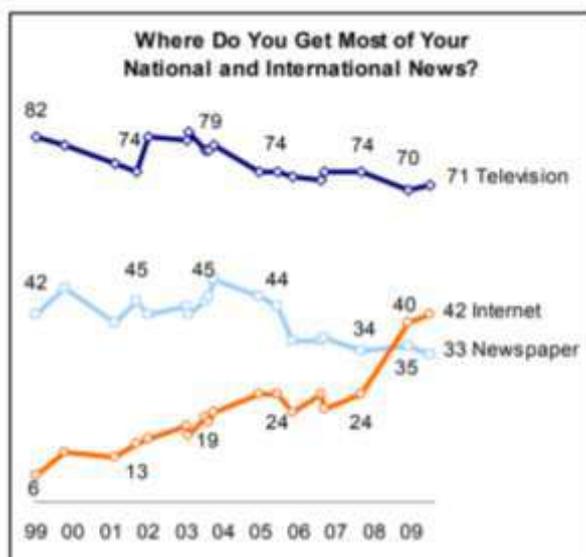


Figure 10. PEW Research: Public Evaluations of the News Media: 1985 to 2009.

When different age groups are considered, the trends are clear that different generations obtain their news from different sources as per Figure 11 below. Slightly more of the older generation get their national and international news from the television and newspapers. The trend by age regarding getting this new from the internet decrease with age from 42% to 10% for 65+. The middle ages represented get their news more from the radio than other ages in the range. For local news the television is about the same for all ages. The internet is seldom used by 65+ people for local news, however, newspapers are used significantly.

Main source for...	Total	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Nat'l & int'l news	%	%	%	%	%
Television	71	70	62	77	81
Internet	42	64	54	29	10
Newspapers	33	21	26	37	55
Radio	21	18	28	19	15
Local news					
Television	64	67	60	63	69
Internet	17	21	24	12	4
Newspapers	41	39	33	45	53
Radio	18	22	21	14	13
N	1506	183	420	478	399

Figures read down. Q6 & QA.
Figures add to more than 100% due to multiple responses.

Figure 11. Source: PEW Research: Public Evaluations of the News Media: 1985 to 2009.

In the long-term performance of the Press, the PEW study, as seen in Figure 12, shows that the public is increasingly critical of the Press in several areas. Trends for new organizations getting the facts straight has been in decline. The trend regarding new organizations being inaccurate has increased. New organizations have been less willing to admit when they make a mistake and more willing to cover up mistakes contrary to journalistic norms. Fewer people think that news organizations are highly professional.

Increasing Criticism of Press Accuracy, Openness										
	July 1985	Feb 1999	Sept 2001	Nov 2001	July 2002	July 2003	June 2005	July 2007	July 2009	85-09 diff
News organizations ...	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Get the facts straight	55	37	35	46	35	36	36	39	29	-26
Stories often inaccurate	34	58	57	45	56	56	56	53	63	+29
Don't know	11	5	8	9	9	8	8	8	8	
Willing to admit mistakes	34	26	24	35	23	27	28	29	21	-13
Try to cover up mistakes	55	66	67	52	67	62	62	63	70	+15
Neither/Don't know	11	8	9	13	10	11	10	8	9	
Highly professional	72	52	54	73	49	62	59	66	59	-13
Not professional	11	32	27	12	31	24	25	22	27	+16
Neither/Don't know	17	16	19	15	20	14	16	12	14	

Q31, Q35bF1, Q35gF2.

Figure 12. PEW Research: Public Evaluations of the News Media: 1985 to 2009.

Another source of error is bias. The PEW report shown in Figure 13 shows that new organizations are less careful to avoid bias and more politically biased. Fewer people thought that news organizations treated both sides of a story fairly and more thought the stories favored one side more than the other. Now, 74% of the respondents said that the Press is influenced by powerful people and organizations while only 20% believe that the news is independent. It appears as though the Press sources that are liberal or independent is about the same over the time of the study. The partisan gap for cable news by organization has grown significantly. For FOX news the gap has grown from 14% to 24% between Democrats and Republicans. Meaning, 24% more Republicans prefer FOX than democrats. While on CNN, the gap has grown from 6% to a 16% difference between the parties.

Views of Press Bias, Fairness, Independence										
	July 1985	Aug 1989	Feb 1999	Sept 2001	July 2003	June 2005	July 2007	July 2009	85-09 diff	
News organizations ...	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
Careful to avoid bias	36	--	31	26	29	28	31	26	-10	
Politically biased	45	--	56	59	53	60	55	60	+15	
Neither/Don't know	19	--	5	15	18	12	14	14		
Deal fairly with all sides	34	28	--	26	26	21	26	18	-16	
Tend to favor one side	53	68	--	67	66	72	66	74	+21	
Don't know	13	4	--	7	8	7	8	8		
Liberal	41	--	--	--	51	50	52	50	+9	
Conservative	19	--	--	--	26	26	25	22	+3	
Neither/Don't know	40	--	--	--	23	24	23	27		
Independent	37	33	--	23	23	21	23	20	-17	
Influenced by powerful people/organizations	53	62	--	71	70	73	69	74	+21	
Don't know	10	5	--	6	7	6	8	6		

Q35iF2, Q32, Q35jF2, Q33.

Figure 13. PEW Research: Public Evaluations of the News Media: 1985 to 2009.

Of note, the biggest change over the years has been political bias. In 1985 the difference between Independent, Democrat and Republican in terms of bias was only 44%, 43%, and 49% respectively. The gap continues to widen until 2009 where the bias is considered by respondents to be 62%, 50%, and 78% respectively for Independent, Democrat and Republican. The partisan view of inaccuracy also widened. In 1985, Independents, Democrats and Republicans said the inaccuracy of the Press was 35%, 32%, and 37% respectively. In 2009, the values were 63%, 59%, and 69% respectively. Other biases that were exposed in the PEW research related to pro-U.S. vs negative to the U.S. and bias related to administrations. Regarding the watchdog role of the Press, the positions of respondents depended on what administration was in the White House with the opposite party indicating that the Press does more good than harm. The favorable opinion of news sources, regardless of party affiliation has declined over the study period. Local TV news has declined from 84% to 73%. The daily newspaper has declined from 81% to 65% favorability rating. And, network TV news has declined from 84% to 64%.

Not covered in the PEW study was the changes in technology and productivity expectations and their impact on the reliability of news information. While fewer of the public believe that journalists are truthful with their reporting. They also are not confident that editors are monitoring the performance of reporters (Seymore-Ure, 2009). This may relate to the volume expected per journalist. For example, errors in the Press may be partially linked to new technology. Journalists must produce more materials in less time to meet accelerated news cycles. User generated information is being exploited by journalists and staff is not available to corroborate the information taken from blogs, photographs, videos, etc. (Seymore-Ure, 2009). The combination of fewer resources, less time, poor quality source information, and non-robust methods leads to inaccurate reporting.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the publicly available longitudinal World Values Survey, this study presents strong evidence to support the idea that media or news systems as institutions are experienced unevenly across the world and with fluctuating degrees of trust and mistrust. In general, we saw a significant drop in trust of the Press in about half of the countries studied. In countries with a democratic-corporatist tradition, such as Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands, levels of trust fluctuated but over time remained relatively stable. In comparing data from the initial WVS results in the 1980s with the most recent Wave data, we can see that trust levels have actually grown in these same countries. Notably, the Netherlands mark an exception here, since a loss of trust was recorded after the fourth Wave. This development might be traced back to the launch of free dailies in 1999 as well as to media scandals such as the one involving the daily *de Volkskrant*, which was accused of manipulating the 2006 elections through publishing a hoax about Dutch soldiers torturing prisoners in Iraq. Similar fluctuations were shown in parts of South America (e.g., Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru) as well as parts of Asia, although trust in the Press remained consistently high across India and the Philippines.

These results echo Norris' (2011) findings that political trust has not eroded consistently around the world. That being said, our analysis of the WVS data does indeed point to a decline in people's confidence in the Press in a substantive number of societies. The decline in trust is strongest in the United States, in continuation of a trend first identified in the 1970's (Gronke & Cook, 2007), with a substantive drop by almost 30 percent during the decade of the 1990's. Gronke and Cook attribute this drop to, among others, the Lewinsky scandal and subsequent impeachment of then U.S. President Bill Clinton as well as to a growing public sense of the news media as exercising too much influence. Australia and New Zealand, the other two countries from the English-speaking world included in Table 1, have also suffered from a substantive drop in trust of the Press. Together, these three countries broadly belong to a specific type of media system that Hallin and Mancini (2004) have classified as 'liberal' and as Müller (2013) has noted in another comparative study, media systems in the western Anglo-Saxon world have a particularly strong tendency to breed distrust in the Press.

There are at least two possible reasons for this. One is that as cable news outlets proliferated the West, their need to retain viewers in a 24-hour news cycle became more clearly driven by a business model of delivering financial success versus simply delivering 'the news'. To do so, many of these outlets or institutions began providing a particular narrative about the news events in a way that would appeal to specific consumer groups, resulting in loyal repeat customers. While Fox News, among others, was the first media institution to find financial success in

this strategy, trust in news outlets as institutional pillars of society began to waver as individuals and groups questioned the balance between a pure profit motive and keeping the public informed of key events based on verified facts.

A second possible reason is the relatively long history of a two-party system in several western countries, in which two major political ideologies struggle over political dominance (e.g., Democrats and Republicans in the United States, Labor and the Coalition in Australia, and National and Labor in New Zealand). Two-party systems are arguably more vulnerable to ideological polarization than ideologically more diverse political systems.

In addition, our multilevel analysis points to at least a strong association between trust in political institutions and trust in the Press. Confidence in the media has substantially eroded in countries that went through political transition, regime change, and massive political uncertainty.

Egypt is a case in point: Since the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2010, trust in the Press levels dropped by more than 20 percent. Similarly, trust of the Press in Mexico sharply plummeted after President Calderón initiated the war on drugs in 2006. Likewise, people lost faith in the Press in several post-Communist societies in Eastern Europe, most notably in Estonia, Poland, and Slovenia. Mishler and Rose (2001) argue that these countries needed time to adapt to the new political system because authoritarian values may still have persisted for a generation or more beyond the collapse of the old regime.

Looking at countries individually (after controlling for all other individual-level variables), standardized effect sizes of political trust vary between a low of .22 (the Netherlands and Argentina) and a high of .71 (Uzbekistan) and .61 (Azerbaijan). Effect sizes were greater than .30 for forty-six out of the fifty-three societies. Regression coefficients were larger than .50 for Algeria, Azerbaijan, Colombia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Uzbekistan, and the United States.

Our analysis, therefore, found substantive support for what we tentatively term as the Trust Nexus to describe an erosion of trust in the Press that appears to be connected to a broader public disenchantment with and widespread sense of disdain for social institutions and more specifically in this instance for political institutions. In this view, both media trust and political trust are bound by a common destiny; they are caught in an inescapable relationship that can turn out to be a downward spiral of trust—or a race to the bottom—in some contexts or an upward spiral (or a virtuous circle; Norris 2000) in others. When interpreting these results, however, it has to be taken into account that the WVS data does not entitle us to draw conclusions about directions of causality because each wave has surveyed different samples of respondents. A systematic assessment of causal assumptions about the individual-level relationship between political trust and trust in the Press is impossible with this particular data set. Furthermore, our results pointing to the notion of a Trust Nexus are in line with evidence reported by Ariely (2015), Cappella (2002), and Tsfaty and Cohen (2005).

Also, low levels of institutional trust may have resulted from lack of experience with the new political order. When transition began for these countries in the early 1990's, the initial 'honeymoon effect' of people's excitement with new freedom was followed by a rapid decline of institutional trust (Catterberg and Moreno 2005)—and increasing disillusionment with the media by extension. At the same time, rising public aspirations and expectations with regard to democracy, governance, freedom of choice, as well as a long-term erosion of social trust and community networks may encourage people to look more critically at the news media and the content it produces (Mudde 2004; Norris 2011; Welzel 2013). The political environment seems to play an important role in the formation, maintenance, and decline of trust in the Press. More specifically, trust in the Press and political trust seem to be connected in an upward spiral in some countries and a downward spiral in others.

Populist discourse deliberately constructs an antagonistic relationship between 'the people' and 'the elite' in which the Press is construed as essentially an elitist institution. This impression is further cultivated by journalists expressing a condescending attitude toward those who conceive of themselves as being marginalized in the 'mainstream' media (Hochschild 2016). Notably, the United States is an illuminating example; among the western democracies studied, it is the country where trust of the Press and political trust are particularly strongly related. Ideological polarization does not appear to affect media trust directly; however, when political conversation takes

place in a highly polarized climate, the association between trust in the Press and political trust is indeed stronger. From a normative perspective, declining levels of trust in the Press, as observed in countries such as the United States and Australia, are most worrisome if they result from general anti-elitist attitudes and few but attention-grabbing media scandals rather than the performance of the Press in general. Trust is essential for most processes of political communication: If people do not trust the institutions that deliver the news, how could they make informed decisions in the political domain? At the same time, (Hanitzsch, et al. 2018) however, excessive media trust may be just as undesirable from a normative point of view. Ultimately, Democratic political systems are believed to greatly benefit from the public's critical attitude and a healthy sense of skepticism toward politics and the news media.

9. CONCLUSION

Based on the current state of research on media trust, two major questions have motivated this analysis: To what extent is a decline in trust in the Press as an institutions a universal phenomenon and what are the factors that drive differences in trust in the Press across societies and individuals as well as over time? Considering the first question, we can provide a clear answer: No, the widely noted decline in trust in the Press is not happening everywhere in the world or at least not at the same time. Trust in the Press is continuously eroding in a smaller proportion of surveyed societies, while for most countries, it seems to fluctuate over time in somewhat modest terms. Of all the countries we studied, it is the United States that experienced the largest and most dramatic decline in trust in the Press. Even and especially in the western world, the United States is likely an exception rather than the norm when it comes to developments of media trust. Hence, using the American experience as an exemplar of western democracies and extrapolating it to other (western) nations can produce seriously misleading conclusions. Second, political trust has emerged as a key factor for our understanding of trust in the Press. Our analysis of the World Values Survey data found robust evidence for what we called the Trust Nexus—the idea that trust in the news media is tied to the way the public looks at political institutions. The decay of trust in the media, for example, appears to go hand in hand with the erosion of public confidence in political institutions, as Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger, and Bennett (1999) noted almost two decades ago. We furthermore found that the relation between trust in the Press and political trust is becoming even stronger over time. This has important implications. Discussing trends in media trust in isolation from the larger institutional context obviously misses the point. If there is a crisis in public confidence, the news media is not the only institution that falls victim to this trend. Conversely, the erosion of media trust may be a marker of substantial issues with public confidence in a country's social institutions, most likely driven by a growing anti-elitist sentiment.

Finally, we would like to make note of some important caveats of the study presented in this essay. For one, using secondary data, we had to rely on a somewhat simplistic measure of trust of the Press despite the fact that trust is actually a much more complex construct, and even increasingly so in a changing media environment (Daniller, Allen, Tallevi, & Mutz, 2017). Moreover, the Press itself is anything but a monolithic category, especially when considering the important distinction between broadsheets and tabloids as well as newspapers and magazines. Furthermore, the use of secondary data restricted our choice of potential determinants when it would have been productive to also account for a rapidly changing digital media-scape (e.g., by including data about social media use). Finally, our study raised several questions that need to be addressed in future studies. One of these questions is related to causality in assessments of media trust vis-à-vis political trust. Such an analysis would require some kind of experimental setting or panel design to get at the heart of causality. Central to further studies should be to clarify the extent to which political trust, in addition to its direct effect, also mediates the relationships between trust in the Press and other predictors. We nonetheless think that our analysis has demonstrated the potential of combining cross-sectional and longitudinal data to furthering our understanding of media trust and its development over time. These dynamics should be the subject of further studies, ideally using a multi-wave panel design. Such a design allows making stronger claims about causality and studying the nexus between media and political trust.

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