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Changing Confidence in the News Media: Political Polarization on the Rise

Robert Reedy
Robert.Reedy@Colorado.EDU

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Changing Confidence in the News Media Political Polarization on the Rise

BY

Robert M. Reedy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of

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Thesis Advisors:

E. Scott Adler: Department of Political Science
Carey Stapleton: Department of Political Science

Defense Council:

Jennifer Fitzgerald: Department of Political Science
Annjeanette Wiese: Department of Humanities

Abstract:

A large number of Americans no longer have confidence in the news medias ability to report the news accurately. With ongoing anti-media rhetoric and presence of "fake news" in the political climate, Americans remain divided on the topic of the media, and believe the news media is biased in their coverage of President Trump's administration. Historically, a free and open press is vital for healthy democracies around the world, and is well protected under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Negative views towards the press can have dire consequences with regards to the political scene. This research will look at the relationship between trust in the news media to report on the Trump administration and several independent variables like age, gender, ideology, and Trump approval. Using the 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study, I found a strong correlation with media distrust and Trump approval, along with conservatism and younger Coloradans. This research highlights the importance of media trust in a post-election "Information Age," and suggests beliefs about the news media is no longer a politically neutral topic, but instead a politically polarizing dilemma.

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Literature Review	7
Trend Data	7
Causes of Media Perception	9
Effects of Media Distrust	11
Media Usage of the General Public	13
Guiding Hypotheses	15
Data Selection	17
Results	18
Discussion	23
Limitations	25
Conclusion	26
List of Variables	34
References	36

Tables and Graphs

Figure 1: Histogram - Trust in the News Media	28
Figure 2: Crosstab - Trust in the News Media and Partisanship	28
Figure 3: Crosstab - Trust in the News Media and Trump Approval	29
Figure 4: Crosstab - Trust in the News Media and 2016 Post-Election Results	29
Figure 5: Linear Regression - Trust in the News Media	30
Figure 6: Visual Regression - Trust in Media and Trump Approval	30

Figure 7: Visual Regression - Trust in Media and Ideology Approval	31
Figure 8: Visual Regression - Trust in Media and Trust in Federal Government	32
Figure 9: Visual Regression - Trust in Media and Age	32
Figure 10: Visual Regression - Trust in Media and Political Interest	33
Figure 11: Visual Regression - Trust in Media and Political Knowledge	33
Figure 12: Trend Data - Trust in Mass Media by Party	34

Introduction:

Why does the general public have varying levels of trust and confidence in the news media? More specifically, what causes Coloradans to view the news media as honest or dishonest when reporting on the Trump administration? By asking these questions I hope to uncover what causes Americans to view the news media (television, radio, newspapers, Internet, etc.) as trustworthy in their coverage of President Donald Trump's administration. By answering these questions, I hope to explain the changing political environment when it comes to the public and the news media.

These questions are important in the realm of politics, since the news media has great influence on a democratic system. Most well established democracies around the world have a free and open press that provides citizens with valuable information about the markets, political environment, and international events. This is made evident in Sheila Coronel's piece "The Role of the Media in Deepening Democracy," in which she found media to be a valuable watchdog in exposing corrupt politicians, as well as a tool for citizens of a nation to become educated on public policy and current events (Coronel 2003). As an extension to Coronel's arguments on media deepening democracy, Aymo Brunetti and Beatrice Weder observed the relationship between corruption and a free press through a comparative analysis, and found a significant correlation with a more free press and less corruption (Brunetti and Weder 2002). Countries with a more restricted press have higher levels of corruption in government; hence a free press might be a valuable check on government corruption in a democracy.

Finally, Toril Aalberg and James Curran's *How Media Inform Democracy* takes a comparative approach at understanding the relationship between media use, political trust, and political knowledge. Their findings suggest "exposure to newspapers and PBS news programs is

positively associated with political trust and political knowledge," but that exposure to other media doesn't produce the opposite. However, education is a larger predictor of political knowledge and political trust than the media (Aalberg and Curran 2012). These three studies all suggest that a free and open press is thus an essential part of a healthy democracy, as it hinders corruption and increases the public's knowledge and political awareness.

With the media being a valuable check on government, people's opinions about the fairness and accuracy of the press matters for a healthy democracy. In Art Swift's research with Gallup Polling, he found Americans' trust and confidence in the news media has been on the decline since 1997, and peaking in the late 1970s. In 2016, a total of 32% of Americans had a "great deal" or "fair amount" of confidence in the mass media, compared to 54% in 2003 (Swift 2016). Why has there has been such a great decline in confidence in the mass media over the past decade, and what explains this phenomenon? In a post-election country, the "mass media" has a significant role in covering political news, and the general public's feelings about this information greatly affects how they will view government, especially President Trump. I want to know why the general public has certain feelings about the news media based on their political affiliation, age, gender, and education, and whether there is a relationship with these variables and media distrust. This information will be important in unraveling voters' true feelings about politics, government, and the media. I hope to add to the existing research by determining what factors are most salient in determining distrust in the news media. My research will provide insight on people's views of the news media, and specifically the media's ability to report on the Trump administration. I hope to use new data to draw conclusions about how the public views the news media, and state why that matters in politics. If voters do not have confidence in the

news media's ability to cover the President's administration, that suggests a changing political climate.

Literature Review:

Overview:

Several political scientists have contributed greatly to the understanding of how distrust in media affects politics and government. Before diving into the collection of political scientists who have made past findings on media trust, I will be dividing up the literature into four sections: trend data, causes of media perception, effects of media distrust, and media usage of the general public. There have been groundbreaking findings in all four of these areas of focus, all adding to the existing literature on the public's trust in the news media. In the first section, trend data has been used to show how perceptions of the media have changed over periods of time. Trend data has given valuable demographic information on trust in the news media. The section on causes of media perception will unravel what variables can explain media perception, including age, media consumption, political ideology, and education. The third section will be devoted to seeing what the effects of media distrust have on voting behavior and the political climate. Finally, the last section will include information on how media usage affects trust in the news media, specifically by partisanship.

Trend Data:

Numerous trend data results have concluded that overall confidence in the news media is sinking in recent years. In Art Swift's Gallup research, he tried to find out what percentage of the American public trusts or distrusts the mass media over time. He also asks how media trust relates to political party and age. Gallup conducted this data by doing telephone interviews of a random sample of 1,020 American adults. They found that general trust in the mass media is in

decline, across all political parties since 1997. Specifically, they found that only 14% of Republicans had a "great deal" or "fair amount" of trust in the mass media, compared to 30% of independents and 51% of Democrats. They also found that younger people are more likely to distrust the media compared to older people (Swift 2016). This trend data is illustrated in Fig. 12, with trust in the mass media broken down by political party. This information is important groundwork in my project because I need a general sense of where the public stands on trust in the mass media, and how that has changed over time.

Frank Newport's Gallup article explores the public's views on American institutions in general, in which he finds ideology as a predictor for varying levels of confidence in various media institutions. In order to understand the public's opinion on these institutions, Gallup conducted a telephone survey of 1,009 randomly samples American adults. They found that overall trust in institutions is going up from 2016, specifically in newspapers. He found that general trust in newspapers fell among Republicans by 3%, but increased among Democrats by 16%. The data suggests that Democrats are also more trusting of television news with 31% (up 4% from 2016). However, trust among Internet news is low among both Republicans and Democrats, with only 14% and 16% trust respectively (Newport 2017). These findings are important for my project because I want to understand the differing levels of trust in different types of media, whether that's television, newspaper, or Internet political news.

In Amy Mitchell's "State of the News Media 2016," she looks at the changes in media consumption since 2007, and found some interesting revelations. Her findings suggest that media consumption has changed drastically in the past decade. She found that local TV viewership is in great decline, especially late night news, in which "the average audience for these late night newscasts has declined 22%" since 2007, from about 30 million to 22 million viewers in 2015.

Meanwhile, cable news viewership remains strong. Data from the Pew Research Center found that digital news was the second most common news source in 2016, with 38% of the American population. When it comes to radio listenership, the number of radio listeners in 2016 has risen to 57%, while in 2007, only about 20% of the American population listen to radio news.

According to Pew Research Center data, they found 73% of radio listeners listened on smartphones, and 61% listened on computers (Mitchell 2016). Due to changing media consumption methods, attitudes towards the news media might be affected by a decrease in local news coverage, which tends to be more neutral and less partisan, and an increase in digital and radio media consumption.

Causes of Media Perception:

A number of studies have looked into the causes of media distrust, most of which point to conservatism, distrust in government, and age as meaningful predictors of media distrust.

Another work I will be considering while conducting my research is David Jones' "Why Americans Don't Trust the Media," where Jones' main question is what causes Americans to distrust their news media. In order to find out what causes distrust in the media, Jones used data from the 2000 NES and performed multiple regressions by using variables like partisanship, Internet use, talk radio consumers, and trust in government. His results suggest that more conservative and talk radio consumers have a lower level of trust in the news media. He also found that distrust in government was strongly correlated with distrust in news media.

Additionally, his regressions suggest a slight correlation with distrust in media and Internet users. These results are important in my project because I want to know what has been the cause of distrust in the news media in the past decade. Jones offers an explanation for conservatives

who distrust the media, saying their distrust has less to do with journalistic integrity, but more to do with the "liberal bias" effect (Jones 2004).

Albert Gunther offers an interesting perspective when it comes to media distrust and the public in his work "Biased Press or Biased Public? Attitudes Toward Media Coverage of Social Groups." Gunther was interested in the relationship between distrust in the press and social group involvement. He observed how media consumers perceive news sources based on variables like age, sex, education, etc. He used ASNE survey data to draw conclusions on the relationship between distrust in the press coverage of social groups and many other variables. He found that his hypothesis was correct, and that "a respondent's own group identification" was the strongest predictor of distrust of media coverage and social groups. If a person was a member of a specific group, they were more likely to believe that media coverage was unfavorable towards their own identified group. In terms of demographics, Gunther found that there was no correlation with media attitudes, except with age, in which older people perceived news coverage as adequate (Gunther 1992). This was similar to the findings made in both Swift's Gallup piece and Jones' book, in which he found older individuals were more trusting of the news media. These findings are important for my research because Gunther finds a correlation with age and media trust. I will be testing to see if age, when controlled for partisanship and ideology, is correlated with media trust.

As a continuation of Gunther's piece on causes of media attitudes, Tsfat and Cappella conduct research on how media skepticism relates to mainstream and nonmainstream exposure. In their piece "Do People Watch What They Do Not Trust?", they wanted to know what factors predict exposure to mainstream and nonmainstream news media outlets. Tsfat and Cappella found that political interest was correlated with both mainstream and nonmainstream, but

political extremism and political knowledge were correlated with only nonmainstream media. Their model showed that liberal ideology, unemployment, and older age are associated with more mainstream media exposure, while individuals that were younger, skeptical of the media, politically extreme, political knowledgeable, and conservative ideology were associated with nonmainstream media exposure. They proved their hypothesis right, in that "media skepticism was positively and significantly associated with nonmainstream exposure—the higher the skepticism, the higher the exposure to nonmainstream media" (Tsfati and Cappella 2003). As a result, individuals who are skeptical of the news media are less likely to consume mainstream news outlets, and instead rely on nonmainstream sources. It's worth noting that nonmainstream media users are politically knowledgeable, and that these individuals are more knowledgeable than mainstream users. This study is a great addition to previous works done by Jones and Gunther, and confirms that media skeptical individuals that are conservative and younger also consume more nonmainstream media.

Effects of Media Distrust:

As a consequence of ongoing distrust in the news media, there is a consensus among scholars that this distrust in the media influences partisan voting. In Jonathan M. Ladd's *Why Americans Hate the News Media and How it Matters*, he looks at the problems distrust in the news media has on voting and political affiliations. He uses data from the 2000 NES in much of his book to explain how distrust in media can influence the public's beliefs on the economy and foreign policy. His findings also try to understand how distrust in media relates to partisanship. He found that distrust in the media was correlated to increase partisan voting. He also found that there is a relationship between media trust and political leanings, in which adults with positive feelings about the news media had positive opinions about the economy and crime rates. This is

a similar finding to Jones' piece, since he found correlations between media trust and trust in the federal government. Finally, Ladd research concluded that those who trusted media were more concerned about war and foreign conflict than those who don't trust the media (Ladd 2012). His findings are relevant to my project because Ladd argues that there is a relationship between partisan voting and media trust.

In Ladd's earlier work "The Role of Media Distrust in Partisan Voting", his focus is in the consequences of mass media distrust in America. Specifically, Ladd wants to know how these consequences are manifested in the 2004 election. In order to figure out the consequences of a distrusting population, Ladd looks at the relationship between partisanship and trust in media. He ran a multiple regression using many variables to control for radicalism, disillusionment, and cynicism. He finds that distrust in media can lead voters to "discount campaign news and rely on partisan predispositions as cues" (Ladd 2010). This is similar to Ladd's other piece, in which he claims media distrust can influence partisan voting behaviors. I agree with his findings, and believe distrust in media can directly influence voters. This work relates to my project because media distrust has impacts on partisan voting in America. My research will want to unravel who distrusts the media and what the consequences are from that, and in this case, party cues prove to be more salient to distrusting individuals than campaign news.

Another study by Emily Swanson looks at the effects of media distrust and how individuals characterize "their media" as superior to "the media." In her Associated Press Media Insight Project "'My' Media Versus 'The' Media: Trust in News Depends on Which News Media You Mean," she found that individuals have varying attitudes depending on which media people are consuming. Their study is more nuanced than previous works, and their findings suggest individuals are "skeptical of 'the news media' in the abstract, but generally trust the news they

themselves rely on." Individuals' attitudes about "the new media [they] use most often" are more positive than "the news media" in every category, from accuracy, morality, willingness to admit mistakes, protect democracy, and caring about people they report on. Just 17% of Americans believe "the media" is "very accurate," but 34% say the same about the media they consume. Also, 53% of respondents (more than double) believe the news media they consume is "moral" (Swanson 2017). These findings are salient to my project on distrust in the media, since the idea of "the media" is much more abstract and complicated. This "Us vs. Them" mentality is clearly manifested in this research, since most people do rely on the media they consume, but not "the media" in abstract.

Media Usage of the General Public:

When it comes to media consumption, there is a general consensus among scholars, in which people of varying backgrounds have different ways of interpreting the news. In this case, partisanship and level of cynicism have a great impact on how individuals consume and perceive news. In Allcott and Gentzkow's piece "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election", they looked at the consequences of fake news and media distrust in the 2016 presidential election. They wanted to know what types of people are more vulnerable to believing in fake news. First, they look at the history of the public believing in false conspiracy theories, and then they look at the data behind fake news stories. To figure out what type of people are more likely to fall for fake news, Allcott and Gentzkow run a regression using variables like party affiliation, media usage, and education to see whether they are more likely to believe in fake news headlines. They found that the average American remembered reading and believing fake news stories during the election, with higher exposure to pro-Trump articles than pro-Clinton articles. In the regression, they found that older, more educated, and more media consumption is correlated with more

accurate beliefs about news (Allcott 2016). These findings are salient to my project because fake news is a serious problem among the public, and that directly influences their overall trust in the media. I will use this information to understand how certain demographics have true or false beliefs about the media. Specifically, those who are non-educated, consume less media, and younger were less likely to see true news, which can directly impact their levels of trust in the media.

In "News Frames, Political Cynicism, and Media Cynicism," Cappella and Jamieson want to know why cynicism and skepticism in Congress, government, and social institutions has been on the rise. In order to test their question, they conducted a four-year study on how framing political news coverage can greatly influence audience responses. They found that a subtle change in framing a news study could activate cynicism about "government, policy debates, and campaigns." He argues it's hard to tell cause and effect between government trust and media trust, since "one domain tends to be cynics in the other domain" (Cappella 1996). This information is valuable to my project because it is a contribution to the debate of whether distrust in government leads to distrust in media, or vice versa. Jones argues that media trust causes distrust in the government, whereas Ladd would argue the opposite. Cappella and Jamieson's study is similar to Ladd's, in that they both account for certain levels of skepticism and cynicism in the public's views on politics. Their findings that framing stories contributes to cynicism shows how media distrust can, in fact, lead to distrust in politics. I will keep this in mind when running my regression with general levels of trust in the federal government.

This political divide is evident in Amy Mitchell's "Political Polarization & Media Habits," which looks at the relationship between media consumption and political affiliation. They are interested in finding out what the key differences are among Democrats and

Republicans when it comes to consuming media. They use survey data that was conducted in 2014 to see what news sources they find trustworthy. They also observed ideological differences among audiences of different media outlets. They found that Democrats are more trusting of most media outlets, especially outlets with more liberal viewers. They also found that most news sources were left of the spectrum (Mitchell 2014). This information will be important in my research because it's important to know where Republicans and Democrats differ among the different news outlets and react differently to opposing outlets. Past findings in Gunther and Jones explain the causes of media distrust, but Mitchell's piece clearly articulates the effects it has when it comes to media consumption regarding political ideology.

Literature Review Summary:

The consensus is clear among political scientists, in that levels of confidence in the mass media is on the decline, which consequentially leads to partisan voting and increased levels of cynicism. This increasing cynicism and disillusionment leads to differing perceptions of the economy, crime rates, and the direction of the country, as stated in Ladd's piece. Again, there is a strong relationship between media trust and variables like partisanship, age, and trust in the government, that being younger, more conservative, and distrusting of the government are less confident in the new media's abilities. Scholars believe that media consumption is a reaction to differences among demographics, including age, partisanship, education, and amount of media consumption.

Guiding Hypotheses:

I hypothesize that a majority of Americans will trust the news media "About half the time" when covering the Trump administration. I expect Republicans and conservatives will be the most skeptical of the news media, while Democrats and liberals will trust the media more.

According to Gallup, trust in mass media dropped to a new low in 2016, "with 32% saying they have a great deal or fair amount of trust in the media." When the numbers are broken down by political party, 51% of Democrats trust the mass media, while only 14% of Republicans trust the mass media (Swift 2016). I believe this difference in media trust between Democrats and Republicans is a result of Donald Trump's harsh criticism of various new networks. Another Gallup study found that Democrats are becoming increasingly more trusting of newspapers and television news. In 2017, Democrats had a 16% increase in confidence in newspapers, while Republican confidence in newspapers fell to just 12% (Newport 2017). These two Gallup studies, along with the Jones study, are consistent with my hypothesis that Republicans and conservatives are going to be more skeptical of the news media.

Another hypothesis for why the general public doesn't trust the mass media is due to the surge in "fake news" on the Internet and social media. A new study from Stanford's *Journal of Economic Perspectives* looks into the "fake news" epidemic in the 2016 election, and specifically addresses how it can influence people and be more susceptible to certain types of people. They found that "education, age, and total media consumption are strongly associated with more accurate beliefs about whether headlines are true or false" (Allcott and Gentzkow 2016). They found that Republicans are more credulous for both true and false articles than Democrats, but partisanship overall was not a determining factor. I believe those who are lesser educated, younger, and consume less media will be more likely to distrust the news media due to their susceptibility to fake news stories. Those who are educated and consume more media will be able to differentiate real and fake news, and will therefore be more trusting of news in general.

Finally, for the 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study, I expect individuals who are older and disapprove of President Trump to be more trusting of the news media. Previous literature

done by Jones and Gunther explain how age is correlated with media trust. They found that older individuals were generally more trusting of the news than younger individuals. I expect to see this in my regression results, since younger people tend to have negative attitudes about political institutions in general, as they haven't been fully integrated in the system themselves. It's no surprise that I expect to see individuals who support President Trump to distrust the news media, since the President has claimed the media to be the enemy of the American people. Those who approve of Trump will believe his sentiment on the "biased" news media, while those who don't approve of him will have confidence in the press.

Past work has found that there is a significant correlation with unfavorable views of press coverage and group membership. In Gunther's piece "Biased Press or Biased Public? Attitudes Toward Media Coverage of Social Groups," he concluded that an audience's attitudes of media coverage on social groups stems from "involvement with issues and groups" (Gunther 1992). Although I will not be able to have variables that control for respondents being in social groups, political parties do act as a political group and might explain attitudes towards media coverage. In Cappella and Jamieson's work "News Frames, Political Cynicism, and Media Cynicism," they find that framing a political news story can activate cynicism in "government, policy debates, and campaigns" (Cappella 1996). I hypothesize that there will be negative perceptions of media coverage with subtle changes in the framework of a news story.

Data Selection:

The evidence that I will use to answer my hypotheses will come from the Colorado Political Climate survey. I had the opportunity to ask a sample size of 800 Coloradan respondents one question regarding trust in the media's ability to report on the Trump administration. The survey mode will be an Internet survey, which will be done with the market

research and data analytics firm YouGov, which has picked a sample of Coloradans to participate in the survey. The question I will be including in the survey will be as following: "How often do you trust the news media to accurately report on the Trump administration?" The respondents will have response options from "Always," "Most of the Time," "About Half the Time," "Sometimes," or "Never" (Adler 2017). This question has frequency response options, which will give me a general sense of how often people find they trusting the political news media. From this question, I hope to understand Coloradan's confidence in the news media on their job of reporting the Trump administration. I plan on using this quantitative data and perform a statistical analysis using variables like party affiliation, support for Trump, education, gender, and age to confirm or contradict my hypotheses. The survey takes about 10 minutes and asks questions about trust in Congress, Governor Hickenlooper, and President Trump. With the data from the 2017 Colorado Political Climate Survey, I will be able to make inferences from the general population of Colorado, and run an in-depth statistical analysis of what is causing Coloradans to have differing levels of trust in the news media. By doing this, I hope to explain what causes varying levels of trust in the news media to report on the Trump administration.

Results

According to the 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study, there was a large divide between Coloradans on whether they trust or distrust the news media in reporting on the Trump administration. This divide is illustrated in Fig. 1, in which 31.7% of respondents trust the media "Most of the Time." This was the most frequent response by Coloradans; however, 27.5% of respondents "Never" trust the news media, which was the second most common response. Unsurprisingly, only 9.1% of Coloradans "Always" trust the news media, being the least

common response option (Alder 2018). This great divide between trust and distrust in the news media is clearly manifested from these results.

To uncover this divide between Coloradans with varying levels of trust in the news media, I created crosstabs to see if there were any underlying differences between these two groups. I found that Democrats were overwhelmingly more trusting of the news media than Republicans, which was consistent with my hypothesis. There is a shocking difference among Democrats and Republicans, in which 54% of Republicans "Never" trust the news media in reporting on the Trump administration. 54% of Democrats trust the news media "Most of the Time." Fig. 2 shows this relationship between media trust and partisanship. An even greater number of respondents who support Trump distrust the media (as shown in Fig. 3), in which 74% of those who "Strongly Approve" of Trump "Never" trust the news media. That is a 20-point difference between Republicans and those who strongly approve of Donald Trump. Additionally, 15.3% of individuals who strongly approve of the president trust the media "Sometimes." Therefore, a total of 89.3% of those who strongly approve of the president rarely, to never trust the media in reporting on the Presidents administration.

Another question regarding trust in the news media played a pivotal role in the 2016 election. I wanted to look at whether confidence in the media mattered when it came down to voters' decisions on Election Day. To look at this relationship between media trust and voting behavior, I used 2016 post-election results to see how Clinton and Trump voters differed when it came to trust in the news media. Unsurprisingly, I found that there was a strong divide among Clinton voters and Trump voters in Colorado. From the crosstab results (as shown in Fig. 4), it's clear there is a partisan divide among Democrats and Republicans when it comes to media trust. 17% of Clinton voters "Always" trust the news media, while 58% do so "Most of the Time."

Notably, the 17% of Clinton voters who "Always" trust the news media is higher than individuals who both Strongly Disapprove of President Trump and identify as Democrats.

To look more into this divide, I will run a linear regression with seven independent variables that I believe will best explain levels of trust in the news media. The independent variables I will be using for my linear regression are respondents' approval ratings of Trump, partisanship, ideology, trust in the federal government, gender, age, education, and race (white or non-white). I hope to use the gender, age, education, and race variables as controls for demographic differences among Coloradans. The linear regression will be able to show which independent variables are most correlated with trust in the news media when reporting on the Trump administration. Due to an oversample population of women and Democrats, I did a weighted regression to account for the gap in order to get a true representation of Coloradans.

The linear regression (shown in Fig. 5) suggests that there is a strong correlation between trump support and distrust in the news media to report on the Trump administration. For every one-unit increase in Trump support, there is a 0.519 unit decrease in media trust, and was statistically significant. The linear regression also suggests a statistically significant correlation with ideology and media trust. The more conservative a respondent was, the more distrusting of the news media they were. This is consistent with my hypothesis, and is consistent with previous works done by David Jones and Gallup. There was also a correlation with partisanship and media trust, but were less significant than Trump support and ideology. Republicans were more distrusting of the news media than Democrats, however, ideology is statistically more significant than party affiliation.

The linear regression also suggests a strong correlation between trust in the media and trust in the federal government. Individuals who are more trusting of the federal government are

more trusting of the news media. This is similar to what Jonathan Ladd used to control for skepticism, cynicism and overall disillusionment in government. When it came to level of education, there was no statistical significance, which is contrary to my hypothesis that more educated individuals would trust the media at higher rates. On the other hand, there was a slight correlation with media trust and age. Every one-unit increase in age is associated with a 0.005 unit increase in media trust. This is consistent with my hypothesis that older individuals would be more trusting of the news media when controlling for other variables like political ideology and party affiliation. However, I was surprised to find gender statistically significant when it came to media trust. Contrary to my hypothesis, females were more distrusting of the news media than men by 0.23 units. Finally, the regression table suggests a slight correlation among white Coloradans and distrust in the news media to cover the Trump administration. Overall, several demographic variables showed a slight correlation in media trust.

The three strongest predictors of media trust were Trump approval, conservative ideology, and trust in the federal government. To illustrate these variables' relationships with media trust, I created visual regressions in Figs. 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10. Notably, Trump approval was the strongest overall predictor of trust in the media to report on the Trump administration (Fig. 6). The average respondent who "Strongly Disapproved" on President Trump had a media trust score of just above 3, or "About Half the Time," while respondents who "Strongly Approve" of the President fell between a score of 1 and 2, or "Never" and "Some of the Time." In Fig. 7, conservative ideology was a strong predictor of media trust. On average, respondents who identify as "Extremely Liberal" trust the media to report on the Trump administration with a score of 4, or "Most of the Time," while there was much more variation with Conservatives, who fell between a 2 or 3 on average. The visual regression in Fig. 8 illustrates the relationship

between media trust and trust in the federal government. There is about a one-unit difference among respondents who "Never" or "Always" trust the federal government. When it comes to age, Fig. 9 shows the relationship between media trust and a respondent's age, older people generally having higher levels of confidence in the news media.

Another variable I used to predict media trust was political interest. When included in a new separate regression, political interest is a strong predictor of media trust, in which those who are more politically interested are more trusting of the news media. This might be a useful measure for political cynicism, since those who are not at all interested in politics might be skeptical of political institutions. Fig. 10 shows the relationship with media trust and political interest, with more variation with individuals who are not politically interested. It's difficult to determine whether individuals are distrusting of the media due to disinterest in politics, or the opposite.

To test whether trust in the media relates to political knowledge, I ran the same regression in Fig. 5, but with political knowledge as an independent variable. This variable measured a respondent's general level of knowledge regarding the U.S. political system. Two questions were asked ranging from Senators' term length (6 years), and which political party has more conservative economic policies (Republican Party). My findings suggest a statistically significant correlation with media trust and political knowledge. This relationship is illustrated in Fig. 11, in which those who scored higher on the political knowledge quiz were more trusting of the media to report on the Trump administration. When isolating this relationship with media trust and political knowledge, there is no correlation. There may be some parallels with political knowledge and political interest, and it's possible either variable might be explaining the variance in media trust, considering both variables are correlated with one another.

Discussion:

When it comes to "why" Americans are so divided on the issue of trust in the media to report on the President's administration, the answer may be more complicated, and possibly a combination of factors. One reason might have to do with the changing political climate and the election of Donald Trump as President. In recent years, President Trump and many conservative news outlets have criticized "the news media" for being dishonest. President Trump often calls the news media as "fake news," and shortly after his inauguration referred to many mainstream media outlets like CNN, ABC News, CBS, and NBC News as "the enemy of the American people" (Grynbaum 2017). As the face of the Republican Party, Trump's attacks against certain media outlets have a great influence on his supporters, as well as others in his party. Although trust and confidence in the media was low among Republicans before Trump's 2016 Presidential Campaign, trust in the mass media dropped from 32% in 2015 to 14% in 2016, the largest drop since the start of the time series data. This decline in media trust among Republicans has been ongoing since the early 2000s, and a possible "Trump Effect" might explain why levels of trust among Republicans are at an all time low.

It's possible the perceived "liberal bias" effect, coined in David Jones' 2004 piece, has had a great influence on conservatives. The 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study confirms previous studies conducted by Jones and Gunther that suggest conservatives and younger individuals are more distrusting of the news media. If conservatives believe that mainstream media outlets are biased and don't represent their interests, they will feel inclined to distrust the mass media. According to Tsfaty and Cappella, they found that Americans don't watch what they don't trust. Instead, individuals who are exposed to nonmainstream news outlets tend to be more conservative, younger, and more politically extreme. Since conservatives don't trust the

mainstream media, nonmainstream outlets are safe havens for these underrepresented ideologies. For example, David Jones' study suggests talk radio consumers are more skeptical of the media, of which many talk radio shows are conservative and more politically extreme. These nonmainstream sources might influence those types of individuals to be less trusting of mainstream outlets; hence these nonmainstream consumers will be more skeptical of the media.

Another reason for why individuals distrust the news media might have to do with the decline in local news consumption. Local news media is less focused on the national political scene and in Washington D.C. than cable news networks, which tends to create more division than local news coverage of apolitical events. Since fewer people are watching local news, more people are relying on other news outlets that might be more partisan leaning. With more partisan outlets and nonmainstream media outlets, these news sources may serve to be echo chambers for individuals who are unwilling to watch a more neutral and unbiased news source. With more partisan leaning news and less localized and apolitical news, this might be a cause of distrust in the abstract concept of "the news media." The news media is larger and more diverse than every before, and the line between mainstream and nonmainstream news will continue to be blurred.

The media is a broad topic. This has led to problems with measuring levels of trust and confidence in the news media. The study conducted by Emily Swanson suggests that individuals are twice as trusting of the media they consume versus the abstract concept of "the media." If my research had focused on specific media outlets as being honest or dishonest, I would have been able to get a more nuanced view of media trust. To encompass the entire news media would be difficult because of the varying types of media being consumed in America. For this study, using the abstract term "the news media" might be the best way to measure overall confidence in the news media, even if it's overtly vague. Narrowing in on a specific type of media, like digital or

radio might have narrowed my focus too far from my objective, which was more in line with people's trust in the media and the Trump administration.

Limitations:

Although my data suggests a strong correlation with media distrust and several independent variables, I was limited in the number of independent variables from the 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study. There are other variables that may show a strong relationship with media distrust, but I unfortunately was limited from my dataset. It would be useful for further research to include media consumption variables that could help explain the variation in media distrust. An additional question in the survey more specific to the topic of the news media would have reinforced my arguments.

More data on an individual's media consumption frequency would be extremely valuable because there might be a correlation with distrust and frequency of media consumption. For example, a survey question could be phrased, "On a typical week, how often do you consume news from the mass media?" In addition to media consumption frequency, I would also include a variable on what sources of news they consume, encompassing liberal, conservative, mainstream, nonmainstream, credible, or non-credible outlets. These sources could be from the Internet, newspapers, radio shows, cable news, etc. I would be particularly interested in seeing whether politically partisan news outlets like Fox News or MSNBC would have an impact on media trust, versus individuals who gets their news from nonpartisan outlets like ABC News or PBS News. In the topic of media trust, there are varying types of media, and that has a great impact on how individuals perceive the all encompassing and abstract concept known as "the news media." I would also be interesting to compare nonmainstream to mainstream news outlet consumption and whether that leads to media trust or distrust. Finally, I would be interested to

see if there were any correlations with individuals who consume both liberal and conservative news outlets and media skepticism. Further studies could look at these relationships with media consumption and trust in the abstract "news media."

Another interesting variable to include could look at respondents' levels of trust or distrust in these particular news outlets. From this, we could look at where liberals and conservatives differ on what news sources are "credible" or "not credible." This would be similar to Amy Mitchell's piece that looks at media habits and political ideology. However, my study would add on to this existing data, because I would use these variables to look at correlations between individuals' levels of trust in the many news outlets and overall trust in the news media. This would make for new discoveries in the topic of the news media and would add to the existing knowledge produced by Mitchell.

Conclusion:

According to the 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study, the most significant predictor for trust in the media to report on the Trump administration was Trump approval, political ideology, and trust in the federal government. My findings suggest a negative correlation between Trump approval ratings and trust in the media to report on the Trump administration, as well as a negative correlation with conservatives and trust in the media. Feelings towards Trump and political ideology were stronger predictors of attitudes towards the news media than partisanship. Also, individuals that were younger, female, and white were less trusting of the news media.

Ultimately, Americans' attitudes towards the news media matter in the political environment. It's clear from the Colorado Political climate study that polarization is on the rise in the United States, and that there are several factors that determine whether an individual is

skeptical of the medias coverage of the Trump administration. A distrusting population towards American institutions matters, and when the public doesn't believe in the ability for the news media to cover the Presidents administration, that is problematic. More than ever, the news media is a divisive issue in American politics. To be against the media is to have a political identity, and the same goes with those who trust the media. The two political parties are more divided on the issue of the media than ever before, and this will have serious political implications for the years to come. One thing is certain, the public is divided on the news media's ability to report on the news, and the media is not going anywhere.

Tables and Graphs:

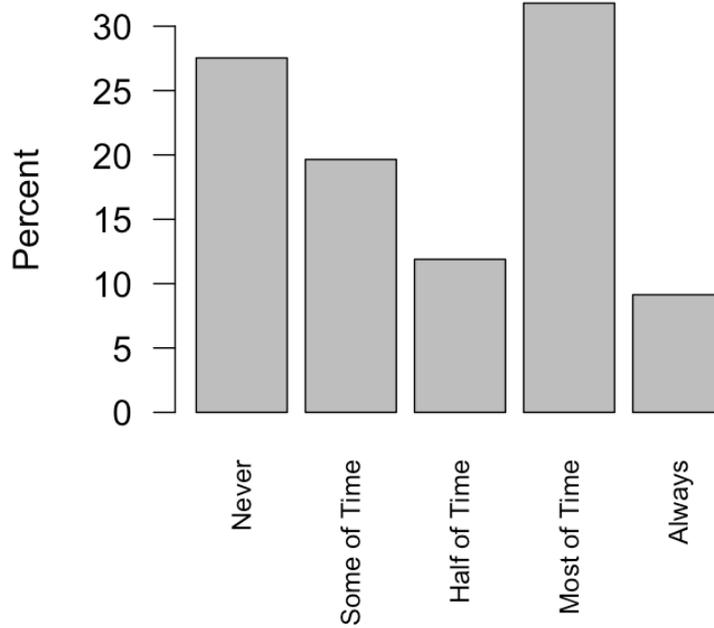


Fig. 1. Histogram - Trust in the News Media. Source: 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study.

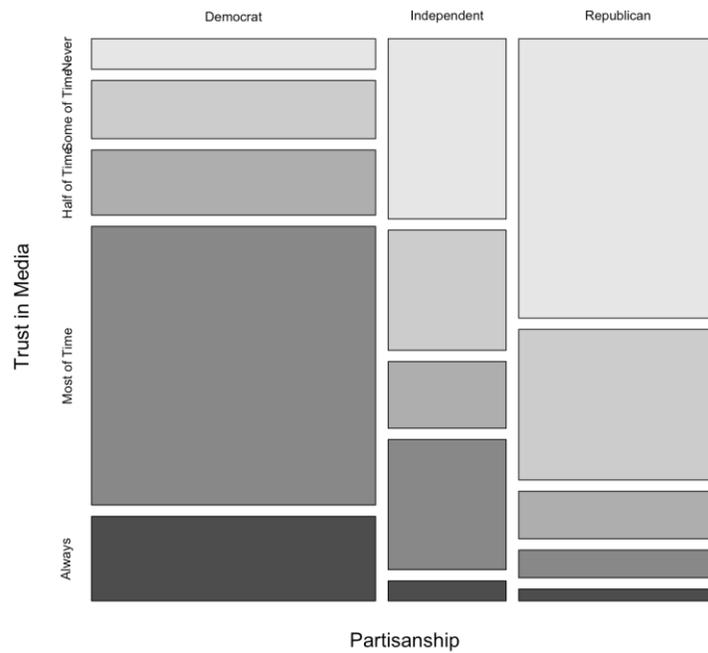


Fig. 2. Crosstab - Trust in the News Media and Partisanship. Source: 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study.

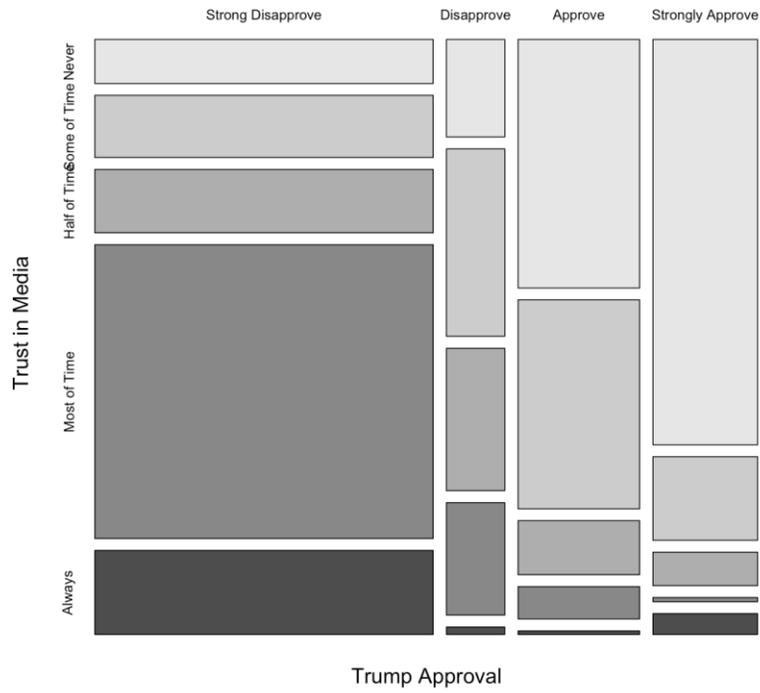


Fig. 3. Crosstab - Trust in the News Media and Trump Approval. Source: 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study.

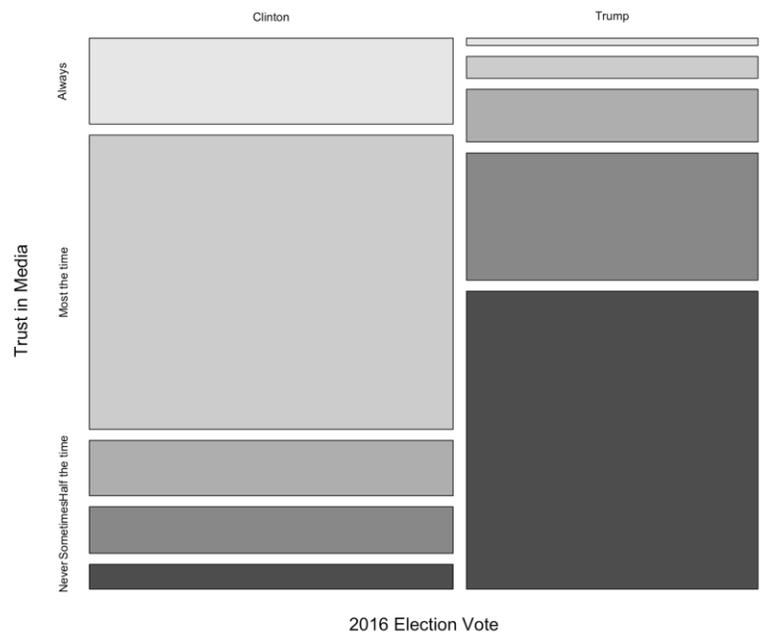


Fig. 4. Crosstab - Trust in the News Media and 2016 Post-Election Results. Source: 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study.

Dependent variable:	
Trust_in_Media	
Trump_Approval	-0.519*** (0.053)
Republican	-0.051* (0.031)
Conservative	-0.185*** (0.035)
Trust_Federal_Gov	0.251*** (0.040)
Female	-0.230*** (0.077)
Education	-0.022 (0.026)
Age	0.005** (0.002)
White	-0.172* (0.094)
Constant	4.568*** (0.240)
Observations	761
R2	0.446
Adjusted R2	0.440
Residual Std. Error	1.042 (df = 752)
F Statistic	75.633*** (df = 8; 752)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Fig. 5. Linear Regression - Trust in the News Media. Source: 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study.

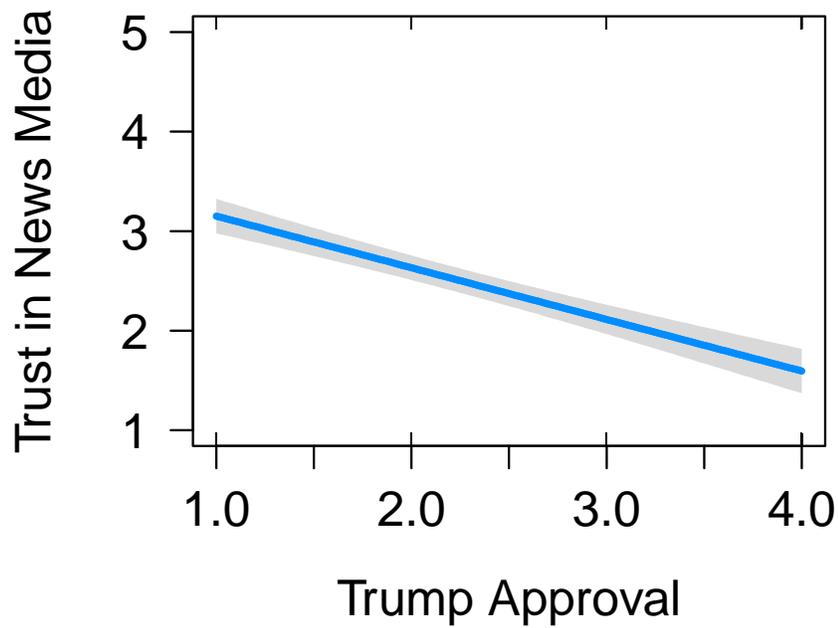


Fig. 6. Visual Regression - Trust in Media and Trump Approval. Source: 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study.

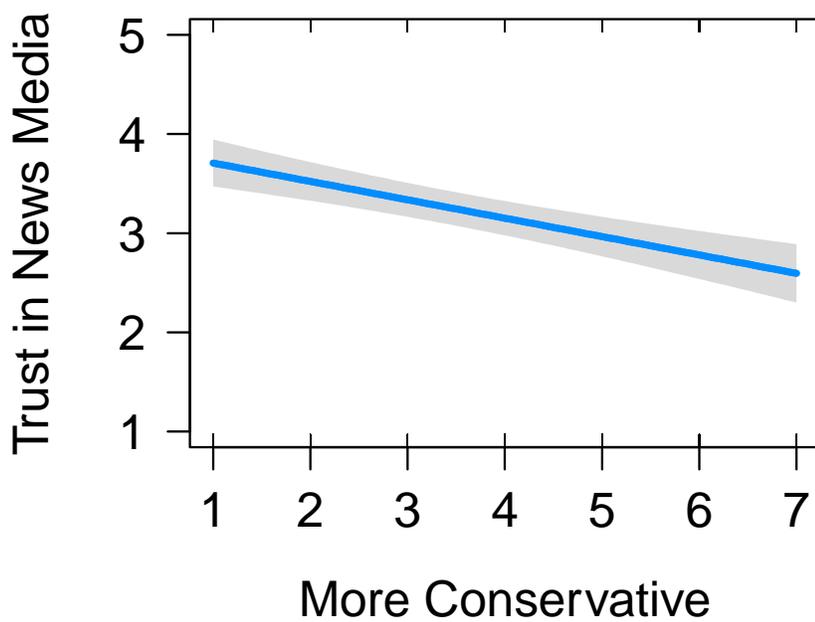


Fig. 7. Visual Regression - Trust in Media and Ideology. Source: 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study.

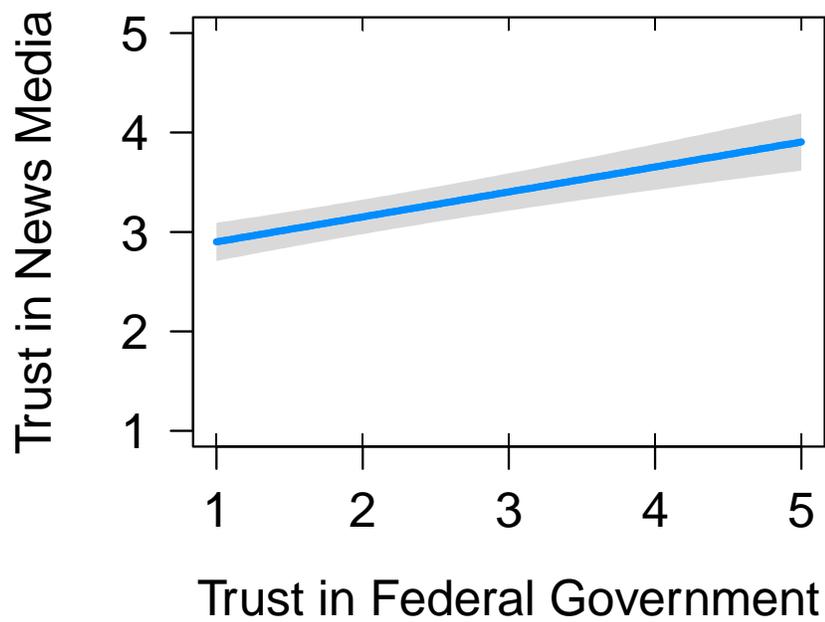


Fig. 8. Visual Regression - Trust in Media and Trust in Federal Government. Source: 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study.

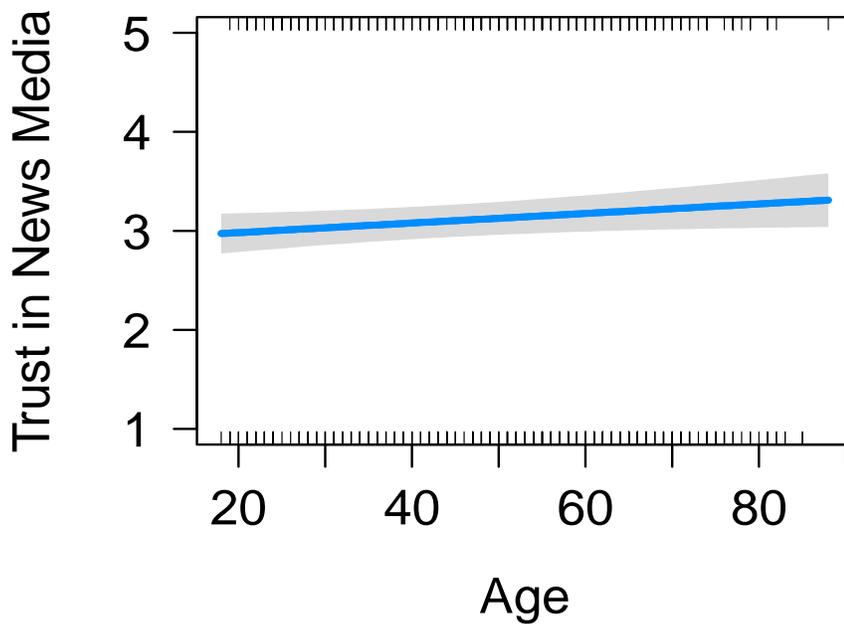


Fig. 9. Visual Regression - Trust in Media and Age. Source: 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study.

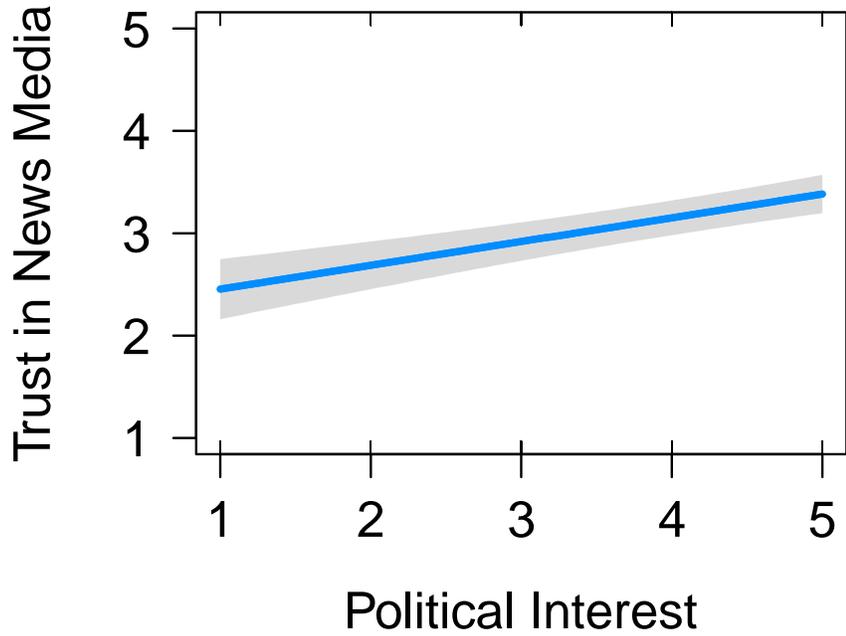


Fig. 10. Visual Regression - Trust in Media and Political Interest. Source: 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study.

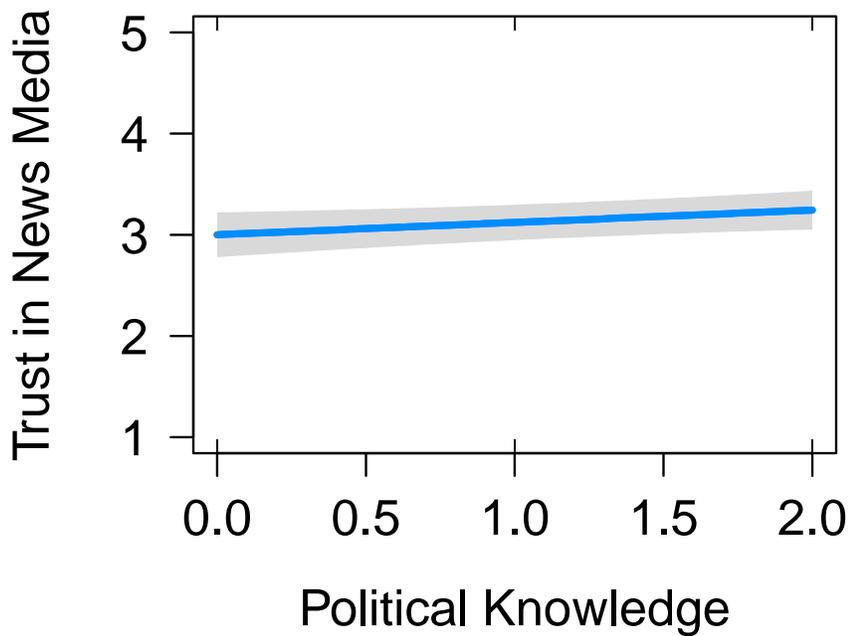


Fig. 11. Visual Regression - Trust in Media and Political Knowledge. Source: 2017 Colorado Political Climate Study.

Trust in Mass Media, by Party

% Great deal/Fair amount of trust

■ Republicans ■ Independents ■ Democrats

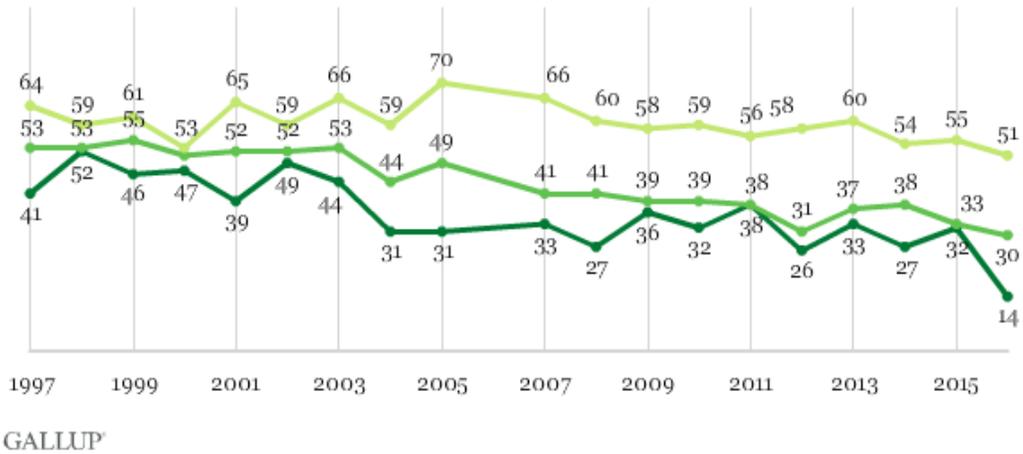


Fig. 12. Trend Data - Trust in Mass Media by Party. Source: Gallup. Date: Sept. 7-11, 2016. (Swift 2016).

List of Variables:

Trust in Media:

Measures trust in the news media to report on the Trump administration (1 = Never, 2 = Some of the Time, 3 = Half of the Time, 4 = Most of the time, 5 = Always).

Trump Approval:

Measures support for President Trump (1 = Strongly Disapprove, 2 = Disapprove, 3 = Approve, 4 = Strongly Approve).

Republican:

Measures partisanship (1 = Strong Democrat, 2 = Democrat, 3 = Lean Democrat, 4 = Independent, 5 = Lean Republican, 6 = Republican, 7 = Strong Republican).

Conservative:

Measures political ideology (1 = Extremely Liberal, 2 = Liberal, 3 = Slightly Liberal, 4 = Moderate, 5 = Slightly Conservative, 6 = Conservative, 7 = Extremely Conservative).

Trust Federal Gov:

Measures levels of trust in the federal government (1 = Never, 2 = Some of the Time, 3 = Half of the Time, 4 = Most of the time, 5 = Always).

Political Interest:

Measures general levels of interest in politics (1 = Not at all Interested, 2 = Not Very Interested, 3 = Somewhat Interested, 4 = Interested, 5 = Very Interested).

Political Knowledge:

Measures general knowledge of the political system, based on two political questions regarding Senator term length and economic policies of the Republican Party (0 = 0 correct, 1 = 1 correct, 2 = 2 correct).

Demographic Variables:

Female: Gender of respondent (1 = Male, 2 = Female).

Education: Level of education (Less educated to more educated).

Age: Continuous variable measuring age of respondent (Younger age to older age).

White: Binary variable measuring race of respondent (0 = non-white, 1 = white).

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