



CRISIS IN DEMOCRACY: RENEWING TRUST IN AMERICA

**THE REPORT OF THE KNIGHT COMMISSION ON
TRUST, MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY**

The Knight Commission invites you to join the public dialogue on this report beginning February 2019 at <http://as.pn/trust> or by using the Twitter hashtag #knightcomm

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CONTENTS

Statement by the Co-Chairs, <i>Tony Marx and Jamie Woodson</i>	2
Executive Summary	5
<i>Crisis in Democracy: Renewing Trust in America</i>	
<i>The Report of the Knight Commission on Trust, Media and Democracy</i>	
Part I. Context	
Chapter 1. Trust in Democratic Governance	14
Chapter 2. Media and Democracy: Our American History	24
Chapter 3. The New Media Environment	38
Chapter 4. Why Has Trust in Government and Media Declined?	52
Part II. Recommendations	
Chapter 5. Restoring Trust in Journalism	72
Chapter 6. Strengthening Democracy Through Technology	104
Chapter 7. Revitalizing Citizenship in the Digital Age	126
Call to Action	148
Endnotes	153
Appendix	
Glossary	171
Contributors to the Knight Commission	176
Members of the Commission	180

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STATEMENT BY THE CO-CHAIRS



T

here is an urgency today in the United States. Political polarization has reached crisis proportions. Americans cannot assume that their fellow citizens are operating under the same set of facts. Many of us live inside echo chambers where only our own political sentiments can be heard, and distrust those who do not agree with our particular viewpoint. Provocateurs and hatemongers, foreign and domestic, are fueling disagreements, and media are amplifying the divides. Some of this is recent, but some is the continuation of long trends of media disruption, voter apathy and political polarization.

However one describes the problem, there is a disturbing discord in the American polity that needs everyone's attention and resolution to fix. This Commission report focuses on the intersection of the distrust in American democratic institutions and in the journalistic media. These are difficult times, calling for strong responses to the dilemmas set forth below.

The Knight Commission on Trust, Media and Democracy consists of 27 individuals from various sectors of society—current and former members of media, business, nonprofits, academia, government and the arts. A partnership of the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Commission began working in the summer of 2017 with the aim of reporting in early 2019. During that time, the Commission benefited from a wide diversity of input on crucially important issues. It held meetings around the country, hearing from a wide array of witnesses, scholars, activists, government officials and, through a Medium channel, the general public.

We as co-chairs are awed by the concern, competence and commitment of our fellow Commissioners as well as the many others who have participated in the process. It is a daunting task that the Commission has undertaken, and none, in our minds, could be more important. What should Americans do to restore trust in our democratic republic and the media that serve it and us? More specifically, what can our leaders, our media and our citizens do to better understand the “other,” to distinguish between truth and disinformation and to govern ourselves fairly and effectively?

The Commission considered many creative ideas for solutions and refined the ones it considered the best and most practical. Some are bold, some are obvious, all are aspirational. They embrace a set of values that provides a compass for where this country should go: responsibility, transparency, diversity, innovation and commitment to the greater good.

For example, we look to the journalism sector to be more transparent in how they develop, write and correct stories, and in telling us who they are. We look to the digital distributors of news to act more responsibly in determining what goes out over their media, while also giving consumers more control over what they receive. We also support measures that give consumers the opportunity to change providers. And we ask all Americans, including their political, media and business leaders, to commit to this country's basic democratic ideals by becoming more civically- and digitally-literate citizens.

Each Commissioner comes at the issues from a different perspective, life experience and value set. Yet we were all able to agree on these principles and proposals. We are particularly proud that this Commission modeled what we hope America can do more of: come together, listen to the other, find common values and common ground, and move forward with goodwill and ambitious aims. Some of the Commission's recommendations are specifically intended to encourage this kind of civic deliberation to take place more often, across political, geographical and class divides. That is our message, one that we hope all Americans commit to pursuing in the years ahead regardless of their political viewpoints and the particular issues facing their communities and nation.

This report has two parts. The first defines the issues and establishes the context. The second sets forth a series of unanimous recommendations addressed to government, media executives, business leaders, journalists, political leaders and every citizen.

That said, we each have different opinions on particular details that we hope to expand on in the days and years ahead. We also note that while each of the Commissioners supports these measures, the organizations for which they work do not necessarily endorse every point.

We have many to thank for bringing us to the culmination of this report. We do so in the Contributors to the Knight Commission section at the end of the report.

The foundations of the American form of government are built on the assumption that truth will prevail from a fair deliberation among people of goodwill, coming together for a common purpose. Each of these elements is in crisis. The American identity is at stake. The urgency is clear. We urge you to act.

Tony Marx
Co-Chair

Jamie Woodson
Co-Chair

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a crisis of trust in American democracy. By virtually every measure, Americans' trust in most of their democratic institutions, and particularly in the media, has declined dramatically over the past half century. A country that provides universal education, proclaims press freedom and enjoys the legacy of one of the oldest representative governments in the world is nevertheless having great difficulty understanding and supporting its democracy.

Why are Americans losing faith in democratic institutions? Government appears gridlocked and unresponsive amid large-scale global shocks and serious domestic challenges. American politics are sharply polarized. The gap between the wealthy and the poor continues to grow, with declining prospects for upward mobility. And racial tensions persist.

Although a vibrant free press is an essential element of a healthy democracy, much of the public lacks faith that the news media are accurate and unbiased. While most people find some content source that they like, they show declining trust in news media as a category.

Advances in technology have given citizens unparalleled access to the world's great pool of knowledge and people. Yet that same technology is overwhelming individuals' ability to find news they consider trustworthy. Because the internet allows anybody to create content and share it widely, there are fewer controls over accuracy. Misinformation and disinformation are spreading virally, sometimes by innocent sharing, sometimes with malice.

Meanwhile, the line between news and opinion has become blurred, as news reporting is increasingly intermixed with commentary. Declining revenues have forced many local news organizations to cut back substantially or shut their doors entirely, creating local "news deserts." And attacks by politicians on the media are further shaking people's trust in the press.

Layered on top of these challenges is perhaps an even more fundamental development—an inability to agree on facts. In 2018, unwelcome facts are labeled as "fake," false information is regularly sent out over the internet and increasingly sophisticated "deepfake" video technologies can manipulate images and voices to realistically portray something that never happened. "Filter bubbles" make it possible for people to live in "echo chambers," exposed primarily to the information and opinions that are in accord with their own.

So, accompanying and amplifying concerns over the future of American democracy is a crisis of trust in news and basic information. But a “post-truth” politics is incompatible with a functioning democracy, and an assault on the notion of truth is a fundamental attack on our ability to self-govern.

The Knight Commission on Trust, Media and Democracy, 27 diverse citizens organized by the Aspen Institute in partnership with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, hopes for an American future that promotes knowledge of the country’s democratic heritage, encourages a willingness to engage in local civic activities and supports an array of inclusive institutions in government, media, business and civil society. It sees vibrant and responsible journalism serving the goal of self-government and holding the powerful accountable, and a world where new forms of communication enhance rather than diminish a healthy democracy.

This Commission wants 21st century American democracy to work at all levels, and strongly believes it can. This report aims to articulate the reasons for the growing distrust in American institutions, to re-envision news media that will be fair, truthful and responsible, and to catalyze citizens to participate in civic life.

The Commission recommends specific actions to restore trust in media and democracy. It identifies what journalists can do; what the media distributors such as social media and other digital networks can do; what government and business leaders can do; and, perhaps most important, what each American can and should do to assume responsibility for democratic governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

JOURNALISM

VALUES: The Commission calls for all news media to rededicate themselves to the ideals of the profession: to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing, to hold the powerful accountable, and to pursue the truth.

1. **Practice radical transparency.** The media should develop industrywide, voluntary standards on how to disclose the ways they collect, report and disseminate the news. The Commission calls for a convening of news leaders across competitive boundaries to work together to develop and adopt common standards and best practices that promote transparency. These include: labeling news, opinion and fact-based commentary; best practices on corrections, fact-checking, anonymous sources and tracking disinformation; and avoiding advertising formats that blur the line between content and commerce. They should also develop strategies to better engage with the public and reflect the interests of their communities.
2. **Expand financial support for news.** There are some promising new models for funding for-profit journalism. But market solutions alone are insufficient to provide the quality of journalism that citizens need and deserve, especially news about local communities. Philanthropy should increase its support for journalism in the public interest. The Commission focuses on the development of new nonprofit models to achieve sustainability and to serve journalistic missions. It calls for the creation of one or more national venture-philanthropy entities dedicated to funding new and existing nonprofit organizations across the country.
3. **Use technology to combat disinformation.** To remain relevant, the media must learn to use advanced technology in all aspects of their businesses. Some of the larger entities are leading this effort, but many more need to catch up. In particular, the Commission urges media and technology companies to improve technologies to determine and then address disinformation. The media should also expose their audiences to diverse viewpoints, understanding the tendency of new media environments to create and amplify “filter bubbles” in which people tend to view only material that already supports their opinions.
4. **Diversify news organizations.** News organizations should adopt recruitment, hiring and retention practices that increase diversity of staff, and even of owners. Newsrooms should develop mentoring and training programs that can help enlist, retain and promote more women and journalists of color at all levels. And they need to include other underrepresented groups, such as underrepresented geographical and political groups, so that the reporting they produce reflects the entire community. The Commission also challenges all news organizations to develop and publish metrics for hiring and employment in newsrooms.

TECHNOLOGY

VALUES: The internet has vastly expanded the ability to access information and communicate with others around the world. Yet this new technology has also made people vulnerable to abuse of personal data, disinformation, hate speech, harassment, trolling, foreign manipulation and more. The Commission affirms the importance of free expression, an open internet and inclusion, understanding that there are no quick solutions, or single-shot inoculations against future threats to American democracy. But leaders and new media entities must act responsibly and serve democratic principles.

5. **Online services must take responsibility for protecting their users.** In other areas of American life, professionals and businesses such as doctors and accountants that have access to personal data about customers commonly have a “fiduciary duty” to protect their interests. To complement privacy legislation and enforcement, the Commission supports proposals that technology companies and online services become “information fiduciaries.” As fiduciaries they must act in a trustworthy manner by ensuring security of user data, keeping it confidential and not using it for their own benefit in ways that compromise the interests of the user.
6. **Online services should track and disclose sources of information.** Online platforms should develop technology and standards to disclose to their users where the information they see comes from—identifying the author and publisher of articles, for example. In addition, the Commission encourages the development of an automated tracking system that would enable analysis on the original source of a story, as well as how it spread to the public. The Commission also recommends that the sponsors of all digital advertising be clearly identified. This requirement should apply particularly to “native advertising,” which looks similar to independently produced editorial content but is paid for by a third party. Finally, the Commission recommends disclosure of information regarding the targeting of political ads intended to affect attitudes toward a political issue.
7. **Empower people to make technology work for them.** The Commission recommends that researchers develop ways to measure healthy dialogue online. These include creating metrics to help analyze balanced, democratic discourse. It recommends that internet platforms provide people with information about how algorithms work that determine which information they see, as well as opportunities to customize them. It also recommends enabling people to move their data from one social network to another. And it proposes a multi-stakeholder forum for technology, journalism and consumer interests to work out solutions to a variety of issues that arise in this space.

CITIZENSHIP

VALUES: Citizens need knowledge as well as the opportunity and a sense of responsibility to participate fully in public debate and other democratic activities. Yet many lack the basic skills to do so. Every citizen should have a basic understanding of the Constitution and our system of government. Citizens also need opportunities to engage in productive dialogue about local civic matters with others who hold opposing political viewpoints.

- 8. Provide students of all ages with basic civic education and the skills to navigate online safely and responsibly.** Too many Americans lack an understanding of basic elements of their government and governing principles. Before they graduate from high school, all students should be able to pass the U.S. citizenship exam or a civic knowledge test.

Furthermore, individuals who lack digital literacy skills are less able to assess the reliability of information sources in order to tell fact from fiction. They are easier to harass, mislead or defraud online. They can find it harder to gain knowledge, pursue education or careers, stay healthy, protect their rights and help their communities improve.

State and local educational authorities need a plan to provide their citizens with the skills to access, analyze, evaluate, create and act on digital information based on new standards for civic and 21st century literacies. Prior to participating in social media, every child should have a basic understanding of digital media and how to use them safely. Before reaching the legal voting age of 18, individuals should be digitally as well as civically literate, able to find and use information necessary to be knowledgeable voters. These goals should apply to everyone, no matter their income, where they live or what their background.

- 9. Reach across political divides.** The Commission recommends that communities develop programs hosted by trusted local institutions to convene dialogue among citizens. These exchanges should address important questions ranging from local issues to relevant constitutional questions. Public libraries are one obvious place for such discussions. The Commission also recommends the development of public awareness campaigns to encourage people to participate in civic institutions.
- 10. Encourage a commitment to a year of national service.** As politics has become increasingly tribalized, citizens have lost a shared American narrative and a sense of citizenship. To address this, the time has come to revitalize efforts to encourage a year of voluntary national service. The Commission identifies four primary areas in which national service could help renew trust in our democratic institutions and particularly in the press: general civic service; teaching traditional and digital literacy; engaging in public service journalism, particularly at the local level; and serving in libraries. Efforts can be inspired by existing programs, such as the Service Year Alliance, AmeriCorps and Report for America.



This report begins and ends with the current national crisis in trust. Americans need to take measures now to sustain the democracy that has developed for almost two and a half centuries, to maintain the free and open press that undergirds that democracy, and inspire the citizenry to find areas of common ground that outweigh their political and cultural differences.

Like democracy at its best, this will be a process. This report is only a beginning point—a compass, not a map.

We are citizen-sovereigns. We must act as sovereigns, take responsibility and move forward.

Knight Commission on Trust, Media and Democracy

RECOMMENDATIONS

Restoring Trust in Journalism

Recommendation 1. *Transparency*: Encourage radical transparency and community engagement from news organizations.

Recommendation 2. *Journalism*: Increase support for quality journalism at all levels, with a focus on rebuilding local journalism.

Recommendation 3. *Innovation*: Use technology to enhance journalism's roles in fostering democracy.

Recommendation 4. *Diversity and Inclusion*: Build a news and information ecosystem that reflects the diversity of individual communities and our nation.

Strengthening Democracy Through Technology

Recommendation 5. *Responsibility*: Technology companies and online services that collect user data should become information fiduciaries with duties to the user.

Recommendation 6. *Transparency*: Technology companies and online services should embrace transparency by providing more information about the impact of their advertising tools, the source and sponsorship of content online and the role that algorithms play in the flow of news and information.

Recommendation 7. *Innovation*: Invest in new structures and technology-based solutions to address emerging problems.

Revitalizing Citizenship in the Digital Age

Recommendation 8. *Literacy*: Revitalize education in civics and 21st century literacies for all citizens in order to better align the democratic process with America's modern, highly connected culture.

Recommendation 9. *Engagement*: Create local spaces for constructive civic dialogue bridging various communities, and encourage broader civic engagement.

Recommendation 10. *Commitment*: Encourage widespread commitment to a year of voluntary national service.

DEMOCRACY AND THE NEWS
MEDIA ARE INEXTRICABLY
INTERTWINED, AND IT IS CLEAR
THAT **BOTH ARE IN CRISIS.**

PART I

CONTEXT

CHAPTER

1

TRUST IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE



FINDINGS

Democracy and Trust

-
- ▶ Trust is a critical element in the functioning of democracies, but it must be balanced: too little trust in government leads to political dysfunction, but too much trust can lead to autocracies.
-
- ▶ Citizens need not agree with every government action or trust each individual officeholder. At a minimum, citizens must trust that the democratic political process will protect the national interest, act responsibly and uphold the rule of law.
-
- ▶ Holding those in power accountable is a critical element of a democratic republic. Another vital element is communication between the government and the citizenry. Therefore, freedom of the press, protected by the Constitution, is elemental to self-governance.

The Decline of Trust

-
- ▶ The overall level of Americans' trust in government has declined over the past half-century and now stands at or near historically low levels.
-
- ▶ The decline in trust is not confined just to government. Surveys show a similar decline in trust in many institutions, including big business, NGOs and the media.
-
- ▶ This erosion of trust is not just an American phenomenon.
-
- ▶ There is a similar crisis in trust in many other countries. Trust in media globally is at an all-time low.

These developments, together, constitute a crisis of trust in democracy in this country as well as elsewhere that warrants the attention of every leader, businessperson and citizen.

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or over two centuries, Americans have wrestled with what it means to govern themselves. Through triumphs and setbacks, America's great experiment with self-governance has sparked the country's imagination and inspired millions around the world to push for democratic values and republican forms of government in their own countries.

That legacy now faces challenges on multiple fronts. This is not a time for complacency. Americans are not immune to history nor to the forces that have eroded—and in some cases eclipsed—democratic norms and institutions around the globe.

There is a crisis of trust in American democracy. In response, several independent commissions are exploring ways to restore faith that this long-lived representative democracy can renew itself. This document is the report of a commission that focused particularly on the role of trust in the ongoing interplay between media and democracy.

THE VISION. The Knight Commission on Trust, Media and Democracy, 27 diverse citizens organized by the Aspen Institute in partnership with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, hopes for an American future that promotes knowledge of the country's democratic heritage, an understanding of the tools that citizens can use to govern, a willingness to engage in local civic activities, and responsive governmental, political, media, business and civic institutions at all levels. It envisions leadership that acts effectively to advance better lives for all, a society that the youth of today and tomorrow enthusiastically want to join, one that serves well the ideals of this country. It sees vibrant, critical and responsible journalism serving the broad goals of self-government, including speaking truth to power, and a society where new forms of communication enhance rather than diminish our way of life. And it expects consistently reliable news available so citizens are able to engage effectively in their communities.

The Commission can envision that bright future, but only if we act together now to respond to the crises defined below.

A CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY. As shared bonds have frayed, Americans are polarized. Their faith in democratic institutions has declined, along with civic engagement and the sense of a common American identity.

WHILE TRUST IN GOVERNMENT IS VITAL TO A HEALTHY DEMOCRACY, SO IS A CERTAIN MEASURE OF DISTRUST.

Democracy is a generalization. It could encompass many different concepts. The Commission has considered a variety of democratic models, including direct, communitarian, pluralistic, deliberative and representative democracy. We recognize that the United States is a representative democracy more accurately described as a republic. In this report we use “democracy” as shorthand for the values, institutions and aspirations of representative self-governance asserted and protected by the United States Constitution.

Trust is commonly defined as belief in the reliability, truth, ability or strength of someone or something. By virtually every measurement, Americans’ trust in the practices, intentions and outcomes of our institutions—especially in our government and our media—is steadily declining. (Small business and the military, which have retained relatively high levels of trust, are exceptions.)

Among the factors that have undermined Americans’ faith in democratic institutions are a perception of government as increasingly dysfunctional, dislocations caused by globalization and immigration, political polarization, large inequalities in wealth and income, reduced upward mobility and racial tensions. While a free press and robust journalism are essential elements of a healthy democracy, much of the public doubt that the national news media are unbiased and fair and are concerned that social media have been used to disseminate disinformation.

A DEFICIT IN CITIZENSHIP. Normally only 50 to 60 percent of the voting-age population votes for the U.S. presidency, and far fewer cast ballots in off-year elections.¹ In the 2014 midterms, for example, voter turnout was about 37 percent, though voters did turn out in record numbers for the midterm election in 2018.²

Participation in local civic activities is down from a half-century ago, and knowledge of the basics of civic literacy—the fundamentals of our democracy—is dismal. Fewer than 25 percent of eighth-graders could pass a basic proficiency test in civics in 2014. Reasons for civic disengagement range from how we allocate our time and attention to a lack of basic civic education to insufficient access to resources such as quality local news.

THE CRISIS IN TRUST. Layered on top of these challenges to American democracy is perhaps an even more disturbing development—the inability to agree on facts. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan famously said, “Everyone is entitled to their own opinions, but they are not entitled to their own facts.” Yet, in 2018, facts that are considered unfavorable are branded as fake, false information is shared widely over the internet, and powerful technologies are becoming increasingly available that can manipulate video images and voices to convincingly portray something that did not happen.

Advances in technology, such as digital social networks, have given many citizens access to the world's great pool of knowledge and people. Yet readers and viewers today often have great difficulty ascertaining the reliability of a source or assertion. Technology is providing access to so much information—and disinformation—that it is overwhelming individuals' ability to determine what is true, especially in the absence of widespread digital literacy. Bad actors using digital platforms of major technology companies to manipulate and influence people with false information are making this problem worse.

In addition, many complain that the media do not separate fact from opinion and condemn much of the media for what they see as endemic bias. Often, readers make media choices based on their political viewpoint, restricting intake to sources compatible with that perspective and accepting that content without questioning its veracity. But as the writer Peter Wehner observes, “Facts that don't penetrate the walls of an ideological silo are facts nonetheless.”³

Thus, superimposed on the concerns over American democracy is a crisis in trust in media and in basic information. But a “post-truth” politics is incompatible with a functioning democracy and is a fundamental attack on our ability to self-govern.



THERE IS A
CRISIS OF TRUST
IN AMERICA.

Today, Americans need to strive for a stronger vision of democracy and citizenry. It includes the right and obligation to voice one's beliefs and to grant the same to all fellow citizens in search of shared truths. As Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote a century ago, "The best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market.... That, at any rate, is the theory of our Constitution."⁴ The marketplace for ideas, though, presumes an electorate willing and able to search for the truth.

The Necessity for Trust in Democratic Governance

A democracy cannot function without the trust of its citizens. They need to believe in a democratic political process that will act responsibly to uphold the rule of law, promote the general welfare and protect the national interest.

But maintaining trust among citizens does not happen automatically. As one social scientist noted, "Every society must teach itself and its young that basic values are good and its institutions are appropriate for achieving those values." It is this belief in and commitment to the legitimacy of the values and institutions of a nation "that allow it to transcend brief crises or endure prolonged periods of deprivation."⁵

This does not mean that citizens need to agree with every action taken by government. Rather, citizens should be aware of what their representatives are doing and remain vigilant about potential abuses and corruptions of power. As James Madison acknowledged in *The Federalist Papers*, "Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm."⁶ He understood that abuse of power was inevitable, and therefore citizens were well advised to maintain a degree of distrust of any government "administered by men."

The importance of citizen engagement with government and politics is a theme that has continued to resonate widely through American history. Mercy Otis Warren, a political writer at the time of the American Revolution, observed that "the origin of all power is the people, and they have an incontestable right to check the creatures of their own creation."⁷ Jane Anne Morris, a contemporary cultural critic, has pointed out that "if you don't know what the government is doing, you don't live in a democracy."⁸

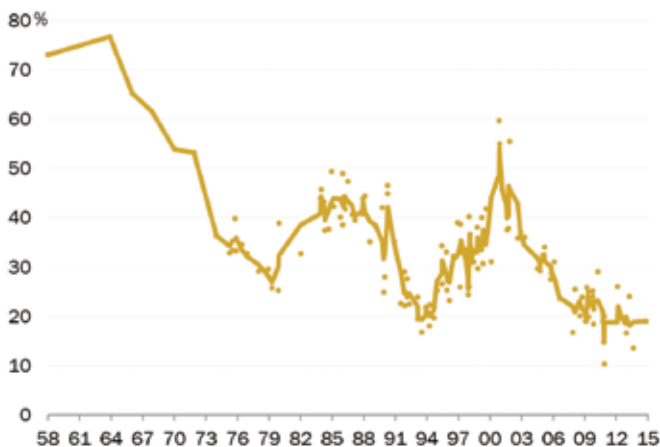
While trust in government is vital to a healthy democracy, so is a certain measure of distrust. The need to maintain a balance between the two disparate attitudes is described as "the paradox of democracy." One way to understand this paradox is by distinguishing between two types of trust: *particular trust* in an administration or individual official, which can be contingent, and a deeper, more enduring *general trust* in a political process that includes disagreements among competing factions and assumes an orderly sharing of power. Democratic politics can function effectively even when many citizens lack trust in an individual incumbent. In fact, partisan politics assumes such conflicts and offers the recourse of "voting the rascals out" in the next election. A decline in *general trust* is a more serious issue.

What Has Happened to Trust?

Democracies can and will operate with a certain amount of distrust in their leaders and their actions. But a lack of general trust in the legitimacy of the political process represents a significant challenge to the functioning of a democracy.

Numerous studies have found that the overall level of trust in government among Americans has been declining steadily over the past half-century and now stands at or near historically low levels. For example, a survey conducted by Gallup has tracked public trust in government annually since 1958. In 1964, nearly three-quarters of Americans (74 percent) said that they “trusted the government in Washington to do what is right ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time.’”⁹ Over the next two decades, the percentage of Americans who expressed high trust in the government began falling (see Figure 1.1). There were temporary upticks in this indicator in the 1980s during the Reagan years and again in the mid- to late-1990s during the Clinton years and again in the early George W. Bush years (with a sharp but short-lived surge in trust in the immediate aftermath of 9/11). But the overall trajectory for trust has been downward and has remained below 25 percent for the past decade,¹⁰ just one-third the level of trust at its high point 50 years earlier. It is as difficult today to find a citizen who has a high degree of trust in government as it was to find someone with a low degree of trust in government in the mid-1960s.

FIGURE 1.1 AMERICANS’ TRUST IN GOVERNMENT: 1958–2015



Survey conducted Aug. 27-Oct. 4, 2015. Q15. Trend sources: Pew Research Center, National Election Studies, Gallup, ABC/Washington Post, CBS/New York Times, and CNN Polls. From 1976-2014 the trend line represents a three-survey moving average.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: <http://www.people-press.org/2015/11/23/1-trust-in-government-1958-2015/>

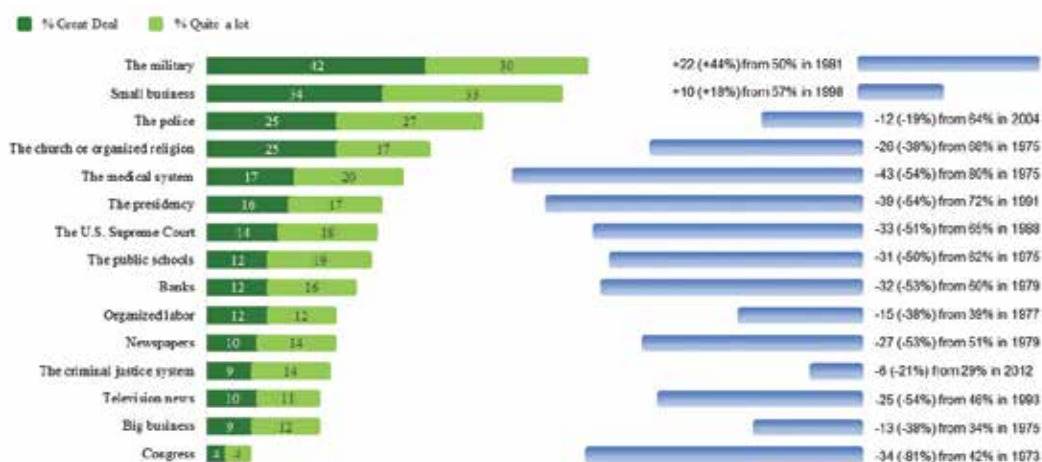
Other major surveys confirm this trend. For example, the American National Election Studies (ANES, a collaboration between the University of Michigan and Stanford University), which has been surveying American voters since 1948, finds a similar decline in trust—from a high above 60 percent in the 1960s to a low under 25 percent today.¹¹

The decline in trust in government is not the whole story, however. It needs to be seen in the context of two larger trends: first, the parallel drop in Americans' trust in a broad range of other institutions, and second, a similar pattern that is happening globally.

DECLINING TRUST IN MANY INSTITUTIONS. In addition to surveying Americans about their trust in government, in 2018 Gallup also asked about their level of trust in other important institutions.¹² Only three institutions—the military, small business and the police—currently enjoy trust levels above 50 percent. Media organizations are near the bottom in this survey, with newspapers at 24 percent and television news at 21 percent, along with big business at 21 percent and Congress at just 12 percent (see Figure 1.2).

An analysis of the Gallup data by MIT scholar Ethan Zuckerman (graph at right in Figure 1.2) shows that only the military and small business experienced an increase in trust over time, while all the other institutions in the survey saw drops.

FIGURE 1.2 CHANGING TRUST IN VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS



Source: Chart by Ethan Zuckerman 7/17 White Paper, from Gallup data at <http://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidenceinstitutions.aspx>

While the Gallup survey found a steady decline in trust in both newspapers and television over the last few decades, a 2018 Poynter survey has found that consumers appear recently to be reversing this trend, particularly for local media.¹³ This apparent inconsistency may be explained by the confusion in what exactly the respondent sees as “the media.” That term is extremely broad and could include local, national, print, broadcast, online, politically-driven or other media. One might trust a local outlet, or one attuned to his or her political outlook, and still distrust “the media” in general.

GLOBAL DECLINE IN TRUST. The erosion in trust in key institutions is not confined to the United States; it is a global phenomenon. For 17 years, the Edelman Trust Barometer¹⁴ has been tracking the level of trust in key institutions among citizens of 28 countries. The 2017 edition of the Barometer found what it describes as “a profound crisis in trust” worldwide. Two-thirds of the countries included in the survey were classified as “distrusters” (with less than 50 percent of respondents expressing trust in the institutions of business, government, media and NGOs to “do what is right”), compared with half of the countries in 2016. Among the four key institutions, government and the media were the least trusted, with trust in media declining by the greatest amount among the four.

Edelman reported in 2018 that globally, “trust in media plunges to all-time lows,” with trust levels well below 50 percent in all but a handful of the 28 countries in the survey, making media the least trusted of the institutions it tracked.

Other studies have documented a similar global trend in distrust of government and other institutions. A report on *Building Trust in Government in the 21st Century* from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs found that “since the mid-1960s, public trust in government and political institutions has been decreasing in all of the advanced industrialized democracies. Although the pattern and the pace of the decrease are dissimilar across countries, the downward trend is ubiquitous.”¹⁵

A study from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported that “only four out of ten citizens in OECD countries say they have confidence in their national authorities.”¹⁶ A more recent report on public attitudes in the European Union found that a majority of EU residents (56 percent) did not trust their national governments, but results varied substantially from country to country.¹⁷

Government and Media

The symbiotic relationship between media and democracy cannot be overemphasized. Citizens need media for information and engagement at every level of governance, and to hold those in power accountable. Governments need media to communicate and account for their policies to the citizenry in order to remain legitimate representatives of the sovereign populace. The media—whether local or national, liberal or conservative, print, broadcast or digital—are the lifeblood of the republic.

But like any blood relationship, the link between press and government can become strained, and certainly has shown fissures throughout America's history (see Chapter 2). We are currently at a particularly tense and unfortunate moment in this relationship. Critics, citing article after article that they see as unjust in their coverage of the President and the government, believe that much of the media has a pervasive bias against him. Others welcome strong, critical coverage of the Executive. But the Commission is particularly concerned that the current presidential administration has repeatedly attacked the integrity of much of the press, independent of issues with particular articles or reporters.

Respect and support for the rights and safety of the media are vital to the health of America. Far from being the enemy of the people, a free and fair press is essential to the governance of this country. The American public needs to stand by and for the strong protections of the press that inhere in the First Amendment.

In his 1838 Lyceum address, Abraham Lincoln said the chief danger to the American republic would come from within: "If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher." To confront an attack on our institutions and values would "require the people to be united with each other, attached to the government and laws...."

Recent foreign and domestic attacks on the American political process are well documented. To heed Lincoln's warning, individual citizens, political leaders, businesses and civil institutions must consider their responsibilities, as participants within the democracy, to resist the attack—or decay—from within.

CHAPTER

2

MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY: OUR AMERICAN HISTORY



FINDINGS

-
- ▶ A distinctive characteristic of the U.S. political system is its enduring commitment to a free press as vital to maintaining liberty and good government.
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- ▶ The U.S. government, from its earliest days, encouraged a vigorous press both by ensuring press freedom (the First Amendment) and by providing economic support (through low postal rates) for the wide dissemination of news.
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- ▶ Despite a strong tradition of support for a free press, throughout American history there have been repeated attacks on the excesses of the press and efforts to ensure the “responsibility” of the press, often when a new medium appears on the scene that threatens to disrupt existing media.
-
- ▶ A recurring concern about the press has been the dominance of a limited number of media channels and the struggle of ordinary citizens to gain access to these channels to express their viewpoints. The internet has largely solved this problem by its radical openness, giving a voice to all users, but has created a novel set of problems for users in judging the authenticity and quality of news.
-
- ▶ An enduring problem for the media is the tension between the drive to maximize profit and the imperative to serve the public good with high-quality journalism. Another ongoing tension is between the press as a megaphone for partisan political views and the press as an independent, professional reporter of facts.

The press has been a vital element of American democracy since the country's earliest days. For that reason, the Framers created strong and unique protections for speech and press in the American Constitution. The First Amendment, which bans Congress from making any law “abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press,” has provided the media with enduring protection from government interference. Nonetheless, over time, the news media in the United States have seen recurring doubts about their role and their impact on society.

For the first century and a half of the American republic, the story of the press was essentially that of the evolving role of printed newspapers. Not until the 20th century did the press expand to include radio and television (first broadcast, then cable). At the end of the century, the rise of digital media broadened the press still further. Today, virtually all Americans walk around with the equivalent of a constantly updated interactive newspaper—and much more—in their pockets.

Early Days

In his seminal study, *The Creation of the Media*, historian and sociologist Paul Starr recounts how newspapers were a distinctive presence in colonial America and central to how the emerging confederation thought of itself. Given the key roles of the press in achieving independence, the Founders were not shy about protecting the press as a key component of the American political system.

As early as 1719, Boston had two newspapers and by 1735, when the city's population was just 15,000, the city supported five newspapers, while a dozen papers were being published elsewhere in the colonies. In 1774 the Continental Congress officially recognized that the press played an important role, not only in advancing “truth, science, morality and arts in general,” but in promoting discussion “whereby officers are shamed into more honorable and just modes of conducting affairs.” The country's early leaders understood that the press “had served as a means by which colonists had debated their common interests, developed a national identity and created capacities for cooperative action.”¹⁸

THE FRAMERS CREATED STRONG AND UNIQUE PROTECTIONS FOR SPEECH AND PRESS IN THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION.



Once it achieved independence, the American government took two critical steps to protect and promote the press. Through the First Amendment, it restrained itself from limiting the freedom of the press. And through the Post Office Act of 1792, which provided newspapers with special discounts and privileges, it actively encouraged the wide dissemination of news. Not only did the Act set low postal rates for newspapers, it also mandated that newspaper publishers could exchange copies with one another for free.

The American policy of protecting and promoting a free press set it at odds with much of the rest of the world. While the U.S. supported the spread of news, much of Europe taxed and restricted publications. Prior to the 17th century, the prevailing notion among the rulers of Europe was that “ordinary people were not concerned with government.”¹⁹ A 1620 English royal decree stated that political matters were “not themes or subjects fit for vulgar persons or common meetings” and made divulging parliamentary proceedings a crime. Even though printed newspapers began to appear in Europe in the 17th century, they frequently had to contend with restrictive licensing, high taxes and extensive censorship.

What made America distinctive is the recognition that its democracy depended on an informed and engaged citizenry. And that, in turn, depended on a free press to inform them about what their government was doing and to allow them to express their views. As Christopher B. Daley noted in his history of journalism in America:

The First Amendment expresses something that is fundamental about our entire society.... It expresses rights that reach beyond the press as an industry to the people themselves. The press is empowered by the First Amendment to discover facts and to articulate arguments not for its own benefit but for the benefit of the public as a whole. In order for them to govern themselves, the people must have reliable information. The press freedom asserted in the First Amendment is therefore a trust placed in the press on behalf of the broader society.²⁰

From the early days of the Republic, the press was essentially and often fiercely partisan, a role that has evolved over time but has never disappeared. Readers did not expect their newspapers to report objectively on events of the day, but rather to represent the views of the parties that subsidized them.

Despite the constitutional protections it enjoyed, the press in America has not been immune from attacks on its freedom. According to Daley, “Government agencies, the military, churches, courts, corporations and other powerful institutions have regularly attempted to limit press freedom since the country’s founding, and they have succeeded more often than most Americans like to admit.”²¹

In fact, not long after America became independent, some politicians began to chafe at partisan attacks from the press. The Sedition Act of 1798, passed less than a decade after ratification of the Bill of Rights, made it a crime to “write, print, utter or publish...any false, scandalous and malicious writing against the government, Congress or the President.”

The Act was an attempt to suppress the expression of political dissent at a time when conflict between the country’s first two political parties, the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans, was growing in intensity. A number of newspaper editors were convicted and jailed under the Act. However, the law eventually backfired when those it intended to punish became popular heroes. After the election of 1800, Congress allowed the Sedition Act to expire, and newspapers began to thrive.

Growing Pains

Throughout the 19th century, the press, and particularly the daily newspaper, continued to grow—and to generate controversy. Several technical innovations helped to lower the cost of newspapers. In the 1830s, the shift to steam-powered presses led to the rise of the “penny press,” and in the 1860s, the introduction of newsprint (paper manufactured from wood pulp rather than rags) further reduced costs of producing a newspaper.

The increasing popularity of newspapers was accompanied by a substantial increase in voter participation, which grew from 27 percent in the presidential election of 1824 to 78 percent in 1840.²² By the eve of the Civil War, the country was home to 4,000 newspapers and periodicals, of which three-fourths were partisan publications. Many of these were adamantly opposed to President Lincoln, who complained that Horace Greeley, the founder and editor of *The New York Tribune*, was causing him “almost as much trouble as the whole Southern Confederacy.”²³ Although Lincoln generally chose to tolerate press opposition, strong-arm tactics against journalists were not uncommon. In 1861, for example, some 200 newspapers were subject to attacks from federal agencies, civilian mobs or Union troops.²⁴

Following the Civil War, the press and freedom of speech came under a different type of attack, motivated by an impulse to ban popular works that were deemed likely to contribute to immorality. An 1873 federal law, known as the Comstock Act (named after anti-obscenity crusader Anthony Comstock), made it a crime to send through the mail “any publication of an indecent character.” After being appointed as a special agent of the U.S. Post Office, Comstock led prosecutions of more than 3,000 defendants.²⁵ It was not until 1983 that the Supreme Court ruled the Act unconstitutional.

Despite these challenges, the popularity of newspapers continued to grow. Total daily circulation in the U.S. grew from 34 newspapers per 100 households in 1870 to 121 per 100 households in 1910, or an average of more than one daily newspaper per household. As papers became more economically successful, generating revenue from advertising and sales rather than political subsidies, they tended to become more independent and less tied to a particular party. But that did not free them from controversy.

As the readership for newspapers spread to larger mass audiences, the focus of news tended to expand from politics to topics like crime, sports and human-interest stories. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, concern about the impact of the press found a new target in the rise of highly successful but often sensationalistic newspapers:

The ‘yellow journalism’ of the 1890s and the tabloid journalism of the 1920s and 1930s stigmatized the press as a profit motivated purveyor of cheap thrills and vicarious experiences. To its many critics, it seemed as though the press was using the freedom from regulation it enjoyed under the First Amendment to make money instead of fulfilling its vital role as an independent source of information in a democracy.²⁶

Perhaps the most notorious practitioner of yellow journalism was William Randolph Hearst, who along with Joseph Pulitzer has been credited by some with helping to start the Spanish-American War. In 1898, when a somewhat mysterious explosion occurred on the warship *Maine* while it was anchored in the Havana harbor, Hearst’s *New York Post* immediately ran a headline proclaiming, “The War Ship *Maine* was Split in Two by an Enemy’s Secret Infernal Machine.”²⁷

Improving the Quality of Journalism

Around the turn of the 20th century, dissatisfaction with the excesses of many newspapers provoked a number of counter-responses, a pattern that is still occurring today. In 1896 Adolph Ochs purchased *The New York Times*, originally founded in 1851, and committed the paper to reporting that was detailed, factual and reliable. In 1908 Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, created *The Christian Science Monitor* to counteract what she saw as the dangers of fearmongering by the popular press.²⁸ *The Monitor* was deliberately non-sensationalist and gained a reputation for impartial reporting.

Several other steps were taken to advance journalism as a profession and improve the quality of reporting. In 1908, the University of Missouri established the first school of journalism in the United States. Shortly thereafter, the school's founder and first dean, Walter Williams, offered what he called "The Journalist's Creed," (see sidebar) which is still displayed on a plaque in the National Press Club in Washington. In 1910, the Kansas State Editorial Association adopted the industry's first code of ethics, which called on publishers to avoid "the publication of fake illustrations...fake interviews...and the issuance of fake news dispatches."²⁹ When Joseph Pulitzer died in 1911, he left money in his will to set up the Columbia University School of Journalism (1912) and to establish the Pulitzer Prizes for excellence in journalism (1917).³⁰

Despite initiatives like these, concerns about the "tabloidization" of the news have persisted. The bigger the audience, the more a media entity can charge advertisers. In a competitive capitalist society, it is unlikely that the impulse to pursue popularity over objectivity will disappear, nor will efforts to constrain it.

WHAT MADE AMERICA DISTINCTIVE IS
THE RECOGNITION THAT ITS DEMOCRACY
DEPENDS ON AN INFORMED AND
ENGAGED CITIZENRY.

THE JOURNALIST'S CREED³¹

Walter Williams

I believe in the profession of journalism.

I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of their responsibility, trustees for the public; that acceptance of a lesser service than the public service is betrayal of this trust.

I believe that clear thinking and clear statement, accuracy and fairness are fundamental to good journalism.

I believe that a journalist should write only what he holds in his heart to be true.

I believe that suppression of the news, for any consideration other than the welfare of society, is indefensible.

I believe that no one should write as a journalist what he would not say as a gentleman; that bribery by one's own pocketbook is as much to be avoided as bribery by the pocketbook of another; that individual responsibility may not be escaped by pleading another's instructions or another's dividends.

I believe that advertising, news and editorial columns should alike serve the best interests of readers; that a single standard of helpful truth and cleanness should prevail for all; that the supreme test of good journalism is the measure of its public service.

I believe that the journalism which succeeds best—and best deserves success—fears God and honors Man; is stoutly independent, unmoved by pride of opinion or greed of power, constructive, tolerant but never careless, self-controlled, patient, always respectful of its readers but always unafraid, is quickly indignant at injustice; is unswayed by the appeal of privilege or the clamor of the mob; seeks to give every man a chance and, as far as law and honest wage and recognition of human brotherhood can make it so, an equal chance; is profoundly patriotic while sincerely promoting international good will and cementing world-comradeship; is a journalism of humanity, of and for today's world.



Rise of National Media—and National Concerns

A big shift in the media landscape came in the 20th century with the arrival of highly successful national magazines and the immense popularity of advertising-based radio and television broadcasting.

With the rise of fascism and its attendant propaganda in the 1920s and '30s, a controversy arose about the trustworthiness of media, foreshadowing recent concerns about the role of news and its veracity. In 1920, Walter Lippmann, the eminent political commentator, published a tract titled *Liberty and the News* in which he argued that “the present crisis of western democracy is a crisis in journalism.” Recognizing the power of propaganda to shape public opinion, he warned that “the freedom of thought and speech present themselves in a new light and raise new problems because of the discovery that opinion can be manufactured.”³² Lippmann called on journalists to be more “objective,” to “develop a sense of evidence” and to be transparent about the limitations of the information available to them.

The most ambitious effort to examine the role of journalism in the U.S. came in 1947 with the publication of the report of the Commission on Freedom of the Press, known as the Hutchins Commission, which was funded by *Time* founder Henry Luce. The report, titled *A Free and Responsible Press*, summarized its key findings in its opening paragraphs:

The Commission set out to answer the question: Is the freedom of the press in danger? Its answer to the question is: Yes. It concludes that the freedom of the press is in danger for three reasons:

- First, the importance of the press to the people has greatly increased with the development of the press as an instrument of mass communication. At the same time the development of the press as an instrument of mass communication has greatly decreased the proportion of the people who can express their opinions and ideas through the press.
- Second, the few who are able to use the machinery of the press as an instrument of mass communication have not provided a service adequate to the needs of society.
- Third, those who direct the machinery of the press have engaged from time to time in practices which the society condemns and which, if continued, it will inevitably undertake to regulate or control.³³

Like other media critics before and after, the Hutchins Commission grappled with the tensions between the press's commitment to keeping the public informed and the pressure to maximize financial performance. The Commission warned that if the “giant agencies of communication are irresponsible, not even the First Amendment will protect their freedom from government control. The Amendment will be amended.”

Additionally, the Hutchins Commission identified the relative lack of access of ordinary people to “the press as an instrument of mass communications” as a central issue—an issue that would be utterly transformed by the rise of the internet.

The Age of Television News

With the arrival of television after World War II, broadcasting took on an even more prominent role in American life. While radio and TV were primarily purveyors of entertainment, which drew the largest ratings and generated the most advertising revenue, they regularly reported the news both out of a sense of obligation and legal necessity.

Broadcasters, who needed government permission to use the public airwaves, did not enjoy the same sweeping First Amendment protections that print journalists had. Holders of broadcast licenses, for example, were subject to the Fairness Doctrine, in force from 1949 to 1987, which required them to “present controversial issues of public importance” and to do so in manner that was “honest, equitable, and balanced.”³⁴ This policy effectively restrained most broadcasters from promoting a political viewpoint.

This is not to say that broadcasters and TV news were not powerful forces in American political life. From the 1960s through the 1980s, a majority of adult Americans watched one of the three evening network news programs daily, giving the networks great power to define in a nightly half-hour which issues were important, and which were not.

Television had a unique ability to make distant events immediate and vividly real, thereby shaping public opinion.³⁵ When CBS News anchor Walter Cronkite, known as “the most trusted man in America,” departed from his normal apolitical stance to express misgivings on air about the Vietnam War, it was a seminal moment.

In the years following World War II, an era of unprecedented growth in America's economic prosperity and global political power, the mass media became ever more massive. Controlled by a handful of powerful gatekeepers that tended to share a centrist perspective, the media played, in effect, a homogenizing and standardizing role in American political culture.

Reinforcing this role, the business of advertising led broadcasters mostly to avoid controversial or divisive programming. The networks' true customers were their advertisers, who wanted to reach the largest possible audience and were not interested in supporting programming that ran the risk of alienating viewers.

The rise of television also had a disruptive impact on the newspaper industry. Afternoon newspapers' subscriptions fell as the audience for evening news on television rose. In cities, consolidation among newspapers made most markets virtual monopolies. Meanwhile, local newspapers often saw themselves as responsible for reflecting "the issues, events, experiences and ideas of the entire community"³⁶ and set the news agenda for the community.

Another factor in the changing landscape of news was the evolving role of radio. In response to the increasing popularity of FM radio, which offered better sound quality for music, AM stations began looking for new, nonmusical formats. With the Fairness Doctrine no longer in effect, radio commentators, somewhat shunned by mainstream media, found a home where they could express strong political opinions without worrying about the need to provide opposing viewpoints. Political talk radio, mostly with a strong conservative bent, blossomed and quickly spread from a few local stations to national networks.³⁷ More recently, the FCC's relaxation of limits on the number of broadcast licenses that can be held by a single owner made it possible for individual companies to control large numbers of stations.³⁸

The New Media

The next major shift in the media ecology occurred over the past several decades, with the rise first of cable television and then the internet. These developments weakened the hegemony of national TV broadcast news and brought additional competition to the printed press.

The launch of CNN in 1980 meant that television news was no longer confined to a nightly half-hour. It now operated on a 24-hour cycle. After an initial diet of round-the-clock news shows, CNN and its eventual competitors began increasingly to rely on commentary, producing shows with pundits and partisan commentators, blurring the line between factual reporting and interpretive discussion.

The arrival of the Fox News Channel and MSNBC in 1996 blurred the line even more and increased perceptions of media bias with programming designed to appeal to viewers who shared the same political perspective. These channels included "breaking news" but emphasized commentary from right- and left-leaning perspectives. The Fairness Doctrine never applied to cable television and was repealed in 1987 in any event. As MIT's Ethan Zuckerman observed, "After a long age where partisan journalism was less common...cable news made partisan news viable again."³⁹

THE DECLINE OF THE NEWSPAPER

Perhaps no industry has been more deeply disrupted by the internet than newspaper publishing. For more than a century, newspapers had an effective monopoly on reporting of daily news. While the advent of radio and television provided a formidable challenge, the industry continued to grow during much of the 20th century.

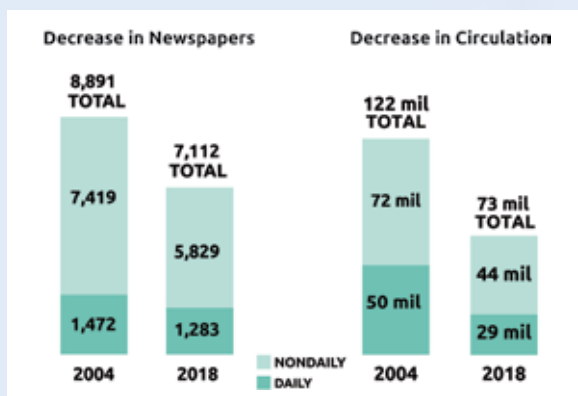
But newspaper subscriptions peaked in the 1980s and began a steady decline as readers switched to media that provided more rapid access to the news. Daily newspaper circulation fell from a high of about 60 million in the 1980s to 28 million in 2018. However, revenue from circulation continued to increase slightly as publishers raised their subscription prices.

Starting at the turn of the 21st century, the economics of newspapers changed dramatically as consumer behaviors shifted from print to online as did the retail and classified advertising that was the major source of revenue for newspapers. Ad revenue for print newspapers declined from a high of \$49.4 billion in 2005 to \$18.3 billion in 2016.

The impact of this revenue loss has been devastating (see Figure 2.1). More than a thousand newspapers have gone out of business, leaving cities that had multiple papers with just one, and turning smaller towns that had a single newspaper into “news deserts” with no local paper. Even newspapers that survived have experienced deep cuts in their staffs. There are now approximately half as many working reporters today as a decade ago.⁴²

As Penelope Muse Abernathy of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Media and Journalism testified to this Commission, local newspapers have traditionally served a number of critical functions in their communities: setting the agenda for debates on important policy issues, supporting economic development and encouraging social cohesion and local activism. To keep communities healthy, whatever replaces the traditional newspaper needs to serve these functions.

FIGURE 2.1 U.S. DAILY NEWSPAPER AND CIRCULATION TOTALS, 2004–2018



Source: Penelope Muse Abernathy, *The Expanding News Desert*, Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, October 2018, https://www.cislm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Expanding-News-Desert-10_14-Web.pdf

By 1996 the Pew Research Center was reporting that “television news is in trouble with the American public. Viewership of nightly network news is particularly hard hit,” with regular viewers falling from a high of 60 percent of adult Americans to 42 percent.⁴⁰ By 2012, the collective audience for cable news had surpassed that of the nightly network TV news. And by 2018 regular television news viewership had fallen below 30 percent of adults, while print newspaper readership also continued to decline (see “The Decline of the Newspaper”).

Meanwhile, other new media forms continue to emerge—for example, the podcast. One in four Americans now listen to a podcast at least once a month.⁴¹

Rise of the Internet

The most recent and perhaps most far-reaching force in shaping the dissemination of news has been the internet. Over the past two decades, the portion of the population that gets much of its news online has grown dramatically, as the audience on traditional news media has declined. By making access to news faster, cheaper and more convenient, the internet has disrupted the creation, delivery and consumption of news, just as it has altered other industries. By enabling more precise targeting of advertising, the internet has also siphoned substantial ad revenues from traditional media.⁴³

What is unique about the internet is that it is an open, two-way medium. It not only offers access to existing content throughout the world, but it allows users to amplify content from others and to create and share their own content on an even footing, more or less, with every other provider, big or small.

Just as in the 18th century, when the new American government chose to protect and promote a free press, in the 20th century the U.S. government was instrumental in enabling the growth of the internet. It did this first through its funding for creation of the ARPANET, which established the technical basis for what became the internet. And second, it adopted a “light touch” regulatory approach that placed minimal restrictions on how the internet could be used.

Perhaps the most significant governmental action has been a section of the 1996 Communications Decency Act that gave Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and “online services” (such as Google, Twitter and Facebook) immunity from liability for third-party content that they host or convey.⁴⁴ This provision, known as Section 230, allows ISPs and online services to provide access to a wide range of speech without being liable for the content of the posters. It also permits them to restrict or filter materials they deem to be offensive or objectionable or that are contrary to their terms of service. In other words, with very limited exceptions, the law gives online information

intermediaries the freedom either to carry or not carry content of virtually any kind without fear of legal liability for their posters' content.⁴⁵ This does not, however, affect the liability of the original posters, who remain responsible for the content of their posts.

In some important ways, the internet represents the ultimate realization of the democratic ideal of free speech, in large measure fulfilling the desire of the Hutchins Commission to expand access to the press for ordinary citizens. At the same time, it has given rise to a cacophony of voices and to new concerns about the veracity of news and information.

Indeed, alarm bells are ringing about how technology companies are being used in ways that challenge democracy. Online social networks have been used for covert disinformation campaigns, leveraging targeted ad platforms and algorithms that promote engagement based on emotion. This has led at times to violence and civil unrest.

Questions about the impact of the internet and other new media on democratic processes helped motivate this Commission's current endeavor. The emergence of the new digitally driven media landscape and its impact on trust is the topic of the next chapter.



CHAPTER 3

THE NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT



FINDINGS

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- ▶ A confluence of economic, social and political circumstances, along with technological advancements, has created a “perfect storm” that is destabilizing citizen trust in media and in other democratic institutions more generally.
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- ▶ Exponential advancements in digital technology, coupled with explosive growth in broadband internet and ubiquitous mobile access, have dramatically shifted how news and information are produced, distributed and consumed.
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- ▶ The steep decline in advertising revenues for print newspapers over the past two decades has challenged the viability of business models for the traditional news industry.
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- ▶ Social media platforms connect users across the world and have expanded their access to information. But they have also provided a means for promoting civil unrest and sectarian violence and have raised concerns about privacy, manipulation and foreign interference.
-
- ▶ The “public square” has become a 24-hour, continuously connected mobile experience supported by social networks, broadcast and cable television.
-
- ▶ Navigating the new media environment and separating truth from nontruth will be more challenging as emerging technologies, such as virtual reality, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, bots and deepfakes, become more sophisticated.

The media landscape that has emerged over the past several decades has played a role in the diminishing trust in American media. We see it as a perfect storm, driven by rapid and persistent technological change along with the declining business model supporting local journalism and the increased polarization of American politics.

Exponential improvements in computing power, the growth of broadband and mobile communications, and, most recently, the rise of social media have reshaped the media landscape and dramatically altered how Americans access and share information. Collectively, these factors have created a challenging new environment that is altering the role of news in a democracy and influencing citizens' attitudes toward news. The first factor to consider is the speed with which these technologically driven changes have happened.

Most technologies evolve gradually after their initial introduction. Railroads, for example, are faster and more efficient now than when they appeared in the mid-19th century. But they still operate today in essentially the same way as when they were first introduced. Much the same is true of other technologies, like automobiles, aircraft and even broadcasting.

But this is not true of digital technology. Since the advent of the first electronic computer 70 years ago, digital technology has gone through a series of transformations that has taken it—and its users—on an exponential journey.

The development of the integrated circuit, which is at the heart of modern digital technology, gave rise to Moore's Law (1965). According to that law, the number of elements (transistors) in an integrated circuit doubles every two years, enabling raw computing power to increase at the same rate. This has held true for the past 50 years. As a result, digital computers have steadily become faster, smaller, cheaper and more powerful at an exponential rate. Uses that seemed like science fiction at one point have become ordinary reality a few years later. For example, each of the smartphones that millions of people now carry has more computing power than the most advanced supercomputers of just a few decades ago.

[SOCIAL MEDIA] PRESENTS OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT ON BOTH THE INSTITUTIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL LEVEL. BUT IT ALSO MAKES POSSIBLE THE WEAPONIZATION OF INFORMATION IN WAYS THAT PROMOTE CONFLICT AND CONFUSION.

The impact of the exponential improvement of digital computers has been magnified by two related trends: the growth of the internet and the rise of mobile communications that have connected billions more people. The most recent shift has been the emergence of social media platforms that have transformed the way people communicate with one another. As *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman summarizes these changes:

In the early 2000s, a set of technologies came together into platforms, social networks and software that made connectivity and solving complex problems fast, virtually free, easy for you, ubiquitous and invisible. Suddenly, more individuals could compete, connect, collaborate and create with more other people, in more ways, from more places, for less money and with greater ease than ever before.⁴⁶

Even in the relatively early days of the internet's growth, however, a number of problems became apparent. For example, since setting up a decent website required few resources and creators can be anonymous, it was challenging for users to differentiate between established, credible institutions and more dubious sources online. It was also difficult to figure out where web content was coming from or who was creating it, which offered opportunities for bad actors to provide fake or misleading content. Viruses appeared that could spread rapidly through the internet and infect millions of computers. Security breaches that compromised personal information happened with increasing frequency. Spam began to clog users' mailboxes. Multiple industries were disrupted as the creation and distribution of content shifted from physical to digital form.

Still, the internet grew rapidly. While relatively few Americans used it in the early 1990s, more than half were on by 2000, and by 2017 more than 90 percent of Americans were. Two important drivers of this growth have been broadband networks and mobile communications.

Growth of Broadband and Mobile

Beginning in the late 1990s, broadband access became a reality for many users. All-digital broadband connections were not only faster than previous “narrowband” connections, but they were “always on” and did not require a time-consuming logon process. In less than a decade, broadband was the dominant means by which Americans connected to the internet.

Thanks to broadband, the psychological distance between users and cyberspace shrank substantially. As it got easier, people went online more frequently, did more while online and stayed longer. Sharing rich media like music, photos and video became common. YouTube launched in 2005, and by the end of the year, it was generating 8 million video views a day. In 2007 Netflix, which had started by distributing movies on DVDs through the mail, introduced a broadband streaming service. It then rapidly shifted from being the fastest-growing customer of the U.S. Postal Service to being one of the largest generators of internet traffic.

The next big revolution was the move to wireless connections. Cellphones initially appeared in the mid-1980s, and for two decades they remained just portable telephones. That changed in 2007 with the introduction of Apple's iPhone, the first true "smartphone" that was as much a miniature computer as mobile phone, and could support a wide variety of uses. Notably, the instrument included a web browser designed for the iPhone's small screen, which enabled mobile access to the entire web.



In addition, Apple introduced “apps,” tiny programs available through its App Store, that each performed a single function. By creating a platform that allowed others to develop and distribute their own iPhone apps (subject to Apple’s approval), Apple helped build a rich ecosystem for new uses of mobile devices. Competitors answered this challenge with their own smartphone software. For example, Google introduced the Android mobile operating system, which was adopted by many other manufacturers.⁴⁷

Just as wired computer networks evolved from narrowband to broadband, so wireless networks steadily improved their performance. With each new generation of wireless technology, cellular carriers upgraded the speed and reach of their networks, while fast (and often free) Wi-Fi access became increasingly pervasive.

Due to the prevalence of smartphones and other connected devices, it has increasingly become a “mobile first” world. In 2008, Americans spent 80 percent of their online time on laptops or desktops. Just eight years later, more than half of their online time had moved to mobile devices.

A 2018 Pew study highlights the importance of smartphones to usage levels: 31 percent of smartphone users are “online almost constantly,” compared with just 5 percent of nonusers.⁴⁸ Among U.S. teens and young adults, 95 percent have a smartphone, and 45 percent say they are online almost constantly.⁴⁹

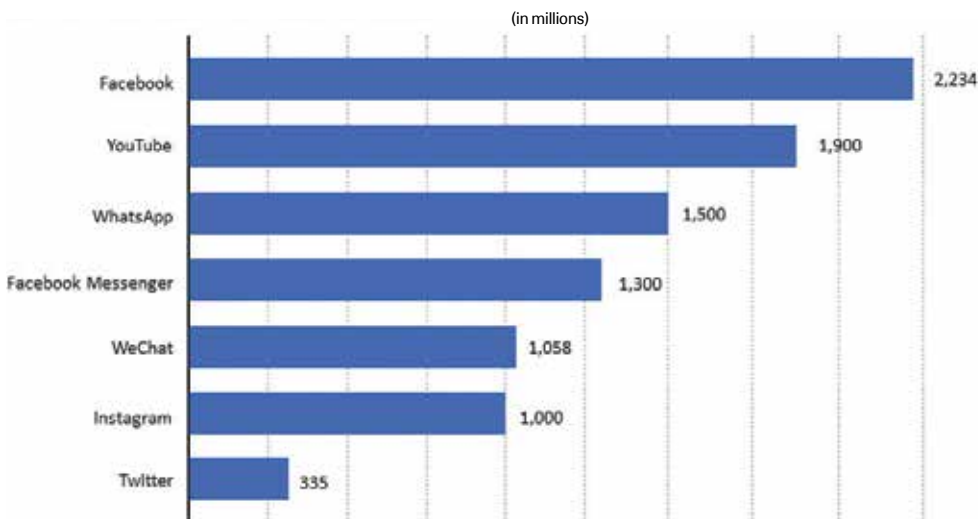
Thanks to the popularity of wireless broadband and smartphones, cyberspace has become a pervasive digital environment that accompanies people wherever they go. Checking, sharing and commenting on news can now be done throughout the day. Podcasting has provided a new way for people to listen to the news. Voice-activated devices distribute content. Within a few years, the next generation of mobile technology (5G) promises to provide even faster, more pervasive wireless connections, not just among humans but for the Internet of Things (linking devices such as webcams, alarms, sensors and even autonomous vehicles) as well.

The Advent of Social Networks

The most recent chapter in the evolution of the internet has been the shift from a focus on providing access to information and transactions to connecting people to one another through social networks. Communication functions like email, bulletin boards, texting and chat have long been popular. But the rise of social media networks vastly increased the person-to-person function of the internet and inspired people to share the most intimate aspects of their lives, often in real time. Social media provided a new kind of platform that allowed individuals and groups that had not previously had a voice to express themselves and reach others with similar interests. It has also provided new channels for the dissemination of both information and disinformation, renewed connections and bullying, political fundraising and intentional misrepresentations.

The most dramatic example of this shift is the spectacular rise of Facebook. After it was founded in 2004, it took Facebook four years to reach its first 100 million users. In the next four years, Facebook grew to 1 billion users and since then has topped 2 billion users (see Figure 3.1).⁵⁰ Facebook is now truly global. Although it started in the United States, only about 10 percent of its current user base (214 million people) comprises Americans. For many people around the world, Facebook is the internet.

FIGURE 3.1 ACTIVE USERS OF SOCIAL MEDIA, IN MILLIONS
As of October 2018



Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

Though not as massive as Facebook, other, newer social networks are still impressively large: YouTube, owned by Google's parent, Alphabet, has nearly 2 billion users. Twitter, started in 2006, has 335 million monthly users and over 100 million daily users. WhatsApp, founded in 2009 and now owned by Facebook, has 1.5 billion users, and Instagram, launched in 2010 and also owned by Facebook, has 1 billion users worldwide. Snapchat, started in 2011, has 291 million monthly users.

Not all popular social networks are U.S. based: Tencent's WeChat, a Chinese-language social network, had more than 1 billion monthly active users as of mid-2018.⁵¹

With the proliferation of smartphones, it is possible to stay almost continuously connected to social networks—and many people do. More than a billion users log on to Facebook from a mobile device daily, and often multiple times a day.⁵² And services like Instagram, WhatsApp and Snapchat are designed as exclusively mobile applications.

THE ROLE OF PLATFORMS

Given their scale, a major technology company's online services are often described as platforms. Platforms typically create little content of their own. They connect users with others who have content of interest to them. Though the nature and specific function of platforms vary, they are by definition large enough to be the foundation of their own ecosystems. These platforms have become the primary organizing means by which most people use the internet.

Most commonly, “platform” describes what we refer to as social networks or social media—services whose primary function is to connect people to share personal information, activities and opinions.

In his book *Custodians of the Internet*, Tarleton Gillespie defines social media platforms as “online sites and services that host, organize, and circulate users' shared content or social interactions for them, without having produced (the bulk of) that content.”⁵⁴ In this category, Gillespie includes social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn, along with blogging/microblogging providers such as Twitter, Tumblr and WordPress; photo and video sharing sites like Flickr, Pinterest and YouTube; and collaborative knowledge sharing tools like Wikipedia and wikiHow.

Gillespie also identifies “a second set [of platforms] that, while they do not neatly fit into the definition of [social] platform, grapple with many of the same challenges of content moderation in platform-like ways.” Included in this category are search engines like Google and Bing; “exchange platforms” like eBay, Craigslist, Airbnb and Uber; and recommendation and rating sites such as Yelp and TripAdvisor.⁵⁵ Platforms generally generate revenue either by attracting advertisers who want to reach their large number of users or by taking a percentage of the transactions that they facilitate.

Amid this impressive growth, young people's use of social media is undergoing a significant shift. For American teens, Facebook is no longer as dominant, with the percentage of teens who say they use Facebook dropping from 71 percent in 2015 to 51 percent in 2018, lower than the shares who use Instagram, YouTube or Snapchat.⁵³

Social networks have connected people in new ways. They enabled countless families and friends to stay in touch even while they are geographically separated. They are used for pro-social campaigns, such as encouraging people to become organ donors or young people to register to vote. Activists use them to raise awareness of social injustices. And citizens of repressive regimes have organized protests online, which have led even to the fall of governments.⁵⁶

Few people, even including some early investors in social media companies,⁵⁷ anticipated how these tools would be used for anti-social purposes. Yet we have seen in recent years online bullying, manipulation of public opinion with impersonation and false information, and the encouragement of sectarian violence.

As the medium is global and instantaneous, erroneous information can become amplified and mostly irretrievable.⁵⁸

From Social Networks to Social Media

A powerful force shaping these global social networks is the business model that determines how they operate. Since these services are free to use, they depend on advertisers for revenue. As Silicon Valley entrepreneur Gina Bianchini explained to the Commission, in the mid-2000s “social networks became social media.” In so doing, they moved from a focus on connecting users to one another to monetizing their users with targeted advertising tools. Because operators sell audiences to advertisers, they have a strong incentive to attract as many users as possible and to maximize the amount of time they spend on their sites.

Because these sites are digital, they routinely capture large amounts of detailed data on the interests and behavior of their users. With this data, operators are able to fine-tune the algorithms that determine what users see, in order to maximize their appeal. The extensive information that they gather on users allows advertisers to reach those most likely to be interested in their products.

Researchers and observers have explored the way in which designers of these entities deliberately work to make them as addictive as possible to keep users coming back.⁵⁹ Others, referring to the popularity of extreme content online, point out that “polarization may be bad for democracy, but is a great business model.”⁶⁰ But the same has also been said about cable television news, partisan digital sites and broadcast media.⁶¹

...A PERFECT STORM OF TECHNOLOGICAL,
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL FORCES HAS CREATED
A SOCIETY WHERE TRUST IN DEMOCRACY AND
IN MEDIA ARE AT HISTORIC LOWS.

Cumulative Impact

According to some observers, electronic media—social networks along with broadcast and cable television—have become the central “public square” for the U.S. and much of the rest of the world. That is, they have become the primary means by which citizens learn about and debate the meaning of what is happening in the world. If so, the combination of eight distinctive characteristics of these media are posing new and unprecedented challenges to Americans’ trust in their media and their democracy. These factors are:

- **Scale.** A majority of the 7 billion people in the world now have access to the internet, most of them via mobile devices. Social media platforms have grown to reach vast numbers of users, challenging our ability to fully grasp their impact. Facebook now has more than 2 billion users. Twitter, operating in 40 languages and producing hundreds of millions of tweets every day, and YouTube, with users in 88 countries watching 4 billion videos daily and uploading 60 hours of new video each minute, have attained similar size and complexity.
- **Instantaneity.** In this hyperconnected environment, messages can travel quickly and virally throughout the world, which makes correction of falsity all the harder. The adage that “a lie gets halfway around the world before truth puts on its boots” seems truer today than ever.
- **Multiplicity of voices.** The many-to-many nature of social media that allows voices and opinions from anywhere and anyone has vastly expanded sources of information, for good or for ill. Everyone connected to the internet has, at least in theory, the ability to act as a producer as well as a consumer of content, and social media platforms are designed specifically to encourage and facilitate free expression. This has become an asset, especially to those who did not participate or were not heard previously. But this openness also increases the potential for the distribution of misinformation or disinformation, which has occurred in significant measure over the past few years.
- **Anonymity.** The ability to post anonymously has created an environment in which users do not easily know the source of information to which they are exposed. Hiding behind a screen of anonymity can protect the identity of dissidents but permits users to be less accountable for what they communicate. Furthermore, this is now a world where it is increasingly difficult to tell humans from artificial bots (see “Emerging Technologies”).

- **Insecurity.** When it was first conceived, the internet was intended only to link a relatively small number of users who knew and trusted one another. As it grew to global scale, the failure to build in security mechanisms has created vulnerabilities, subjecting users to repeated breaches that have compromised the personal information of tens of millions of users. And given the fundamental design of the internet, no easy fixes are apparent, even as the pace and scale of attacks continue to grow. Cybersecurity, then, is a continual arms race where hackers and preventive measures each advance in reaction to the other.
- **Attention scarcity.** In an environment rich in information, attention becomes scarce and valuable. In the face of the increasingly vast amount of information that an individual confronts every day, voices need to shout or be extreme to attract attention. A business model that is based on maximizing advertising revenues by maximizing the number of users encourages emotionally charged content, whether true or false. This can encourage sensationalism at the expense of the truth.
- **Big data and social engineering.** Because an unprecedented number of people now regularly share their attitudes and opinions online, they are contributing to a vast trove of personal information that major technology companies use to generate billions of dollars in advertising revenue. They optimize the appeal of their services and target groups that are likely to respond to specific messages. Some companies have developed social engineering techniques to keep people online as long as possible by personalizing content to maximize its appeal to each user. Critics have charged that this is creating addiction to digital content.⁶²
- **Filter bubbles and echo chambers.** One of the most effective and commercially successful techniques employed by data-driven, targeted advertising tools is personalization. This is a technique designed to promote content that appeals to “people like you.” One result of this technique is to provide users with content that reinforces their pre-existing views while isolating them from alternative views, contributing to political polarization and a fragmentation of the body politic. In turn, increasing political polarization encourages people to remain isolated in ever-more-separate ideological silos, offline as well as online.

The amplification (i.e., the widespread sharing) of ideas through various media is now a major activity within the information and media ecosystem. Ideas or memes can go viral instantly, for good or for harm. Furthermore, concentration of control of platforms by a relatively few companies raises potential problems, temptations and solutions. Gaining access to the platform allows one to reach incredible numbers of people almost instantly. Intervention by the platform can ban someone from this significant medium, but failure to intervene can allow harmful messages to spread unchecked.

This ongoing process presents opportunities for political engagement on both the institutional and individual level. But it also makes possible the weaponization of information in ways that promote conflict and confusion.

Thus, a perfect storm of technological, social and political forces has created a society where trust in democracy and in media are at historic lows. The next chapter lists specific reasons that may explain this loss of trust.



EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Today's new media environment is so recent that the world is just beginning to understand how it works and identify the issues that it raises. But this environment is a moving target. As technology continues to evolve, existing capabilities will get more powerful. Entirely new capabilities will appear, some beneficial, some that are problematic. Among many other impacts, these technologies are likely to influence how news is created, distributed and consumed.

Here are just a few of the emerging technologies that need to be tracked:

- **Virtual Reality (VR).** In the narrowband era, internet content was almost entirely text. With the arrival of broadband, video, audio and visually rich interactive games became increasingly prevalent. The next step in giving online content even more impact may be virtual reality, which offers highly realistic three-dimensional experiences. Some VR is created by the use of 360-degree video recording, while other VR is purely computer-generated. VR systems currently require wearing a headset but may soon be streamed directly through a web browser. Several news organizations have already experimented with providing VR news stories, and the format may become more common as the technology is adopted more broadly. VR can provide powerful experiences of “being there,” but applying journalistic best practices to it will be a considerable challenge, as news becomes less of a narrative account and more of a shared immersive experience.⁶³
- **Augmented Reality (AR).** While VR puts users into an immersive 3D world, AR extends computer-generated imagery into the real world. A recent example of AR is Pokémon Go, the popular smartphone-based game that projects game characters into a live image of the environment around the user using the phone's screen. Newer AR technology will employ glasses to project images directly into the visual environment. Publications such as *The New York Times* have begun to experiment with AR to deliver news to users “in the round, in front of you.”⁶⁴
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI).** Rather than the traditional coding technique that required skilled individuals to manually code each step in a program, AI uses tools such as machine learning to expose a computer to large amounts of data and allow the computer to make connections, generate insights and even make decisions (typically in a highly constrained domain of knowledge). After many years of research that yielded few practical results, artificial intelligence is emerging today as a practical tool in many fields.

AI programs are beginning to change the way journalists practice their craft. Newsrooms across the world are leveraging AI to enhance their capacity to identify emerging stories, to search for background information and to generate engaging digital assets. Already, AI programs are automatically producing news stories based on sports scores, election results and earnings reports derived from multiple real-time data sources. AI also plays a large role in selecting news that is distributed by social media platforms, including automatic identification of false stories. As news creation and distribution get more automated, we may need new standards and tools to judge its role.

- **Bots.** Automated programs that mimic human dialogue (a specific application of AI), bots can be useful tools. But bots can also be used to artificially boost attention to content and to manipulate perceptions of who and what is popular online. Bots are already in widespread use. According to Twitter, Russian forces deployed at least 50,000 bots on its platform during the 2016 U.S. election to help spread disinformation.⁶⁵ And the power of bots will continue to increase. A gathering of technology experts in 2017 predicted that as the capabilities of bots improve, it will become ever more difficult to determine which online posters are human and which are not. “Bots will become even more persuasive, more emotional and more personalized. They will be able to not just spread information, but to truly converse and persuade their human interlocutors in order to even more effectively push the latter’s emotional buttons.”⁶⁶
- **Media manipulation software (Deepfakes).** Programs such as Photoshop already make it possible to alter digital photographs in ways that are difficult to identify. Now developers are using digital technologies to create videos that are convincingly realistic but are not genuine. “Deepfake” technology allows users to place the voice and/or likeness of a person into a wholly different context to create false statements seemingly made by that person, or otherwise place him or her in a false light.⁶⁷ As this technology advances, it will be increasingly difficult to be able to tell whether audio and video content is real or synthetic.
- **Blockchain.** Invented to support cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, blockchain technology has broader potential uses by providing a decentralized ledger that can keep track of transactions of many kinds without the need for an intermediary or gatekeeper. Still in its early stage of development, blockchain may have meaningful uses in journalism,⁶⁸ including providing a mechanism to document the “provenance” of a news story while protecting the identity of a journalist who is operating in a repressive environment. Some news organizations have begun to experiment with blockchain applications.

CHAPTER

4

WHY HAS TRUST IN GOVERNMENT AND MEDIA DECLINED?



FINDINGS

Reasons for the loss of trust in government include:

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- ▶ Poor institutional performance
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- ▶ Large-scale global “shocks”
-
- ▶ Political polarization
-
- ▶ Increasing economic inequality
-
- ▶ Decreasing economic mobility
-

Reasons for the decline in the public's trust in the media include:

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- ▶ Proliferation of news sources
-
- ▶ Media disintermediation
-
- ▶ Confusion between news and opinion
-
- ▶ Spread of misinformation and disinformation
-
- ▶ Decline of local news
-
- ▶ Politicized criticism of the media
-

B

efore offering its recommendations to help restore trust, the Commission needed to examine the causes of the problem. Here we address the causes, first for the loss of trust in government and its democratic processes and, second, for declining trust in the media that are supposed to inform the public about how government and society operate.

These explanations are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it is likely that all of these factors play some role in the overall decline in trust. It is also probable that there are cross-impacts among the various factors responsible for the loss of trust in both government and the media.

Why Has Trust in Government Declined?

Scholars have offered at least five explanations for the decline of trust in government. They include three big social/political factors—poor institutional performance, large-scale global “shocks” and growing political polarization—and two specifically economic factors—rising economic inequality and declining economic mobility.

1. Poor institutional performance

Perhaps the most straightforward explanation for falling trust in government is poor performance by those in power. According to political scientists Kenneth Newton and Pippa Norris, when institutions perform poorly, people lose trust in them: “It is primarily governmental performance that determines the level of citizens’ confidence in public institutions.”⁶⁹

One indicator of the public’s lack of faith in the effectiveness of government is its view of the competency of political leadership. A 2015 Pew survey found that a majority (55 percent) of Americans believed that “compared with elected officials, ordinary Americans would do a better job of solving the country’s problems.”⁷⁰ This trend has continued, as reflected in a 2018 Pew survey, which found that 61 percent of Americans believe that the fundamental “design and structure” of American government needs “significant changes” to address the country’s challenges.⁷¹

...WHEN INSTITUTIONS PERFORM POORLY, PEOPLE LOSE TRUST IN THEM.

Starting with the Vietnam War and Watergate, a series of governmental actions served to diminish public trust. Bad behavior by elected officials—including the Clinton impeachment, after the President was accused of lying under oath; the Iraq War, which turned out to have been launched under false assumptions; a failure to defend against foreign interference in elections; and the gridlock that seems to have dominated U.S. political processes in recent years—provided ample grounds for Americans to doubt the effectiveness of their government. And news media that emphasize conflict, scandal and dysfunction could well be contributing to the loss of trust.

2. Large-scale global “shocks”

To account for a decades-long, worsening “crisis in trust,” the Edelman Report⁷² points to a series of social and economic developments that have shaken faith in key institutions in the United States and abroad.

Globalization and automation. The consensus of economists is that globalization and automation are positive forces in terms of overall economic growth. But even as they have created new jobs, these forces have also produced economic volatility that displaced millions of workers, stoking well-founded fears of economic dislocation and job loss.⁷³

The Great Recession of 2008. All recessions have negative consequences, but the impact of the 2008 recession was especially severe, creating “a crisis of confidence in traditional authority figures and institutions while undermining the middle class.”⁷⁴ According to the Pew Charitable Trusts, combined peak loss from declining stock and home values in the United States totaled \$10.8 trillion, or an average of nearly \$100,000 per household, during the period from July 2008 to March 2009. Millions of jobs were lost and many state and local governments were forced to reduce their budgets significantly, resulting in cuts to critical services such as public education.⁷⁵ Although U.S. economic growth since then has made up for many of these losses, the setbacks and emotional scars from this time still linger.

Global migration. The perceived influx of immigrants to the U.S. led many, especially among working-class Americans, to “feel like strangers in their own land.”⁷⁶ Demographic and social shifts have also increased tensions around the politics of race and gender.

The rise of disinformation. False or misleading news stories have competed with, and perhaps crowded out, accurate stories and seeded doubt about the reliability of news in general, resulting in a sort of Gresham's Law for information.⁷⁷ One consequence of this most recent wave is that, for the first time, the news media are now the least trusted of the various global institutions tracked by Edelman.⁷⁸ If citizens believe they cannot rely on media for a truthful account of political activities, doubts about the legitimacy of government and its actions are likely to spread. Disinformation that comes, whether deliberately or not, from political leaders can be particularly corrosive to trust in government.

3. Political polarization

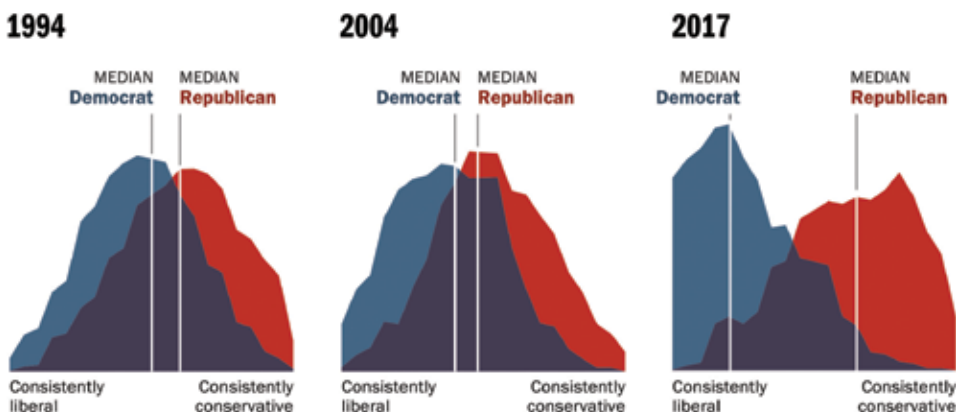
A third factor in declining trust is the steady increase in political polarization in the U.S. This has produced political camps whose views on a wide range of issues have drifted farther and farther apart, increasing hostility across party lines.

Party divides. Data from more than 20 years of polling by the Pew Research Center show a widening ideological gulf between Democrats and Republicans (see Figure 4.1). While in 1994 there was a large overlap in political values between members of the two parties, by 2017 the amount of common ground between the two had shrunk considerably.⁷⁹

FIGURE 4.1 GROWTH OF POLITICAL POLARIZATION, 1994–2017

Democrats and Republicans more ideologically divided than in the past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values



Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see methodology). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents; the red area of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple.

Source: www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/section-1-growing-ideological-consistency/pp-2014-06-12-polarization-1-01/

As the gap has grown, so has anxiety about the other party.⁸⁰ It is logical that the “out” faction, whose views and values bear little in common with the party in power, would feel less comfortable and confident, and therefore less trusting, generally, in the way that the “in” party operates the government.

Echo chambers and filter bubbles. A potential contributor to growing polarization is the impact of so-called “echo chambers” and “filter bubbles.” Echo chambers refer to people’s tendency to seek information that confirms their existing perspectives and assumptions, including their political views. Filter bubbles refer more specifically to the mechanisms within online social networks that provide users with content that is appealing to them, which often is content that is consistent with their current views. The rise of cable channels and web sites with partisan perspectives and with commercial interests to promote strong ideological viewpoints make it possible for individuals to stay with a source that reinforces their existing perspective. On the internet, social media platforms generate advertising dollars by tailoring and targeting information to users that cater to their interests and viewpoints. Algorithms designed to shape each user’s newsfeed tend to favor information from “people like them.” As these algorithms improve, it becomes easier for people to inhabit online worlds that are almost hermetically sealed off from others with different perspectives. The irony is that the internet, which originally promised to be a tool for enlightenment and liberation by providing everyone with access to all human knowledge, has, according to some critics, ended up isolating each user in a “unique, personal universe of information created just for you by an array of [invisible] personalizing filters.”⁸¹

In the realm of politics, this phenomenon results in polarization and fragmentation in which the body politic has shattered into myriad separate “echo chambers” of groups—some small, some considerably larger—that share similar viewpoints. In a white paper for the Commission, Jeffrey Abramson, a professor of law at the University of Texas and a political theorist, describes this process as “the balkanization of the public into separate news-consuming spheres.” He warns that it is “difficult for trust to spread among partisans when the news they receive does not offer a shared baseline of common information.”⁸²

Spatial polarization. Another form of polarization is the split in values and perspectives between rural residents and urban dwellers even in the same state, sometimes described as “spatial polarization.” In addition, the United States today consists of liberal “blue states” clustered mainly along the country’s east and west coasts, and conservative “red states” filling the vast but more sparsely populated heartland of the country.⁸³

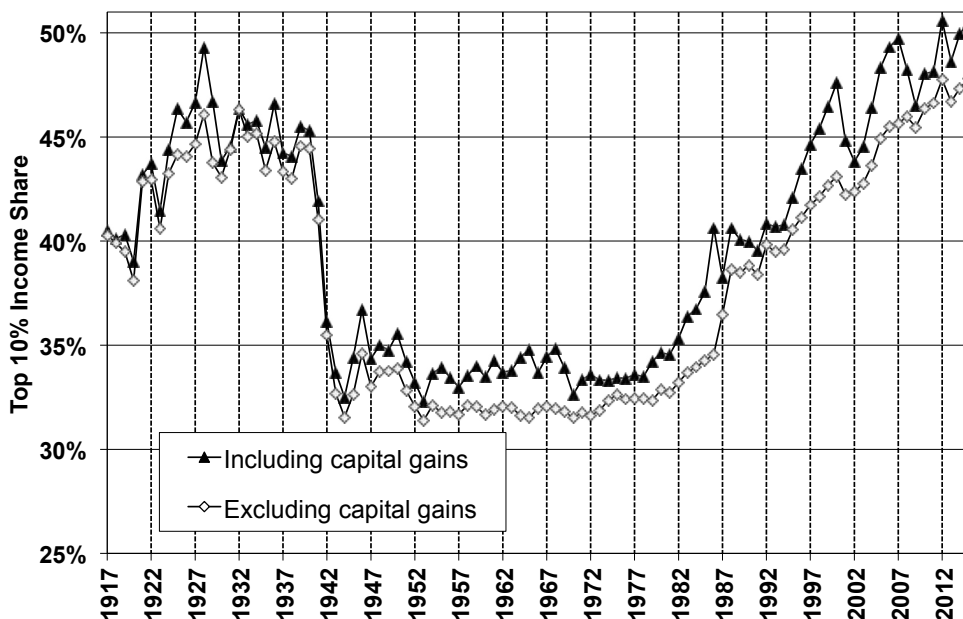
Institutionalists vs. insurrectionists. As polarization increases, the notion of government as a joint enterprise that tolerates disagreement but ultimately works toward compromise in order to get things done seems increasingly quaint. In his 2012 book, *Twilight of the Elites*, Christopher Hayes argues that the country’s political divide has evolved past the traditional distinction between “left” and “right” or between Republicans and Democrats. The country, he suggests, is now divided into two camps that he describes as institutionalists and insurrectionists.

Institutionalists continue to believe in the fundamental legitimacy and necessity of a “central repository of authority.” They are therefore committed to defending the current system of government, despite its flaws. Insurrectionists, on the other hand, are convinced that “there is something fundamentally broken about our current institutions . . . and believe that the only way to hold our present elites accountable is to force them to forfeit their authority.” Even when in power, they work to remake or eliminate many existing government institutions, regulations and policies. They see political opponents not as legitimate counterparts in governing but as “enemies” needing to be defeated, even destroyed. While institutionalists see the erosion of trust as “terrifying,” insurrectionists “see the plummeting of trust in public institutions as a good thing.”⁸⁴ Finding a path forward to restore trust in democracy that will be acceptable to both factions will be challenging.

4. Increasing economic inequality

The decrease in trust in American institutions, including government and the media, generally correlates with an increase in economic inequality. As charted by the French economist Thomas Piketty and others, after a period of declining inequality from the 1930s through the mid-1940s (from the end of the Depression through World War II) followed by several decades of relative stability, inequality began rising sharply in the mid-1970s. It is now at levels not seen for nearly a century and is still increasing (see Figure 4.2).⁸⁵

FIGURE 4.2 INCOME INEQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES TOP DECILE INCOME SHARE, 1917–2012



Source: <https://eml.berkeley.edu/~saez/saez-USTopIncomes-2015.pdf>

Several studies have found links between high levels of inequality and a lack of institutional trust. Political scientists Mitchell Brown and Eric M. Uslaner from the University of Maryland find that, in fact, “economic inequality is the strongest determinant of trust.” They also suggest that “where inequality is higher, the poor may feel powerless. They will perceive that their views are not represented in the political system and may opt out” of participation. However, Brown and Uslaner’s research finds that the erosion of trust based on increasing inequality appears to have a stronger impact on “communal participation” (volunteering or giving to charity) than on political participation (voting, signing petitions).⁸⁶ A 2016 working paper for the International Monetary Fund found “robust evidence that overall inequality lowers an individual’s sense of trust in others in the United States as well as in other advanced economies.”⁸⁷

There are other indicators of a link between economic inequality and trust. One example is attitudes in rural communities in places like the Rust Belt of the Midwest and Northeast and sparsely populated areas of the Western states, compared with those in urban areas, a manifestation of the “spatial polarization” cited above. Research by Katherine Cramer, a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, suggests that “the rural consciousness revealed [in her study] shows people attributing rural deprivation to the decision making of (urban) political elites, who disregard and disrespect rural residents and rural lifestyles. Thus, these rural residents favor limited government, even though such a stance might seem contradictory to their economic self-interests.”⁸⁸

Perception of fairness. Another perspective on inequality and trust comes from Angus Deaton, Nobel Prize-winning economist from Princeton University. He suggests that the key variable in shaping attitudes toward society and politics is not inequality per se but rather the perception of the fairness of the economic system. Deaton argues that people generally accept some forms of inequality—for example, the success of innovators and inventors who reap rewards for their creativity—as fair and therefore unobjectionable. But they perceive other forms of inequality—such as unequal access to health care and quality education, the elimination of pension benefits for workers, anticompetitive practices of large corporations, or government policies favoring businesses over individuals—as the result of unfair economic or political processes.⁸⁹

Support for this hypothesis comes from the Pew Research Center survey data that “trust in government” and “perceptions of the fairness of government” track each other very closely, following almost identical paths over the past half-century. As of 2015, “just 19 percent say the government is run for the benefit of all—and an identical percentage say they can trust the federal government just about always or most of the time.”⁹⁰

5. Declining economic mobility

A final factor, related to economic inequality, is the degree of economic mobility. A 2017 study titled “The Fading American Dream” by a group of economists from Harvard and Stanford found that mobility, as measured by the percentage of children who go on to achieve an income higher than that of their parents, has declined dramatically. Mobility has fallen from approximately 90 percent for the cohort of children born in the 1940s, to 50 percent for those born in the 1980s, with the largest declines occurring in middle-class families.⁹¹ The study attributes most of the decline in mobility to the uneven distribution of national economic gains, with most going to the top earners and much less to the rest of the population.

According to a 2017 paper by Christian Houle, a political scientist at Michigan State University, “Inequality and social mobility, although related, are fundamentally distinct, and immobility is likely to be perceived as even more unfair than inequality, meaning that it may generate at least as much grievances.... I argue that social immobility fuels political instability.”⁹² If, in fact, the key variable in the loss of faith in government is the perception of unfairness, then it would follow that low social mobility is likely to be a significant causal factor.

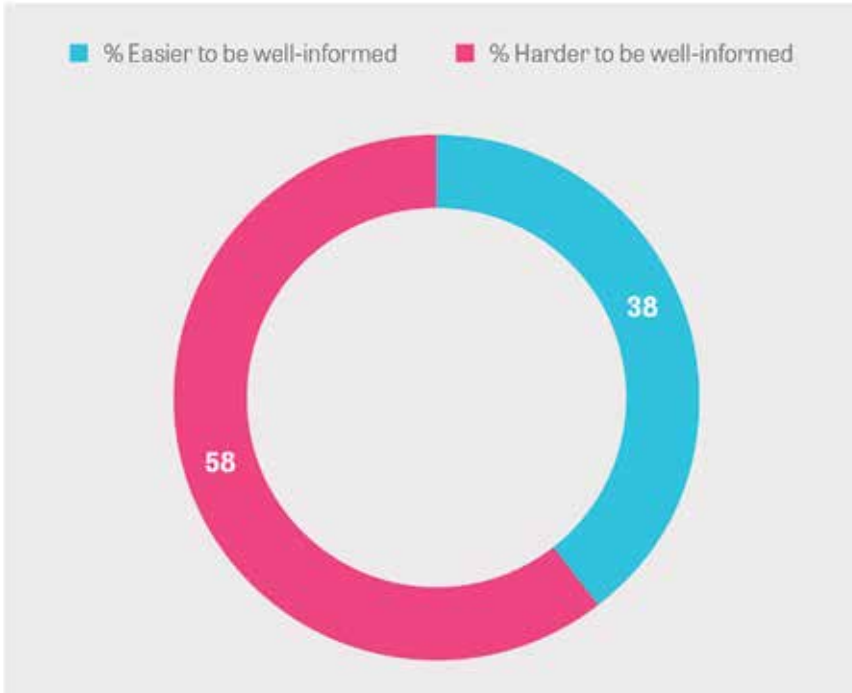
Why Has Trust in Media Declined?

The decline of trust in media may be part of a larger decline of trust in a range of social institutions. Yet there are at least six factors that are uniquely responsible for the decline of trust in media and its role as a consistent, reliable source of news and information. These are proliferation of news sources, media disintermediation, confusion between news and opinion, the spread of mis- and disinformation, the decline of local news reporting and politicized criticism of the media.

1. Proliferation of news sources

The proliferation of media sources, first through cable and more recently through the internet, has increased the challenge of finding trustworthy sources of news and being well-informed. A 2018 Gallup survey commissioned by the Knight Foundation found that almost 6 out of 10 (58 percent) adult Americans said the increase in information available today makes it harder for them to be well-informed. This compared with 38 percent who believed that more information makes it easier to be well-informed (see Figure 4.3). The same survey found that just 41 percent of Americans were confident in their ability to navigate the news environment to remain knowledgeable on current events and determine what is factually true.⁹³

FIGURE 4.3 DOES INCREASE IN INFORMATION AVAILABLE TODAY MAKE BEING WELL-INFORMED EASIER OR HARDER?



Source: Knight/Gallup *American Views*, p. 17.

2. Media disintermediation

The role of the internet as a source of news has altered the way in which news moves from creators to consumers. As of 2018, according to a Pew survey, 68 percent of adult Americans were getting “at least some” of their news from social media platforms and 42 percent reported that they “often get their news online.”⁹⁴ This was just short of the 50 percent who cited television as a frequent source, and well above the portion who rely on radio or print newspapers.

News moves online. In the first wave of online news, many traditional publications established online presences and attempted to attract readers to their sites. Initially, most just put the print version of the newspaper online and did not take advantage of technology to engage users and advertisers in new ways or respond to the changing ways people were consuming news and information. Some of these publications have been successful in attracting regular readers and even paid subscribers. As of mid-2018, 2.9 million of *The New York Times* total of 3.8 million subscribers were digital-only,⁹⁵ and as of early 2017, more than half of *The Wall Street Journal's* 2.1 million total subscribers were online-only.⁹⁶

Readers who subscribe to a specific publication typically understand and trust that publication's perspective and practices. As platforms have become intermediaries between news sources and their readers, many news organizations are increasingly dependent on these platforms to generate traffic to their sites.⁹⁷ In the process, the identities of individual publications can become obscured, diminishing the distinction between major publications that have invested substantial resources in professional reporters and editors, and less substantial sources whose commitment to quality journalism can vary widely.

Reader distrust. The result of disintermediation is to dilute readers' loyalty and diminish their trust in the news they receive. According to the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer, 63 percent of respondents agree that "the average person does not know how to tell good journalism from rumor or falsehoods," while 59 percent say "it is becoming harder to tell if a piece of news was produced by a respected media organization."⁹⁸

American teens and young adults have also found that navigating the rapidly shifting boundaries of online news is challenging. Many young people express low levels of trust and suspicions of bias in the news they encounter online. Youth also report relying more on direct messaging with friends and consulting multiple sources to verify stories found online.⁹⁹

That said, there are recent hopeful signs that the news media can regain the public's trust. In a recent Gallup survey, among those who have lost trust, 69% of adults believe the news media can restore that trust with more accuracy, transparency and reduction of bias.¹⁰⁰ And a new Edelman Trust Barometer survey indicates that the public is engaging more with mainstream media, increasing overall engagement by 22 percentage points globally, and 14 percentage points in the U.S. Engagement increased the most among those who also share and post the news, rising 14 points globally and 7 points in the U.S. among those amplifiers.¹⁰¹

Moderation. A related issue is the role of "moderation" by social media platforms—the process of making decisions about the content that users do and do not see. Tarleton Gillespie, a principal researcher at Microsoft Research, noted that this function is a "surprisingly large" part of what platform operators do on a day-to-day basis:

Content moderation is part of how platforms shape user participation into a deliverable experience. Platforms moderate (removal, filtering, suspension), they recommend (news feeds, trending lists, personalized suggestions), and they curate (featured content, front page offerings). Platforms use these three levers together to, actively and dynamically, tune the participation of users in order to produce the "right" feed for each user, the "right" social exchanges, the "right" kind of community.¹⁰²

Gillespie also points out that moderation is quite challenging: “It is resource intensive and relentless; it requires making difficult and often untenable distinctions; it is wholly unclear what the standards should be, especially on a global scale; and one failure can incur enough public outrage to overshadow a million quiet successes.”¹⁰³

This critical function takes place largely behind the scenes (in part to prevent bad actors from gaming the moderation process for the purposes of social, financial or political engineering). But this opacity means that people who increasingly depend on social media as a primary source of news have scant ability to understand or influence the choices made by these platforms that significantly shape their views of the world. As the platforms become ever more dependent on algorithms and artificial intelligence to aid in moderating billions of inputs, critics have called for more visibility and accountability in how those algorithms operate.

3. Confusion between news and opinion

A fundamental rationale for the First Amendment is to protect the critical role of the press in keeping citizens informed about what their government is doing.

During the 20th century, newspapers separated reporting from editorial comment, which usually appeared in a specific, clearly defined place in the paper. Broadcast news (particularly during the time the Fairness Doctrine was in force, 1949–87) focused on straight reporting and largely avoided the expression of opinions about the news. During this time, journalists professionalized and strengthened their standards for objectivity, aiming to provide accurate and unbiased reporting.

By the mid-20th century, there was a broad consensus on what constituted news and what should be labeled as opinion. This meant there was relatively little disagreement about what constituted “facts,” even if their meaning was open to debate.

Rise of commentary. But the arrival of talk radio and 24-hour cable news channels led to a new emphasis on commentary. As partisanship grew, and the volume of commentary expanded, the consensus on what constitutes “the news” began to erode. The growth of the relatively unregulated internet further expanded the spectrum of voices offering both news and political commentary.

One novel development empowered by the openness of the internet has been the emergence online of “citizen journalists,” nonprofessionals who produce and distribute news and information and, in some cases, commentary. In the absence of professional journalists on the ground in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, for example, local citizens in New Jersey used Facebook to share important information about disaster recovery.

There are scores of other examples of ordinary people sharing photos and videos about important news events on social media from the Tahir Square uprising to the Boston Marathon bombing. While they provide valuable new voices and perspectives, and often serve as the first source of news on breaking stories, they often do not abide by the tenets of professional journalism. These contributors, intentionally or not, can erode the distinction between fact and opinion. More troublesome are political operatives impersonating “citizen journalists,” flooding streams with false content and deploying manipulative tactics to influence users for their partisan interests.

Perception of bias. More recently, conservative media critics have argued that the traditional press—the “mainstream media”—is not truly objective, but rather reflects a generally liberal political perspective that purports to be unbiased. For example, a study by the American Enterprise Institute found “the mainstream media was strikingly more skeptical of Republican education proposals than of Democratic proposals while the education-specific media maintained greater impartiality.”¹⁰⁴

Speaking to the Knight Commission, former presidential press secretary Ari Fleischer argued that some news media have compromised their commitment to objectivity by blurring the line between reporting and opinion in their news articles and broadcasts. Even the choice of what stories get covered and how much emphasis they receive is sometimes characterized as a political decision.¹⁰⁵

In a presentation to the Knight Commission, Wisconsin State Assembly Speaker Robin Vos criticized the tendency of many reporters to ignore what is working in government in favor of stories about dysfunction, conflict and scandals. “Good news isn’t news anymore,” he said. “When good things happen, they are rarely reported, while what is reported is often sensationalized.”¹⁰⁶ Defenders of the press respond that this is not new or even problematic. When things go as they are supposed to, they rarely make news.

Still, the perception of bias continues and pertains to all types of media: newspapers, broadcast, cable and online. The confusion between fact and opinion is reflected in the skeptical attitudes of Americans about news. The Knight/Gallup survey reported that more than 60 percent of the respondents see “too much bias in the reporting of news stories that are supposed to be objective,” while less than half (44 percent) can identify any news source that they believe reports the news objectively.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, the survey results suggest that perceptions of media bias are strongly related to one’s political leanings, with “26 percent of Democrats versus 67 percent of Republicans perceiving a great deal of political bias in news coverage.”¹⁰⁸ Finally, of the 69 percent of Americans who reported that their trust in news media declined over the past decade, 89 percent cited “inaccurate or misleading reporting, lies, alternative facts or fake news” or “biased, slanted or unfair reporting” as the reason for the decline.¹⁰⁹

4. Spread of misinformation and disinformation

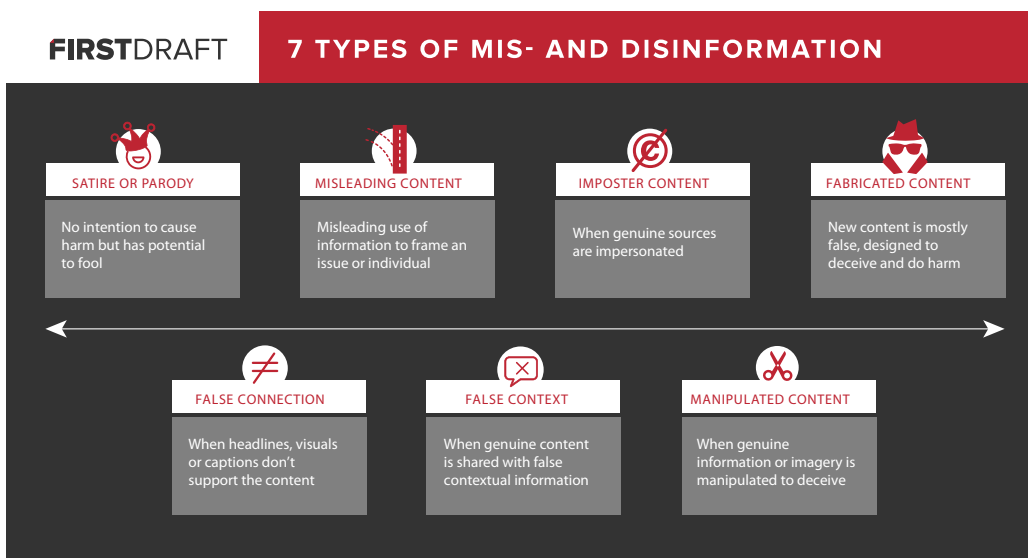
The widespread emergence of information that is false or misleading, that is intended to persuade or confuse rather than inform, is another likely contributor to the decline of trust in media. The problem is not entirely new. Propaganda, usually distortions manufactured by a government or a powerful political interest group to influence the attitudes and opinions of its own citizens or the citizens of another country, has a long history.¹¹⁰

Nearly 100 years ago, Walter Lippmann expressed his concern about the potential of broadcast media to spread propaganda and amplify its power. But traditional media had gatekeepers who were responsible for the quality and reliability of the information they provided. The internet, with its radical openness, has introduced new forms of problematic content.

In recent years, researchers have been studying how false information arises and spreads online. In a 2017 report prepared for the European Council,¹¹¹ Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan of First Draft News identified seven different types of mis- and disinformation, ranging from relatively harmless satire to more serious imposter content and fabricated content. They divide problematic information into two categories:

- Misinformation, when false information is shared, but no harm is meant
- Disinformation, when false information is knowingly shared to cause harm

FIGURE 4.4 TYPES OF MIS- AND DISINFORMATION



Source: First Draft, Executive Director Claire Wardle, PhD, <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research/168076277c>

They identified a third category as well: malinformation, when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere, but the Commission's primary concern is with disinformation.

The presidential election of 2016 brought into sharp focus the opportunities for exploitation offered by the internet, particularly the major social media platforms. During and after the campaign, evidence began to accumulate about how a variety of actors used social media to spread false disparaging information, including multiple baseless conspiracy theories.

The result is what entrepreneur and author Nova Spivack has described as “memetic warfare.”¹¹² Here, a small group of people, perhaps even a lone individual, concoct a false, sensational narrative or image that is specifically designed to be picked up and spread by others who are attracted to the messages but have little idea of their origin. Nor do they have the means (or motivation) to determine the meme's veracity even as they pass it on: “If it's outrageous, it's contagious.”

Perhaps most alarming is the recognition that foreign powers, and most notoriously Russia and its Internet Research Agency, have systematically used social media platforms to attempt to disrupt the electoral process in the U.S. and other countries.¹¹³ Researchers and the U.S. intelligence agencies have found that during the 2016 election, Russian actors created large numbers of fake accounts on social media to spread disinformation. According to a U.S. criminal indictment, this effort continued into the 2018 midterm election campaign.¹¹⁴

As Wardle and Derakhshan note, the Russian interference in democratic elections is intended not just to favor one candidate or another. Rather, its goal is “to sow mistrust and confusion about what sources of information are authentic.”¹¹⁵

Concern about disinformation is not simply an American problem. A 2017 survey conducted for the BBC World Service found that 79 percent of respondents in 18 countries were “worried about what was fake and what was real on the internet.”¹¹⁶

...POLARIZATION AND FRAGMENTATION HAVE SHATTERED THE BODY POLITIC INTO SEPARATE “ECHO CHAMBERS” OF GROUPS.

Recent revelations of efforts to disrupt the electoral process, sow discord and foster doubts about democratic political processes have created grave concerns. For example, *The New York Times* called Facebook's ecosystem "ripe for manipulation" when its business model "capitalizes on personal information to influence the behavior of its users, and then sells that influence to advertisers for a profit."¹¹⁷

Facebook was not alone as a conduit. Comprehensive studies released by the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee documented that Russian manipulation extended to many online media entities in the 2016 election.¹¹⁸ As one of the lead researchers explained, "it was a cross-platform attack that made use of numerous features on each social network and that spanned the social media ecosystem."¹¹⁹

Facebook, Twitter and Google's YouTube have been criticized as too slow to respond.¹²⁰ They have made some changes designed to strengthen mechanisms to detect and remove illegitimate content. For example, Facebook now insists on more transparency around political content that is promoted with its advertising platform. These changes have been occurring so frequently (and properly so) during the Commission's deliberations that we believe attempting to provide a snapshot of developments at one particular time is not useful.

5. Decline of local news

A number of studies have shown that Americans trust local news sources more than national news media. For example, the 2018 Media Trust Survey from the Poynter Center found higher levels of trust in local newspaper and television news compared with national media. This result was particularly pronounced among Republicans: 71 percent said they trusted local TV news, compared with just 28 percent who trusted national network television news. Similarly, 62 percent said they trust their local newspapers, compared with 29 percent who expressed confidence in national papers.

Commenting on a similar discrepancy in the United Kingdom, journalist Jo Allison pointed to several factors responsible for this phenomenon:

One of the primary reasons local news stands apart is that it's often perceived as having higher levels of relatability and accountability. Proximity also plays a part. A local paper can have a tangible presence in people's daily lives. Readers, especially those that take an active role in local issues, are likely to have met a reporter, they're likely to have walked past the newspaper's office on occasion and as a result they're likely to have made a different sort of connection to the medium. It's also often easier for readers to engage with [local] writers, which is important in the social media world of today.¹²¹

Unfortunately, local news organizations have undergone a dramatic financial decline over the past several decades, leaving many communities without local news sources. As people find themselves at a greater distance from those who create the media they consume, their level of distrust in those media is likely to grow.

6. Politicized criticism of media

Americans tend to be more critical of “the media” than of “my media.” What they seem to mean is that although they are able to find news sources they trust, they are distrustful of media generally, including media that they may not have personal experience with.¹²²

There seems to be an ideological component to this general distrust, particularly among more conservative-leaning voters, as a result of continuing attacks on “mainstream media” by pundits and politicians. According to Georgetown professor Jonathan Ladd in a white paper for the Knight Foundation:

Changes in media technology led to the creation of cable news channels and later, internet news sources. The major sources of political news developed different partisan reputations, and these were liked by some parts of the political spectrum and disliked by others. Ideological news sources also had an ideological and professional incentive to use their platforms to attack the mainstream news media, and they did. Politicians and pundits in this polarized party system and fragmented media landscape had an incentive to also criticize the mainstream media and partisan outlets affiliated with their ideological opponents, and they did.¹²³

RECENT REVELATIONS OF EFFORTS TO
DISRUPT THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, SOW
DISCORD AND FOSTER DOUBTS ABOUT
DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL PROCESSES
HAVE CREATED GRAVE CONCERNS.

This Commission's charge is to ascertain the causes of the decline in trust in democratic institutions, particularly the media, and to recommend solutions. We have seen that democratic societies need trust in the legitimacy of their political processes and in the ability of their representatives to run the government properly. They also need a healthy distrust in order to hold those in power accountable, which, in a democratic society, depends on news media to report on what those in power are doing.

It is time for bold thinking on how to revive the healthy combination of a distrust of power with a broader trust in the democratic institutions that have served the United States so well for hundreds of years.

The Knight Commission is not in a position to recommend changes to the democratic workings of American society, e.g., issues of gerrymandering, money in politics or specifics relating to political parties. Nor does the Commission contemplate turning back the clock to a time when media choices were more limited or individual voices less prominent. But it can make recommendations that aim to place media in a more trusted and trusting place, to address the role of technology and online media entities, to instill more responsible actions from our leaders, and to foster better-informed, more engaged Americans. In the next three chapters, the Commission offers its recommendations for actions that citizens, leaders, governments and business enterprises (including media and technology companies) can take to advance these goals.

TRANSPARENCY BREEDS **TRUST.**

PART II

RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER

5

RESTORING TRUST IN JOURNALISM

The Commission Finds:

- ▶ A free and open press, and the strong protection of the First Amendment, preventing the government from restricting the freedoms of speech and press, are basic tenets of this country.
- ▶ The rise of partisan news organizations is producing more bias in news reports, and the increasingly blurred line between news and opinion in traditional mainstream media is contributing to perceptions of bias more generally. Combined with the sheer volume of opinion expressed on digital media and cable news channels, and the rise in polarized politics, this blurring is leading to significantly diminished trust in news and information.¹²⁴
- ▶ Journalism continues to face extreme financial pressures. In many localities, news organizations have vanished or are struggling to survive.
- ▶ Technological innovation has enabled promising new methods of newsgathering, citizen journalism, data visualization, storytelling, reader engagement, and revenue and distribution.
- ▶ Yet the internet and related technologies have disrupted the traditional business model for journalism and have given rise to hyper-partisan online news sites. In addition, the manipulation of major technology companies has contributed to the spread of misinformation and disinformation, an increase in echo chambers, and the ability for both foreign countries and domestic operatives to manipulate news and information during the U.S. election process.
- ▶ When newsrooms do not reflect the demographic and economic diversity of their communities,¹²⁵ the distance between the journalist and the reader grows, and can diminish trust.
- ▶ Principles for quality journalism should apply across all news industry sectors, addressing solutions to functions rather than particular entities.



The Commission Recommends:

Recommendation 1

TRANSPARENCY

- ▶ Encourage radical transparency and community engagement from news organizations.

Recommendation 2

JOURNALISM

- ▶ Increase support for quality journalism at all levels with a focus on rebuilding local journalism.
 - A. Accelerate a national push to create and foster nonprofit, hybrid and for-profit models of quality local news organizations.
 - B. Encourage more collaboration among journalism entities at all levels.

Recommendation 3

INNOVATION

- ▶ Use technology to enhance journalism's roles in fostering democracy.
 - A. News companies need to embrace technology to support their mission and achieve sustainability.
 - B. Use technology and collaboration to help defeat disinformation.
 - C. Use journalism to combat polarization.

Recommendation 4

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

- ▶ Build a news and information ecosystem that reflects the diversity of individual communities and our nation.

At its best, journalism informs the public on matters of civic concern, gives citizens a common set of facts, provides context that lends greater meaning to the news, independently monitors and holds those in power accountable, and strengthens the public discourse. Good journalism helps us to understand others whose lives and challenges are very different from our own.

That is the ideal.

Today's reality is more complicated and more problematic. News media, mostly at the national level, have lost the trust of many Americans, though the degree of trust varies significantly by political affiliation. Republicans generally see “mainstream journalism” as deeply biased, whereas Democrats tend to be more trustful of these media. Independents, as could be expected, are in the middle, though are typically closer to the Republican perspective.¹²⁶

Local media, while still trusted by over 70 percent of the population,¹²⁷ face a growing need for funding to serve their communities. Consequently, the free flow of consistent, reliable news and information in American society is in jeopardy.

...HAVING A STRONG POLITICAL
PERSPECTIVE DOES NOT ABSOLVE MEDIA
ORGANIZATIONS OF THE RESPONSIBILITY
TO BE **ACCURATE AND TRUTHFUL** IN THEIR
REPORTING OF THE NEWS.

The Crisis in Journalism

According to Gallup, 41 percent of U.S. adults trust the media (defined broadly as newspapers, TV and radio) in terms of “reporting news fully, accurately and fairly,” compared with 72 percent of U.S. adults in 1976.¹²⁸ Among those who identify as Republican, this number drops to 14 percent.¹²⁹ Following the Watergate scandal of the 1970s, Americans’ trust in journalism reached a high point. Through the ensuing decades, trust in the press fluctuated amid political polarization,¹³⁰ technological advances and the decline in the business fortunes of local news outlets.

Journalism also faces a financial crisis. In less than two decades, the traditional advertising-based business model for journalism—particularly print journalism—collapsed.¹³¹ Print advertising dollars have turned into digital dimes and mobile pennies. Meanwhile, just two companies, Google and Facebook, have captured 58 percent of the U.S. market share for digital advertising.¹³² Since 2008, more than 25,000 journalists have lost their jobs,¹³³ accelerating the decline of regional and statehouse coverage and of costlier investigative and specialty journalism.¹³⁴

Meanwhile, the number of journalists working in broadcast television news has remained stable since 2008. But the relaxation of federal limits on ownership of local broadcast stations has led to consolidation of ownership, which in some cases has diminished the commitment to local coverage in favor of centrally produced content.¹³⁵

Though many news organizations and journalists are continuing to do outstanding work, other journalists, executives and owners of news media have made strategic decisions that have led to further erosions of trust. In the quest for profits, clicks, shares and ratings, the spectrum of ills includes headlines that overpromise and mislead, advertising designed to look like journalism, and journalists and partisan commentators who blur the line between fact and opinion. It also includes newsrooms at the local and national levels that have failed to keep up with the demographic and political diversity of their communities, and those that have lagged in adapting to the latest ways that readers and viewers consume news and information.¹³⁶

Without faster, more effective innovations in business models, coupled with substantial reinvestment, even the higher levels of trust in local journalism are not enough to sustain healthy local news operations.¹³⁷

That said, we recognize that for commercial and political interests, some news outlets have strategically and intentionally embraced a specific political bias to attract a distinct audience.¹³⁸ For some readers/viewers, this is how they prefer to consume news and information. To them the bias is clear, accepted and, indeed, trusted. In any event, having a strong political perspective does not absolve media organizations of the responsibility to be accurate and truthful in their reporting of the news.

The shift to online delivery of news and the rise of social networks has increased news consumption overall and is producing promising new methods for journalism and civic engagement. But not without a cost. Technology has made news instant and global at the same time. It has enabled the rise of echo chambers and made it easier for foreign countries to interfere in the U.S. election process and for domestic operatives to spread disinformation. For all the advantages provided by technology and unfettered free expression, the current news and information ecosystem presents a complex challenge confronting journalism, technology companies, politicians and America's political institutions.

An organization committed to produce quality journalism, whether nonprofit or for-profit, established or new, online or off, must generate revenue to survive. As advertising revenues continue to disappear, consumers have begun to replace at least part of that lost revenue with direct subscriptions and voluntary contributions.¹³⁹ Declining trust in news media hurts these efforts, raising greater doubts about journalism's capacity to fulfill its civic mission.

Good journalists do not assume that the public will blindly or automatically trust their work. They know they must earn that trust. Yet the solution is not simply to recommit to the guiding principles of journalism (see "The Elements of Journalism"). The challenge, says Tom Rosenstiel of the American Press Institute, is to apply those ideals in ways that grow public confidence in journalism.

The Commission agrees, and finds that this crisis of trust demands bold action and major investments into the practice of journalism at all levels.

THE ELEMENTS OF JOURNALISM:

What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect

Excerpted from the 2007 Updated Edition by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel

The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing.

Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.

Its first loyalty is to citizens.

Its essence is a discipline of verification. It must serve as an independent monitor of power.

It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.

It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.

It must keep the news comprehensive and in proportion.

Its practitioners have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience.

Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news.

The Presidency and the Media

Before presenting our recommendations to increase trust in the news media, this Commission would be remiss to ignore the explicit antipathy the President of the United States has expressed towards much of the press.

This Commission is bipartisan and includes several members who strongly believe that the President has good reason to be critical of the coverage he has received. They can cite examples where they believe the press is prejudicial in its coverage of him, his actions and policies. That sentiment has come through clearly in the hearings we held across the country in 2018 and in other writings.¹⁴⁰ We understand that criticism and address it elsewhere in this report.

Presidents from the inception of this country have had their difficulties and differences with the press. The first Congress passed an ill-advised and short-lived Sedition Act that criminalized criticism of the government. But for most of the post-World War II era, leaders of both parties have embraced the value of a free press, even as they chafed under its spotlight.

As Ronald Reagan said in 1983, “Since the founding of this nation, freedom of the press has been a fundamental tenet of American life. There is no more essential ingredient than a free, strong and independent press to our continued success in what the Founding Fathers called our ‘noble experiment’ in self-government.”¹⁴¹

Two decades earlier, John F. Kennedy noted, “There is a terrific disadvantage in not having the abrasive quality of the press applied to you daily. Even though we never like it, and even though we wish they didn’t write it, and even though we disapprove, there isn’t any doubt that we could not do the job at all in a free society without a very, very active press.”¹⁴²

As difficult as it can be for any leader to be under press scrutiny, American political leaders have maintained an understanding that a free and robust press is a critical part of an open society. It is, indeed, the essence of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Nevertheless, beginning at least with a tweet on February 17, 2017, the President has accused the press, as a whole, of being “the enemy of the American People.”¹⁴³ He has continued this line of attack ever since,¹⁴⁴ even bringing up the possibility of challenging broadcast licenses held by his critics.¹⁴⁵

To be sure, the decline of trust in the press as well as other democratic institutions has a 40- to 50-year trajectory in this country. Nearly everything in this report can be understood and implemented without reference to the current president. But many feel we are at a particularly tense and precarious moment in this relationship.¹⁴⁶

The sustained disparagement of journalism and the news media as a whole challenges our shared understanding as Americans of the importance of a free press, and more generally the importance of sources of information and expertise independent of those who wield political power. As Chris Wallace of Fox News warns, delegitimizing the press is a way to “raise doubts about whether [the press] can be trusted when [it reports] critically about his administration.”

The Commission, in sum, stands for a free and open press as an essential element of the great democratic experiment this country celebrates. It is as basic a value as self-governance itself, and it must be preserved. We are unanimous that a free press is not, and must not be seen as, the enemy of the people.

Recommendation 1

TRANSPARENCY**Encourage radical transparency and community engagement from news organizations.**

To increase public trust, journalists and news organizations must revolutionize their relationship with the communities they serve. As a starting point, the Commission calls for journalists to apply the principles of “radical transparency” to their practice. This includes a call for news entities to disclose the context for every facet of their operations, ranging from business infrastructure to editorial decision-making to community engagement.¹⁴⁷

Specifically, the Commission urges leaders of organizations that report and distribute news to identify and adopt common standards and best practices that promote transparency. The goal is to foster trust in legitimate news, an endeavor that should be common to all. This approach would include all aspects of transparency, including the measures suggested below to combat disinformation campaigns. It is also consistent with a 2018 Gallup survey that indicates that the public is more likely to trust the news media with greater transparency.¹⁴⁸

**SOME BEST PRACTICES FOR
TRANSPARENCY IN JOURNALISM**

- Clearly label opinion and partisan commentators to distinguish them from news.
- To address perceptions of media bias, emphasize reporting and evidence-based commentary over opinion.
- Update and implement best practices on corrections, fact-checking, anonymous sources, the role of political pundits on broadcast and cable and advertising formats that blur the line between content and commerce.
- Engage with citizens and communities to strengthen the quality and relevance of reporting to increase trust.

The need for transparency. Producing outstanding journalism has long been the most successful way for journalists to earn audiences' loyalty. For news organizations to inform the public effectively, that is not enough today. They need to more effectively confront the public's lack of trust and concerns about bias.

As Jay Rosen, a journalism professor at New York University, observed, "Trust, which used to be assumed by news organizations, now has to be earned through greater transparency."¹⁴⁹ In a recent study by the American Press Institute, 68 percent of Americans said transparency was a very important factor in whether they trusted a news report.¹⁵⁰ Accordingly, organizations that produce or distribute news need to make transparency central to their mission,¹⁵¹ reaffirming their roles as civic and public servants.

Transparency serves four functions for journalism:

- **Provides a means for holding news organizations more accountable for the accuracy and fairness of their content**
- **Encourages high standards in reporting by revealing more about how that reporting is conducted**
- **Gives audiences the opportunity to discover and explore additional information that might otherwise remain hidden in reporters' notebooks, files or cameras**
- **Gives audiences a better understanding of who journalists are and how they operate**

Transparency in media makes the business of storytelling visible to the audience. By showing the essence of their work, news providers can explain more clearly how they function and how reporters know what they are reporting. As Tom Rosenstiel of the American Press Institute suggests, "Journalists must invent new story forms that reveal the skeleton of their reporting, raise the bar of verification, and show consumers why they should trust them."¹⁵²

The point is not to burden daily journalism with make-work, or to disclose confidential sources and methods, but rather to give the audience an understanding of the bases for the reporter's approach in matters where bias could be in question. Increasingly, news organizations are disclosing more about their reporting methods, the personal experiences and backgrounds of reporters, the extent and costs of high-quality investigative journalism, and the criteria for editorial decision-making as a means of building trust (see "Experimenting with Transparency").¹⁵³

EXPERIMENTING WITH TRANSPARENCY

Several initiatives are helping news organizations increase their transparency, including the Trust Project at Santa Clara University, the University of Oregon's Center for Journalism Innovation and Civic Engagement, the Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin, the Trusting News Project at the University of Missouri and the News Co/Lab at Arizona State University. A growing list of organizations such as Spaceship Media, Hearken (which supports “public powered journalism”) and the Solutions Journalism Network, are also helping news organizations promote trust through greater community and civic engagement.

Additionally, a number of individual news organizations are taking promising steps toward greater transparency. It is increasingly common to accompany in-depth reports with explanations of “how we got this story.” Leading examples include those from ProPublica (How ProPublica Got the Story), *The New York Times* (Story Behind the Story), Reuters (Backstory), the Center for Public Integrity and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. Some specific examples of greater disclosure:

- Citing a lack of trust in media, *The Washington Post* recently launched a digital video series titled “How to Be a Reporter.” The first episode focused on the reporters who broke the story about allegations of past sexual abuse against Alabama politician Roy Moore.¹⁵⁴
- Arizona PBS produced a program, “Full Circle,” explaining how it makes its nightly news show.¹⁵⁵

(continued)



- News organizations are going beyond bylines to reveal more about who reports and leads their coverage. The Marshall Project published a comprehensive report on the demographic makeup of its staff.¹⁵⁶
- Some news organizations are providing access to more of the supporting evidence behind news stories and investigative projects. This includes sharing more about the sources whom reporters rely on for information. ProPublica has built a promising model for annotating source material in its “Explore Sources” feature.
- *The New York Times* embarked on an ambitious effort to make underlying documents the star of a story. “The ISIS Files,” a multimedia story published in April 2018, details reporter Rukmini Callimachi’s journey through “old Islamic State offices, gathering thousands of files abandoned by the militants as their ‘caliphate’ crumbled.” Though the Times has published only a fraction of the more than 15,000 pages of documents from paper and hard drives left behind by the extremist group, Callimachi told David Beard at the Poynter Institute that the paper plans to digitize and share all documents she recovered.¹⁵⁷
- To accompany its two-part documentary “Putin’s Revenge,” PBS’s “Frontline” created an interactive video archive of 56 interviews conducted for the series.¹⁵⁸ Audiences can navigate, search and share content from interviews conducted for the film. These foundational interviews, which in traditional journalism practice would not have appeared at all, received more than 1 million views. In another experiment, “Frontline” enabled viewers to examine the context of quotes from 16 featured interviews in its documentary film “Trump’s Takeover.” While streaming the film online, viewers can click on an icon that takes them directly to the corresponding point in the full interview.

Best practices

While many news organizations have experimented with transparency initiatives, there are no standard best practices recognized across the industry. A convening of U.S. news media leaders and an ongoing working group of experts from across the industry could identify and adopt common standards and best practices that promote transparency. This could build on existing best practices at traditional news organizations and newer efforts underway such as the Trust Project (a global network of news organizations hosted by the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University), the Credibility Coalition, PENAmerica, W3C, NewsGuard, DeepNews and other institutions working on this problem.

The Commission supports a leadership-level summit meeting that would bring together all elements of the news ecosystem and would be convened by an industry organization or a collaboration of several organizations. We also support the creation of a working group of experts to complement those at the summit.

Meanwhile, establishing best practices for the industry might start with these actions:

BEST PRACTICE: News organizations should clearly label opinion pieces and identify partisan commentary to distinguish them from news.

In multiple surveys, consumers have expressed confusion over whether stories they read are intended as news or opinion. Readers are suspicious that reporters might inject their own opinions into their news stories. Political punditry from reporters on broadcast and cable television news programming further exacerbates the blurring of the line of news and opinion.

This problem is particularly troublesome online. As Mindy Marques, executive editor and vice president of *The Miami Herald*, told the Commission, “Standards for print developed over a long time; now we need similar standards for online news.”

A 2017 study by the Duke University Reporters’ Lab examined a sample of local and national online news publications to determine how effectively they labeled editorials, news analysis, columns and reviews. The study found:

...inconsistent terminology and a lack of labeling. Some organizations provide a mix of labels that conflate article types such as news and opinion with topic labels such as local, politics and sports. The result for readers is a jumbled labeling approach that fails to consistently distinguish different types of journalism.¹⁵⁹

One of the eight “core indicators” developed by the Trust Project, for example, is “...to distinguish opinion, analysis and advertiser (or sponsored) content from news reports.”¹⁶⁰ News organizations should label opinion content clearly and consistently on all platforms. The Commission recommends that news organizations, on- and offline, create a set of standard labels to communicate clearly to consumers whether content is fact or opinion. We understand that there are variations of these categories, e.g., commentary. We simply urge the news industry to address this problem by helping readers and viewers understand what they are seeing.

Labeling presents opportunities for news organizations to link to source material in order to elevate credible sources of information and build trust with audiences. In addition, this recommendation aligns with the Commission's call to support the development of tools to trace the origin of news stories and other online information, as described in Chapter 6.

BEST PRACTICE: Journalists should emphasize evidence-based commentary over opinion.

One factor leading to the public's perception of media bias is the relatively new practice by reporters of appearing on television news programs and expressing their opinions on controversial topics.

To overcome the perception, the Commission recommends that news organizations prioritize reporting, analysis and evidence-based commentary over partisan commenting. Marshaling data sets to provide context for news or analysis is one promising new area that will likely yield more trusted information in the future.

Meanwhile, the Commission urges journalists to stick to the facts of their reporting when appearing on television and when using their social media accounts, rather than engaging in opinion and speculation. We hope journalists will leave opinion to the pundits—those specifically labeled as commentators—and that news and journalism support organizations will move away from turning fundraising dinners into entertainment spectacles.¹⁶¹

...A FREE AND OPEN PRESS...IS AS BASIC
A VALUE AS SELF-GOVERNANCE ITSELF,
AND IT MUST BE PRESERVED.

BEST PRACTICE: News organizations should update and promote best practices on corrections, anonymous sources and advertising formats that blur the line between content and commerce.

Corrections. Journalists make mistakes, but news organizations do not always make it easy to correct mistakes. They need to make it simpler for the public to report an error, especially as partisan political forces continue efforts to undermine the credibility of independent journalism. A few news organizations devote full-time staff members to respond to requests for corrections, but more resources should be devoted to this important task.

Efforts to bring attention to this issue include the “Report an Error Alliance.”¹⁶² That, or similar efforts, deserves greater support amid such high levels of public distrust in the news media. A deeper problem, requiring help from technology organizations, is the need to send a correction along the same online pathways that the original mistake traveled.

News organizations and storytellers will need to develop correction policies and ethical standards to keep up with new approaches to storytelling such as podcasts and voice-activated devices, virtual reality and augmented reality. For example, when responding to questions about news and information, voice interfaces should provide the source of their answers.

Anonymous sources. Anonymous sources are a reality in modern journalism. Reporters have long relied on them, but anonymous sources do not allow the reader/viewer to assess the knowledge, motives or credibility of the person supplying the information.

Many news organizations prefer not to rely on anonymous sources but do use them when that is the only means to report important information. Often, they explain why the source wanted and received anonymity, but what is often missing is an explanation of the informant’s motive. Where appropriate, we urge reporters to disclose information that can help indicate those motives. In any event, all news organizations should have strict guidelines for anonymity that are readily available to the public.

Advertising formats. Advertising content that has the look of a news article also poses a trust problem if not properly identified. Advertising that pretends to be news is unethical—a form of deception. News organizations should clearly label all advertising as such and partner with researchers to be sure the labeling system works. This effort is underscored in Chapter 6, which calls for the disclosure of funding sources for online ads. All media should disclose who sponsored paid content.

BEST PRACTICE: Journalists and reporters should engage with citizens and communities to increase trust.

With the severe cutbacks in local newspaper newsrooms, many papers have reduced their roles in the community and their presence at major events. Fewer reporters are covering local meetings and delivering the on-the-street reporting that puts them in contact with residents. For the most part, local television reporters are not filling the gap and new nonprofit news organizations are struggling to become sustainable. The result is fewer connections to the community, especially as many news organizations focus more on digital storytelling and distribution, work that is often done inside a newsroom rather than in the community.¹⁶³

At one time the Federal Communications Commission required broadcast licensees to ascertain the needs and interests of their communities and to design programming to address those needs.¹⁶⁴ We do not call for a return of those specific regulations. We do suggest, however, that all news entities increase trust in their news products by listening to their audiences for ways they could better serve their communities. And local television stations do have opportunities to fill gaps in local civic information created by newspaper job losses. They could, for example, produce more in-depth coverage and reporting of local issues and activities.

Interactive media offer unprecedented opportunities for journalists to engage with their audiences. A newsroom should be in constant conversation with its community to know what citizens' lives are like, their frustrations and hopes, their story ideas and source material, how they see the issues of the day and their general concerns about news.¹⁶⁵ Just as the audience should know as much as possible about the reporter, so too should the reporter understand as much as possible about the community. This process can also further common understanding about the role and mission of a free press.

The Commission recommends that news leaders develop and communicate new industry standards for engagement.

LISTENING TO THE AUDIENCE: Some Methodologies that Work

Joy Mayer, who leads the Trusting News Project, says rebuilding trust takes more than just delivering factual information. It requires journalists to help citizens understand the role of journalism and respond to their questions and concerns. She writes:

Trust in a news organization develops when people know they can turn to you consistently for reliable information. It happens when people feel they are being heard. It happens when they see their own lives and priorities reflected in your news coverage. It happens when they have confidence in the decisions, values and ethics taking place in your newsrooms.¹⁶⁶

Mayer, who has worked as a journalist, has urged reporters to tell “a consistent, repetitive story about what motivates our work, the range of information and stories we offer, what sets us apart, who we are, how we operate and how people can reach us.” Below are some examples of approaches that show promise.

METHODOLOGY: Solutions Journalism Network

Among the most promising experiments in recent years is the Solutions Journalism Network. Rather than producing successive reports about common problems that never get solved, journalists in the network convene community members and leaders to help inform their reporting and foster conversations specifically to identify potential answers to problems.

A 2017 Solutions Journalism Network project in Philadelphia involved a collaboration of more than a dozen news organizations and won an Associated Press Media Editors Award for “leveraging innovative partnerships across news organizations and creating a project of stunning breadth and clear engagement with the community.”

In Colorado and New Mexico, the Lor Foundation provided funding to seven newsrooms, including *High Country News*, to participate in Solutions Journalism projects. These produced award-winning journalism and helped news leaders identify blind spots they had in the communities they cover.

METHODOLOGY: Engaged Journalism

The University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication created a platform, called Gather, to share resources, best practices and case studies to support this re-imagined form of journalism. According to Andrew DeVigal, director of the school's Agora Journalism Center, journalists ask the public to tell them what is missing from stories about their communities and invite their perspectives into the narrative, an approach that he calls "engaged journalism."¹⁶⁷

To help encourage newsrooms to embrace "engaged journalism," several foundations created a \$650,000 Community Listening and Engagement Fund. This gave 34 newsrooms free access to tools such as Hearken, a platform for journalists to bring the public along during the reporting of a story. Separately, in Detroit, the Southeastern Michigan Community Foundation created an engagement fund to inspire journalists and community residents to identify innovative ways to improve local community coverage.

At the Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University, the News Co/Lab works with local newsrooms to better understand what their communities think while helping communities better understand how newsrooms think. The lab combines efforts to increase transparency and engagement in journalism with community service projects to improve news literacy.

METHODOLOGY: Citizen Newsgatherers

In Chicago, the nonprofit City Bureau trains community members in newsgathering techniques and then pays them to gather information at local municipal meetings. This is one way of restoring some of the reporting horsepower lost to layoffs and downsizing. These trained newsgatherers can also bolster the full-time professionals' ability not just to report news but to go deeper and pursue important accountability journalism. This can strengthen the connection between journalists and citizens, yet another avenue to restoring trust.

Finally, the Commission recommends two other measures to complement the transparency initiatives already discussed.

Governments at all levels should be transparent

Part of a news organization's responsibility to its audience is to hold others, including governments, accountable. Where there is little or no coverage, there is a greater chance of corruption or misdeeds.

Governmental entities have a corresponding responsibility to be transparent about their methods and actions. While the Commission understands and accepts the limitations to disclosure in the Freedom of Information Act, we urge every government official to be open and transparent within the bounds of good government, and to make government-held information, including data sets, easily accessible, particularly as data journalism increases in importance. We join with the Society of Professional Journalists in calling for greater disclosure at all levels of government.¹⁶⁸ This includes making public officials available for interviews as well as providing full access to nonconfidential information.

News organizations should create a national campaign to inform the public about the role of journalism

The supply of news and information is only one side of the coin; the other is the demand side. What do Americans understand about the role of journalism in democracy? How does that role affect their communities and their lives? Thus, in addition to urging news organizations to adopt best practices, the Commission recommends that they launch a national campaign to help the public understand the values, practices and role of journalists, as well as the importance of the First Amendment, in a democratic society.



**TECHNOLOGY HAS
MADE NEWS INSTANT
AND GLOBAL AT THE
SAME TIME.**

Recommendation 2

JOURNALISM

Increase support for quality journalism at all levels, with a focus on rebuilding local journalism.

In 2009 the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy warned that the digital-age disruption of local news media “pose[s] a crisis for democracy.”¹⁶⁹ In the decade since that report, the health of the news industry has continued to decline. More than 25,000 fewer journalists are working today in communities across the country than in 2007, even considering employment growth from digital news outlets.¹⁷⁰

It is evident that market solutions alone cannot provide the level of consistent, reliable quality news and information for people to be informed and engaged with their communities. With the local news crisis, communities of all sizes are experiencing harmful cuts in original local reporting. Some communities have become “news deserts,”¹⁷¹ with no sources of original reporting or professional journalism at all.¹⁷²

Funding news. New business models are needed to ensure the survival of quality journalism at both the national and local level. Philanthropy, in particular, must play a more significant role in advancing the future practice of journalism and help support journalism providers, both new and existing, find new sources of revenue. Philanthropy must help ensure the development of news outlets in underserved communities as well as at the national level.

The Commission is aware of several new approaches to funding journalism. Some are for-profit ventures.¹⁷³ Others are exploring crowdsourced funding from readers,¹⁷⁴ increasing contributions to public broadcasting, partnering of local and national news entities to bring national news to local audiences and vice versa, charitable donations from patrons,¹⁷⁵ licensing fees for products created (e.g., data gathered and charted), and even government funding, such as that recently provided by the state of New Jersey.¹⁷⁶ Associations and journalism-support organizations such as the Lenfest Institute for Journalism,¹⁷⁷ the Institute for Nonprofit News¹⁷⁸ and the Local Independent Online News Publishers¹⁷⁹ also provide support for local reporting.

The Commission encourages these kinds of experiments, and turning successful models into templates for expanded success. It also believes that investment in new technologies, and in collaborative efforts across all levels and forms of news media, must be increased.¹⁸⁰ But recognizing an acute need, the Commission urges new approaches specifically for sustaining journalism at the local level.

A. Accelerate a national push to create and foster nonprofit, hybrid and for-profit models of quality local news organizations.

With local news at a crisis point, the Commission encourages all experiments in funding it. In the following suggestions, however, the Commission focuses on nonprofit and public benefit models to preserve local journalism. Promising models include:

Community News Organizations (CNOs). As profit-driven newspapers continue their economic decline, the Commission recommends accelerated investment in nonprofit, mission-driven journalistic entities we call Community News Organizations (CNOs).

The number of CNOs has increased dramatically over the past decade to nearly 200, although many of these are small and remain “financially fragile.”¹⁸¹ In fact, the CNO universe today bears a strong resemblance in size and maturity to the educational broadcasting system at the time President Johnson signed the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 that established the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. That Act paved the way for the creation of many of the more than 1,400 radio and television stations in the U.S. today.

CNOs vary widely in their scope and individual mandates, but essentially all share a single *raison d’être*: to cover topics of civic importance that many legacy news organizations have been forced to de-emphasize or abandon altogether. Perhaps the most obvious example is reporting from the state capital.

State legislatures make enormously consequential decisions, and many have been subject to significant corruption. But according to Pew Research, the number of full-time statehouse reporters declined by 35 percent between 2003 and 2014.¹⁸²

Unfortunately, statehouse reporting is expensive to maintain. It is also true that state politics is not necessarily a topic of high interest for many readers, and that when news organizations experience financial problems, this type of coverage is vulnerable to cutbacks in favor of more popular fare. A similar statement could be made about many other under-covered local subject areas such as court systems, city hall intricacies, public health issues and the needs of persistently disadvantaged populations.

CNOs seek both philanthropic and commercial support to fill these civic information gaps. However, CNOs are fundamentally civic rather than commercial institutions. By elevating their importance, American society will properly confront a stark and new reality: that the maintenance of an informed citizenry must be the responsibility of the citizens themselves.

Although the Commission has focused on CNOs that operate primarily online,¹⁸³ it recognizes that news organizations today and in the future will deliver products through various media formats, including interactive online media, audio and video. Thus, CNOs can come from any of these sources, and indeed some have blossomed from public radio beginnings.

Community Information Corporations (CIC). One specific form of CNO is modeled after Community Development Corporations, local nonprofits aimed at developing a local area economically. A Community Information Corporation (CIC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization created to support and revitalize communities, especially those that are information-impooverished. A CIC could also be involved in a wide range of community services that meet local needs, such as education, job training and other social programs.¹⁸⁴ While we assume that a CNO (above) would not take government money or privileges, a CIC could and would accept government support. In doing so, however, it would need to maintain editorial independence from government.

Public Benefit Corporations. A Public Benefit Corporation (PBC), by definition, makes clear that an enterprise's goals are not solely for profit. Forming as a PBC, or including PBC-like clauses in its corporate charter, allows for-profit news organizations to invest in serving their communities without fear of shareholder suits for failing to maximize profits.

The Commission recommends that existing for-profit news organizations give serious consideration either to converting to PBCs or adopting “public benefit” commitments in their corporate charters. A recent example is the Philadelphia Media Network, which operates the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Daily News* and Philly.com. The late H. F. Lenfest turned the company into a public benefit corporation in 2016¹⁸⁵ as part of his decision to donate the company and a \$20 million endowment to a new nonprofit, the Institute for Journalism in New Media, now called the Lenfest Institute for Journalism. The goal is for the Philadelphia Media Network to continue to generate commercial revenue from advertising and subscriptions, while pursuing a sustainable business model for its future.

This recommendation presents opportunities for news organizations to increase transparency and trustworthiness through clearly stated goals for meeting the information needs of the communities they serve. By becoming a PBC or adopting specific PBC elements, a news organization can more clearly commit itself to specific social and civic values. Entities that want to move to full PBC status would need to amend their certificate of incorporation to become one. Or, using the PBC framework, news organizations could develop and add specific “public benefit” commitments to their existing corporate charters without formally changing status.

Venture philanthropy. According to a Harvard study, while the local newspaper industry's spending on newsgathering declined sharply in the period 2010–2015, philanthropy barely pushed back.¹⁸⁶ In these six years, U.S. foundations granted a total of \$295 million to nonprofit news organizations, but only \$80 million to those on a local level.

Considering the great opportunity for philanthropic impact on local news, the Commission calls for the creation of at least one national venture philanthropy entity dedicated to funding and supporting CNOs across the country. Patterned after venture philanthropy enterprises that addressed market failures elsewhere in American society (e.g., New Profit, Draper Richards Kaplan), the entity or entities would be dedicated exclusively to journalism.

This approach would serve as a catalyst for the creation of CNOs and encourage more philanthropic investment in these organizations. The American Journalism Project (see below) is one example of a venture philanthropic fund that intends to involve local and national philanthropies in support of quality local journalism.

B. Encourage more collaboration among journalism entities at all levels.

Sustainability in journalism takes more than funding models. It takes good journalism. One notable innovation is collaborative journalism to create “content that is greater than what any individual journalist, newsroom or organization could produce on its own.”¹⁸⁸

There are several ways that journalists can benefit from partnering with other journalistic entities, ranging from local media organizations pooling their news operations in time of disaster to a local entity’s joining a regional consortium to local-national alignments.

Some collaborations, like the Panama Papers,¹⁸⁹ are even international.

While journalism has a tradition of fierce competitiveness, the current state of local journalism finances and the importance of the mission warrant a fresh look at how entities can work together to inform the public.



AMERICAN JOURNALISM PROJECT

One new project in venture philanthropy, which took form during the Commission's inquiry and is spearheaded by a member of this Commission, is the American Journalism Project (AJP).¹⁸⁷ AJP is intended to serve three mutually reinforcing functions:

- **Fundraising.** AJP will seek \$50 million for its first local news fund. The target donors to the fund are foundations, corporations and families who see the crisis in local news as an important national problem. Over time, as AJP and its portfolio partners build a track record, it will seek to raise additional funds. Additionally, AJP will also assist its portfolio organizations in raising matching gifts from the local community.
- **Investing and company-building.** Initially, the Fund will seek to make 25 to 35 transformational investments in existing and new CNOs that can serve as exemplars for a new generation of news organizations. Each investment will adhere to a disciplined set of investment criteria, be designed to leverage existing community support and aim to build capacity for increasing that support. AJP will have partners with a mix of backgrounds in technology, startups, venture capital, journalism and philanthropy. These partners will serve as hands-on board members, advocates for each portfolio company, and advisors on team-building and strategy issues.
- **Education and evangelism.** AJP will seek to increase philanthropic support for local journalism by a factor of 10 in the next decade. In service of this objective, AJP will conduct an unprecedented and “assertive, sustained campaign to cement, in the philanthropic mind, a direct, causal, and strategic link between fortifying local journalism and reviving American civic life.” It will cultivate understanding of the interdependence between democracy and independent local journalism, reframe local journalism as a public service and evangelize for local journalism as a philanthropic priority.



Public media. In 2018, at a time when disinformation was on the rise and trust in all media in decline, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and its member stations ranked highest in public trust among nationally known media institutions—for the 15th consecutive year.¹⁹⁰ Public radio also gets high marks.¹⁹¹

In addition to its trustworthiness, public media in the U.S. comprises some of the country's largest-reaching media organizations that serve their audiences through television, radio, mobile devices, the web, in the classroom and more. As the number of full-time newspaper jobs dramatically declined, public media stepped in to fill the gaps, at least partially. Staffing for journalism in public radio is up, supported by growth in individual giving. Investigative reporting is expanding through collaborative efforts with organizations such as the Center for Investigative Reporting and leadership from National Public Radio, American Public Media and PRX.

The strength of the public media system lies in its collective power. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) has led the way, providing crucial support with technology investments to help NPR and member stations keep up with the shift to digital journalism and changes in audience behavior. Funding for regional and local journalism initiatives has helped increase local reporting and promote civic engagement. Since 2009, CPB has invested more than \$32 million to help launch more than 20 local and regional news collaborations,¹⁹² creating 127 newsroom positions to support the collaborations. These innovative partnerships connect 139 public media stations in 42 states and foster a network of high-quality local and regional multimedia journalism with national reach.¹⁹³

These regional collaborations among news entities in the public broadcasting field are valuable. It is now time to bring the learning from the current regional-local initiatives to an alliance for national-local collaborations.

By partnering national and local public broadcasters, this initiative would enhance the public broadcasting model by further expanding local news coverage and by giving national organizations greater ability to cover local aspects of larger stories. When news organizations pool resources, share lessons learned and work together on in-depth and time-intensive projects, the result is greater than the sum of its parts. To achieve this aim, the Commission calls for more local and national philanthropic support of collaborative projects as well as initial or pilot grants from CPB.

Other national-local partnerships. The USA Today Network is a for-profit example of local-national journalism partnerships, created from the combination of a chain of local papers and a national one.¹⁹⁴ The network tripled the size of its investigative team in 2018 with the intention of fostering stronger collaboration on major investigative efforts emanating from local newsrooms. One Pulitzer Prize-winning effort led by the *Arizona Republic*, “The Wall,” combined the efforts of dozens of journalists in Gannett newsrooms across the Southwest, took advantage of specialized resources from still other newsrooms, and drew on additional resources from *USA TODAY*. While that is an example of internal company collaboration, this approach could be adapted by a network of separately owned aligned news organizations.

Another approach is for national nonprofit news entities to support local efforts, as in the case of ProPublica’s local reporting network. It works with local news organizations on investigative stories, including “conflicts of interest, housing, mental health care, criminal justice and workplace safety,” and even pays several local news organizations to devote personnel to these investigations.¹⁹⁵ And Reveal Local Labs partners the Center for Investigative Journalism with local entities.¹⁹⁶

The Commission thus encourages national news entities to work more closely with local news organizations to expand local capacity and amplify local issues that become national stories.

Educational and nonprofit entities. Universities using the teaching-hospital model of journalism education¹⁹⁷ are now responsible for news and information that reaches millions of Americans. Students at several universities (e.g., the University of North Carolina, the University of Florida, Arizona State University, the University of Missouri, the University of California at Berkeley) have won top professional awards while still in school. The Scripps Howard Foundation announced in 2018 the formation of Howard Centers, “multidisciplinary, graduate-level programs focused on training the next generation of reporters through hands-on investigative journalism projects” at the University of Maryland and Arizona State.¹⁹⁸ The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, sponsor of this Commission, has also contributed to many educational efforts throughout the country too numerous to detail. Student-produced, professionally supervised journalism, then, could help replenish local journalism and keep it flowing as new models arise.

Furthermore, many universities holding broadcast licenses do not produce local news on those outlets. The Commission would encourage these licensees to work with local news labs or develop their own to produce local news for their communities.

Recommendation 3

INNOVATION

Use technology to enhance journalism's roles in fostering democracy.

A. News companies need to embrace technology to support their mission and achieve sustainability.

Journalism, like the society it serves, has seen transformative technological advances in the past quarter-century. Newsrooms have gone from relying on the figurative clacking typewriter to sophisticated mobile devices that can instantly call up information and deliver reports from anywhere in the world.

These capabilities are not equally distributed. While some leading news organizations have the means to employ data journalists, AI experts, engineers and app developers, many local news entities struggle to stay abreast of the technology curve. Any deficit in technology access and application within a newsroom limits its ability to gather news, to connect with and serve its community and to experiment with sustainable models.

New technologies discussed in earlier chapters will present new opportunities and challenges. For example, augmented reality could provide customers of local news operations with enhanced location-based stories, and virtual reality can place a viewer in the midst of a news scene.¹⁹⁹

Data journalism is an important emerging field that allows journalists to use digital data—now available in vast amounts—to uncover important stories and convey complex trends visually. Data journalism can serve many purposes—for example, to analyze crime trends in a community, to delve deeply into voting patterns in an election or to identify patterns of abuse in government spending.²⁰⁰ Many journalism schools now offer courses to equip journalists with the skills to use these new approaches.

As more sophisticated technologies and techniques like these emerge, the Commission recommends the development of best practices on how to integrate them into the practice of journalism.²⁰¹

An important reason for incorporating these new technologies in journalism is to develop forms of news that will attract younger audiences. Youth involvement with news places a significant emphasis on interaction (as it comes through social feeds) and direct messaging within a network.

Understanding behavioral preferences is essential in developing a next generation of readers, viewers, content creators and, most importantly, engaged citizens. For example, one intriguing approach to attracting younger audiences to news is gaming, a storytelling medium in which participants are rewarded for problem-solving. According to BBC journalism futurist Philip Trippenbach, “This challenge structure is at the heart of games’ value to journalism. By setting challenges that are relevant to the subject matter, a journalist can communicate understanding of almost any complex topic.”²⁰²

B. Use technology and collaboration to help defeat disinformation.

Some news organizations, which have expertise in sorting truth from fiction, have already engaged in the effort to defeat disinformation. For example, a small group of specially trained journalists tracked down offenders who were spreading false information during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. They discovered that these media manipulators included teenagers in Macedonia; a California man who established several fake news websites, including “The Denver Guardian;” and, famously, Russian operatives.²⁰³ During the 2017 French elections, experts at First Draft trained dozens of journalists to hunt down efforts to deceive the public and created a collaboration of journalists from multiple news organizations who worked to verify or repudiate online content.²⁰⁴

Leading technology companies are also making efforts to slow the spread of misinformation and disinformation online. But more can be done. The Commission, therefore, looks to journalists and technologists, ideally working together, to address this blight on trust and democracy. Technology companies need to guard the privacy of users’ personal information. But sharing data with journalists and researchers—without disclosing personally identifying information—is critical for independent reporting and analysis on how social media are being used to manipulate users with disinformation. This requires more collaboration between technology companies and journalists.

The Commission also urges journalists and technologists to take further responsibility in helping educate and inform their communities about disinformation, and supports an AdCouncil initiative to do the same.

Increase collaboration. News and technology companies vary widely in their capabilities to identify and address misinformation and disinformation. Some are attempting to use artificial intelligence, for example, to identify online content that the media organization then confirms to be nonfactual and/or manipulated. News and technology entities must continue to use and improve technologies such as machine learning, natural language processing and distributed annotation to detect misinformation or disinformation. To that end, the Commission recommends that the news leader summit proposed in Recommendation 1 include these topics as areas where journalists and technology companies should work together.

The Commission notes several technological approaches to increase the visibility and credibility of sources on the web, including efforts by First Draft, the Trust Project, the Credibility Coalition and Hypothesis. The Reporters Lab at Duke University is exploring multiple ways to apply machine learning to automate fact-checking and to find new ways to distribute trustworthy news. Many other academics and organizations are also engaged in these efforts.²⁰⁵ The Commission recommends increasing support for research and development to address, as quickly as possible, emerging threats such as deepfake videos.

Special care is necessary, however, to ensure that technology solutions do not cause more problems than they try to address. Algorithms sometimes mislabel or are overbroad, incorrectly identifying an article as false, or resulting in other false positives. Algorithms can also reflect the viewpoints of their human creators leading to allegations of bias or censorship. With these caveats, we see great promise in the use of algorithms to help detect suspected misinformation or bias in news stories, allowing humans to review the cases further and correct.

Responsibility to inform. In addition to increased collaboration, journalists have an important role to play in protecting the public from disinformation online. Journalists and academics are already alerting technology companies to efforts to use their platforms to spread disinformation.²⁰⁶ The Commission encourages news organizations and journalists to take responsibility for educating the public about the spectrum of media manipulation and its dangers. As scholar danah boyd observes, “The press’s unique role in our country is rooted in a historically unique capacity to amplify information. Yet, just because the news media is no longer the only gatekeeper does not mean that the responsibilities of democratic governance can be ignored.”²⁰⁷

C. Use journalism to combat polarization.

Part of living in a democracy is engaging with others of different outlooks and philosophies. The various interests interact and deliberate to resolve issues of governance. Ideally, through this process, the informed citizen becomes familiar with competing viewpoints and ultimately comes to decisions on how to vote.

A second strain of democratic theory is that the First Amendment guarantees freedom of expression as a means of determining truth. In the marketplace of ideas, the thinking goes, truth will prevail.

In both cases, it is important that members of the public have access to competing ideas in order to arrive at their own conclusions. Today, however, many individuals look to trusted analyzers, accept their assertions at face value, and proceed to operate through that single prism.

Studies in cognitive bias indicate that as people develop a philosophical outlook on the world, they tend to gravitate to information, viewpoints, advocates and associations that reinforce pre-existing views. They are attracted to seeing the world through a certain lens, or “filter bubble,” as coined by political activist and social entrepreneur Eli Pariser.²⁰⁸ Reinforcing this tendency is the world of social media, where critics allege that exploitation of such biases contributes to addictive information-seeking and -sharing behaviors.²⁰⁹ This is partly a result of the customized or personalized algorithms and recommendation systems to keep users engaged. Algorithmically enabled filter bubbles further push individuals into larger echo chambers, which are often amplified by more media, including broadcast and cable news sources that appeal to specific political perspectives.

The Commission believes it is important for the health of democracy for people to break out of these ideological cocoons. To do so will require individuals to embrace dissent and discomfort in the pursuit of truth. It certainly requires extending professional journalistic practices across the media ecosystem. Reporters need to identify where various interested parties stand and create stories that allow readers or viewers, whatever lens they bring to the story, to better understand the issues being covered. Editors need to ensure the accuracy of these stories and question the assumptions behind what a reporter has gathered and writes.

The Commission is neither the thought police nor a parent. We can, however, recommend that all media—print, broadcast, cable and online—make deliberate efforts to expose their readers, viewers and users to diverse viewpoints. As this recommendation touches upon citizens’ freedom of thought and expression, we do not suggest government mandates of any kind. Rather, the Commission sees this as a time for all media to take on the responsibility to serve the broader society.

Recommendation 4

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**Build a news and information ecosystem that reflects the diversity of individual communities and our nation.**

To win a community's trust, news organizations should serve the entire community. To do otherwise limits its potential in any number of areas: advancing community understanding, helping people solve problems and giving itself the best possible chance for survival and success. Journalism must reduce the self-imposed distance between reporters and citizens by expanding the ranks of those who can contribute to the work of journalism. This inclusiveness should encompass all elements of the news business—news production, ownership, dissemination and ancillary functions.

Over the course of its deliberations, the Commission listened to people who rarely see their communities represented in the media. The social fault lines of race, gender, age, geography, class and ideology remain evident. Newsrooms that do not reflect their communities limit which stories get told, how they are told, who speaks as an authority and how audiences will relate to the issue.

This needs to change.

Inclusion and trust. It is clear to this Commission that greater inclusion would increase trust in the news product. We therefore call for news organizations to reflect their entire communities in their news stories and news feeds. Specifically, the Commission calls for a nationwide commitment to diversity in all facets of the news ecosystem. This applies to the people hired, the stories covered, the viewpoints considered and the authorities quoted. These pathways into journalism will strengthen communities and sustain the industry. They are vital regardless of the economic stresses the industry faces.

The Commission recognizes and applauds current efforts by professional groups such as the American Society of News Editors and the Radio and Television Digital News Association, along with other nonprofits, businesses and educational centers, to promote diversity. We encourage additional support for these efforts.

Diverse workforce. This recommendation urges news organizations to expand recruitment, hiring and retention practices that increase diversity of staff, and even owners.²¹⁰ Lack of opportunities to advance and to do first-rate professional work have been cited as reasons that journalists of color leave the industry.²¹¹ Newsroom organizations should develop mentoring and training programs that can help enlist, retain and promote women and journalists of color as well as journalists from other under-represented groups—e.g., geography, class and even ideology. Such programs should support the inclusion of candidates from diminished socioeconomic means through alternative pay incentives, flexible work schedules, public transportation subsidies or other means.

The Commission also challenges all news organizations to track and share data on hiring and employment in newsrooms. Many now do, but hundreds do not. Such efforts are part of the movement toward “radical transparency” for news organizations. They help reduce the distance between journalists and citizens and expand the ranks of those who can contribute to the work of journalism.

All these measures apply as well to the new media and technology companies whose workforces are also significantly unreflective of their customer base.



... ORGANIZATIONS THAT PRODUCE OR DISTRIBUTE NEWS NEED TO MAKE TRANSPARENCY CENTRAL TO THEIR MISSION, REAFFIRMING THEIR ROLES AS CIVIC AND PUBLIC SERVANTS.

Reaching youth. Today's media leaders need to understand better how young people are engaging on social media platforms, and how to reach those who are not online. They need to consult youth in the development of news products. Mentoring and reverse-mentoring will be important measures to create the next generation of journalists, as well as new forms of news attractive to younger audiences.

The Commission appreciates that many journalism schools are committed to diversity in recruiting and training students. But more needs to be done. News organizations need to find staff members from disadvantaged communities and underrepresented geographic areas. Journalism schools can help in identifying, recruiting, training and counseling those students. Those who work their way through college and do not have time to volunteer on the student newspaper or radio station could receive stipends for such work. One should not have to come from a wealthy or middle-class family to pursue a career in journalism.

News organizations' engagement with youth should extend beyond job training. Journalism and media activities in schools enhance civic education, a Commission interest and recommendation in Chapter 7 on citizenship. Furthermore, news literacy is one of the 21st century capabilities that the Commission also emphasizes in that later chapter. News organizations and journalists are already pursuing those news and media literacy goals, but in view of the needs in our society, more should be done.

Lastly, learning occurs in classrooms, libraries, museums, in the home, online and anywhere else the student is.²¹² News organizations should partner with learning institutions, such as local public libraries, to engage young and old in demystifying the news process.

CHAPTER

6

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

The Commission Finds:

- ▶ The rise of the internet, and especially its social media platforms, has connected diverse populations worldwide, expanded opportunities for free expression and enabled new forms of civic engagement. At the same time, the impact of social media platforms and major technology companies on our news and information ecosystems demands a re-examination of the roles of technology providers in a democracy.
- ▶ While not the only cause, the rise of the internet has deeply disrupted the way Americans find, consume and talk about news.
- ▶ The spread of misinformation and disinformation on the internet, foreign interference in U.S. elections and the abuse of social media platforms and their powerful targeted advertising tools by bad actors have fostered uncertainty about the reliability of online information. To rebuild user trust, major technology companies need to more actively and transparently combat problems such as disinformation, hate speech and other divisive content.
- ▶ Users' fear of losing control over personal information, and particularly of having it disseminated to unknown third parties, can lead to reduced trust in the disseminating entity. When that entity, whether an online social platform, digital portal or media outlet, has been a relied-upon source of information, it leads to reduced trust in media generally.
- ▶ In seeking solutions to the unique challenges of the internet ecosystem and the loss of trust in America's institutions, the following values are crucial: a platform-agnostic (even a technology-agnostic) approach; recognition of the continuing evolution of technology; retention of the best principles of openness, inclusion and free expression; and ensuring that the design and management of social media platforms align with democratic values.
- ▶ In several areas of concern, tensions between potentially conflicting values (e.g., between the interests of individual users and the interests of the community, between freedom and responsibility) need to be thoughtfully addressed.



The Commission Recommends:

Recommendation 5

RESPONSIBILITY

- ▶ Technology companies and online services that collect user data should become information fiduciaries, with duties to the user.

Recommendation 6

TRANSPARENCY

- ▶ Technology companies and online services should embrace transparency by providing more information about the impact of their advertising tools, the source and sponsorship of content online and the role that algorithms play in the flow of news and information.
 - A. Support the development of tools to trace the origin of news stories and other online information.
 - B. Disclose funding sources for online ads.
 - C. Provide end users with information about how algorithms work and access to customized algorithms and news feeds.

Recommendation 7

INNOVATION

- ▶ Invest in new structures and technology-based solutions to address emerging problems.
 - A. Develop metrics for the health of online dialogue.
 - B. Develop techniques to discourage sharing of disinformation and/or anti-social content.
 - C. Provide for data portability among social networks.
 - D. Create a multi-stakeholder forum to develop and promote pro-social policies for tech providers.

The Crisis of Trust and Technology

Since its first commercial use nearly three decades ago, the internet has become a fundamental part of American society. Banking, education, work, travel, entertainment and personal relationships have all been touched or even transformed by the internet and internet-enabled technologies.

The internet has brought many benefits. It vastly expanded people's access to information, spurred the development of an array of innovative new services, connected diverse populations worldwide, empowered citizens to report on and debate events in close to real time, and enabled new forms of civic engagement.

However, the problems featured in headlines of 2017 and 2018—disinformation and hate speech, harassment and trolling, data breaches, foreign propaganda and Russian manipulation—have raised serious concerns about the larger implications of the online ecosystem on our democracy. A key focus of concern is the role of internet platforms (as explained in Chapter 3), particularly social media platforms, but the Commission's concerns extend to the entire media ecosystem.

In particular, we focus on major technology companies and social media platforms that are used for the discovery, dissemination and amplification of news and civic information. Whether primarily intended as a news source or inadvertently turned into one, they have become important conduits between producers of news and online users.

There is no question that the internet and platforms that operate on it have deeply disrupted existing media.

For most of American history, news media—first in print, later in radio and television—had a direct, one-way connection to their audiences. Today, however, a large and growing portion of the population, especially youth, gets its news online. In 2017, 43 percent of Americans reported that “they often got news online,” just below the percentage who often get news from television (50 percent) and far surpassing those who often get news from radio (25 percent) or from print newspapers (18 percent).²¹³

In contrast to its print or broadcast predecessors, online news is available instantaneously to all users in greater volume, from more sources. It presents new opportunities to engage with the content through sharing and commenting. The internet has, in effect, put a printing press—and more—in the hands of every user, thereby vastly expanding free speech. And on social media platforms, news is often part of a “feed” that mingles traditional reporting with commentary from users. This complicates the question of “what is news” by blurring the line between producers and consumers of news. Users of media are now “prosumers,” as the futurist Alvin Toffler predicted 40 years ago.²¹⁴

The Commission's primary concern in this chapter is with how online platforms and services may be eroding trust in media and democracy. Of particular concern is the spread of disinformation and the loss of trust emanating from misuse of information. Additional concerns include confusion over distinctions among different sources of news or between fact-based reporting and the expression of opinions about news events. And we are concerned about the role of filter bubbles and echo chambers that can exacerbate political polarization.

Social Media and Democracy

While recommending steps to address these problems, the Commission also understands that social media platforms and other internet-based capabilities, whatever their faults, can continue to make an important contribution to society. Ethan Zuckerman of MIT, an adviser to the Commission, describes seven things social media can do to strengthen democracy:²¹⁵

Social media can

- Inform us
- Amplify important voices and issues
- Be a tool for connection and solidarity
- Be a space for mobilization
- Be a space for deliberation and debate
- Be a tool for showing us a diversity of views and perspectives
- Be a model for democratically governed spaces



Realizing these goals will require a reimagining of how online intermediaries may better align with core democratic values. The Commission encourages all participants in the media ecosystem, and particularly providers and distributors of news, to identify which pro-democratic values they are pursuing²¹⁶ and to develop metrics that allow them (and the public) to track their success in living up to those values.

Freedom vs. responsibility. Pro-democratic values necessarily include free and open expression, a basic tenet of the First Amendment. Every generation faces the problem of applying the underlying principles of the First Amendment to new technologies. And while these freedoms protect speakers, they do not absolve them from moral, if not legal, responsibilities. Thus, the Hutchins Commission in 1949 urged press leaders to act responsibly before governments felt the need to regulate them. This theme of freedom versus responsibility—doing the right thing—plays an important role in our consideration of the ways to increase trust in the entire media ecosystem.

The Commission recognizes that the ways in which online media operate, and the nature of their impact on society, are directly related to the incentives that drive their behavior. Social media platforms, for example, have financial incentives that tie advertising revenues to the amount of time that users spend with a site's content, i.e., time that eyeballs are potentially attuned to advertisers. This leads to designing online sites in ways that encourage users to share content with others, including provocative misinformation. As Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has put it:

One of the biggest issues social networks face is that, when left unchecked, people will engage disproportionately with more sensationalist and provocative content. This is not a new phenomenon. It is widespread on cable news today and has been a staple of tabloids for more than a century. At scale it can undermine the quality of public discourse and lead to polarization. In our case, it can also degrade the quality of our services.²¹⁷

As noted earlier, in the current media environment, content that is provocative and divisive—even inaccurate—often spreads fastest and farthest. Given this backdrop, the Commission seeks strategies that would instead reward the dissemination of accurate, pro-social content and thwart propaganda.

Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. In the United States, Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (CDA) has played an important role in allowing internet-based services that host the posting and sharing of user-generated content the freedom to grow. This legal provision, enacted in 1996, allows “interactive computer services” to determine which content provided by others to include or exclude from their services without incurring liability for exercising editorial discretion.²¹⁸

Given the enormous growth of the internet over the past 20 years, and the emergence of large entities within it, this is no longer an infant industry, nor does it need legislative impetus for growth. And there is a much greater awareness today of the potential to use the internet to spread disinformation.

Congress has passed legislation that removes full Section 230 protections for content that supports sex trafficking,²¹⁹ and has never offered protection against claims for the unauthorized use of copyrighted material.²²⁰ In addition, there have been proposals in Europe for new limits on online content. For example, the European Commission is considering a requirement that sites take down terrorist content within one hour of being notified by authorities, while France has passed new restrictions on hoaxes and fake news online.²²¹

There will undoubtedly be further debate in the U.S. about the proper application of Section 230. U.S. Senator Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat, has issued a white paper identifying many potential ways to regulate online services, including amending Section 230 to remove its protections with respect to illegal or tortious expression.²²² The Commission has heard arguments for imposing more liability on online services to prevent defamatory utterances, disinformation or otherwise-actionable material that threatens individuals or the democracy itself. And it understands that there can be difficulties in enforcing the few rules that users do have at their disposal.²²³

But the Commission also recognizes that without this protection, social media platforms and other internet-based services would likely have incentives to block lawful speech too aggressively because it might incur liability. And they have already seen allegations of political bias in performing their editorial roles.

Internet platforms and social media sites are at once the curators, moderators and transmitters of information. Because of this complex role, solutions to future threats to American democracy will not come easily.

During the period of the Commission's deliberation, we have seen the major online services acting more forcefully against harmful speech via enforcement of their terms and conditions. In several instances, however, these actions have led to protests that they were insufficient, biased, overly broad or unjustified.

The Commission does not take a position on amending Section 230, as more time and reflection are needed. Given the tension of values that it involves, any consideration of changing this provision should be done deliberately, focusing directly, specifically and narrowly on the speech involved and the potential consequences either way.²²⁴

The values of free expression, of an open internet free to evolve, of responsibility to users and to the democracy, and of inclusion, must remain guiding principles as governments and private companies adapt to and address the internet of today.

Our Challenge

As the Commission developed its recommendations, some of the most challenging questions it considered include:

- What function or purpose do, or should, social media platforms have in our lives?
- Who decides who, or what information, is trustworthy?
- Who is to blame for the lack of trust?
- Do social media or other institutions have a responsibility to work against political or social polarization? How?
- How can platforms inspire users/citizens/consumers to place trust in the news and information they receive, and encourage them to engage in meaningful civic discourse?

Values to consider. To address the unique challenges posed by the internet ecosystem and the erosion of trust in our nation's institutions (including the Fourth Estate), the Commission adopted several values that informed its considerations:

A platform-agnostic (even a technology-agnostic) approach. While certain platforms may have been in the spotlight during 2017 and 2018—namely Facebook, Twitter, Google and YouTube—recommendations for the future of the internet must address the whole scope of services and sites that users engage with online. Recommendations must take into consideration their implications for services of different sizes, with different resources, and serving different communities.

A recognition of the continuing evolution of technology. The internet of today is not the internet of the past, nor will it be the internet of 5, 10 or 20 years from now. Just as it has changed dramatically since its inception, the internet will continue to evolve in unforeseen ways over the coming years.

A commitment to retain the principles of openness, inclusion and free expression. Given the unpredictable future of the internet, users need a set of core values that can guide efforts to shape constructive online experiences. For example, those attempting to combat mis-, dis- and malinformation²²⁵ cannot lose sight of the values that make a free and open internet possible, namely a commitment to freedom of expression, in the U.S. and abroad.

Responsibility to the broader society. Continuing the theme of responsibility throughout this report, each stakeholder should realize its responsibility to the broader society and to individuals.

Recommendation 5

RESPONSIBILITY**Technology companies and online services that collect user data should become information fiduciaries, with duties to the user.**

As users spend more and more time online, platforms and publishers are able to accumulate large amounts of information about users' interests and behaviors. This information helps them tailor messages to users and is sometimes shared with advertisers and others for that purpose.

This new paradigm offers benefits for both users and platforms: users get access to a global audience and free, high-quality online services, while platforms generate revenue by monetizing user data through advertising and other means. For consumers, however, the willingness to allow such personal-data gathering requires a belief that such entities will protect them against harm and improper use of the data.

As social networks and other online service providers aggregate extensive data on their users, points of tension, discomfort and even abuse have become evident. This is particularly concerning in a world in which users' experiences are mediated by a handful of powerful entities.

One flashpoint involves the failure to fully protect data generated by users as they interact with online services. A stream of high-profile security breaches, allegations of discrimination and revelations of questionable business practices has put data from hundreds of millions of users at risk and challenged users' trust in the platforms that define their experiences online.

The trouble does not end with the use of personal information. The tremendous power of technology companies and online services opens the door to other potential overreaches or under-performances, such as the failure to neutralize political disinformation campaigns during the 2016 U.S. presidential election cycle. What if, in the future, intermediaries were to use their control over content feeds and their data-based insights into user preferences to steer electoral or civic outcomes to their own liking?

Other than sector-specific privacy protections, legal responsibility in the United States to protect user data has been light. For the most part, protections for user-provided data are based on contractual agreements usually found in a company's terms of service.²²⁶

By contrast, individuals give their banks, lawyers and physicians access to sensitive personal information every day, but those relationships are subject to extensive legal protections and regulations. Trust in those professionals, in other words, is robustly supported by deeply institutionalized codes and legal protections that impose and enforce meaningful standards. Although users continually expose sensitive data to online intermediaries, those entities do not have similar codes of protection for users.

Some new models for addressing the protection of data are emerging. One is a proposal for a new system of data ownership called Solid, proposed by World Wide Web founder Tim Berners-Lee.²²⁷ Others are attempting to develop a blockchain-based approach for protecting identity on the web.²²⁸ The Commission encourages the thinking and experimentation behind these and other new technology approaches. Here we address in more detail a new legal approach that could complement privacy legislation.

Information fiduciaries. Yale law professor Jack M. Balkin and Harvard law professor Jonathan Zittrain, a member of the Commission, propose a new model for the relationship between users and online services that collect information about those users. It is founded on an institutionalized form of accountability analogous to that found between doctor and patient, lawyer and client, or banker and account holder.²²⁹ They argue “that many online service providers and cloud companies who collect, analyze, use, sell, and distribute personal information should be seen as information fiduciaries toward their customers and end users.”²³⁰

A fiduciary is a person or business with an obligation to act in a trustworthy manner in the interest of another. Fiduciaries have standards of responsibility to use what they know for the user's benefit and not their own, especially when the two may be in conflict. Banks, lawyers and physicians are all fiduciaries, as are many corporate officers and real-estate agents, among others. The specific mechanics of an information fiduciary, however, would be substantially different from those of more traditional fiduciaries.

“Facebook is not your doctor or lawyer,” writes Balkin. “YouTube is not your accountant or estate manager. We should be careful to tailor the fiduciary obligations to the nature of the business and to the reasonable expectations of consumers. That means that social media companies’ fiduciary duties will be more limited.”²³¹ Even so, the Commission sees this as a promising area for instilling trust, not only in online media but in all collectors of personal data.

Scope and structure of the fiduciary duty. Balkin and Zittrain's framework defines three central duties:

The duty of care. The information fiduciary is obligated to collect and store user data in accordance with security best practices. At a minimum, if a user's data is breached, misused or otherwise compromised, the fiduciary must inform the user as quickly and completely as possible. Beyond that, the duty will need further refinement since concerns over personal information are more cultural and nuanced than for other areas where the idea of a fiduciary has been employed, and scale and diversity of users makes it difficult to determine the best interest of each user.

The duty of loyalty. The information fiduciary may not collect, manage or retain a user's data in a way that will compromise the interests of the user for the fiduciary's own benefit. This could include financial, physical and privacy-based forms of harm, among others.²³²

The duty of confidentiality. The information fiduciary may only sell, exchange or otherwise transfer user data to any other person or entity in accordance with the Duties of Care and Loyalty. Any entity to which the information fiduciary does disclose user data must be contractually bound to these same duties.

There would undoubtedly be times where an information fiduciary's conduct falls into gray areas with respect to these duties. But this already happens frequently in law, medicine and accounting. Just as evolving bodies of case law or advisory opinions lend additional clarity to fiduciary duties in those fields, so too would courts, professional associations or government agencies help to define the duties in applying fiduciary principles to collectors of information.

The information-fiduciaries proposal has the potential to protect users' control and ownership over their personally identifying information in a manner well suited to the American context. The European Union's 2018 General Data Protection Regulation statutorily provides many of these same protections. But the United States has thus far approached the legal framework around privacy rights with greater caution.

The U.S. Congress is likely to consider comprehensive privacy legislation that may address broader issues of user control. The concept of fiduciary duty, already solidly established within American jurisprudence, could provide a complementary model.²³³

Adopting and enforcing the information fiduciaries framework. The concept of information fiduciaries could be implemented in different forms—legislative, contractual or otherwise. Ideally, all data-collecting entities dealing with sensitive user data—platforms, providers and media companies—would voluntarily adopt the duties of information fiduciary. Imposing regulation from above would require more political capital than might be available and could lead to drawn-out legal battles. Voluntary adoption encouraged by regulation could result in a flexible regulatory structure focused on engaging data collectors as partners rather than as adversaries.

Zittrain and Balkin suggest that the approach of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), if adapted to information fiduciaries, could accomplish this purpose.²³⁴ The DMCA offered companies the opportunity to accept (opt into) a set of intellectual-property rules defined by the government in return for exemptions and protections against highly variable state-level rules. In other words, the proposal to establish information fiduciaries could provide online companies with a clearer, more predictable and legally safer alternative to a patchy and constantly changing regulatory environment in which professional norms have not taken root.

Enforcement of an information-fiduciaries framework could be carried out under existing regulatory structures. One option might consider breaches of the fiduciary's duties to be unfair or deceptive practices under the Federal Trade Commission Act, allowing FTC enforcement. Alternatively, fiduciary agreements between users and data collectors could enable users whose contractual rights are breached to recover damages from the offending party through standard legal tools, including class-action lawsuits.

**EVERY GENERATION FACES THE PROBLEM
OF APPLYING THE UNDERLYING
PRINCIPLES OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT
TO NEW TECHNOLOGIES.**

Recommendation 6

TRANSPARENCY

Technology companies and online services should embrace transparency by providing more information about the impact of their advertising tools, the source and sponsorship of content online and the role that algorithms play in the flow of news and information.

As the online ecosystem grows in importance and complexity, users express increased anxiety in trying to understand the origin of information and who is paying for its dissemination. The following three recommendations aim to build user trust by increasing the transparency of online services whenever they provide news and advertising. Just as the Commission recommends radical transparency for the news ecosystem in Chapter 5, it recommends this principle as well for online media.

A. Support the development of tools to trace news story origins.

One of the distinctive characteristics of the internet and social media is how quickly and easily information is shared or amplified. This is particularly true for appealing or provocative content. However, as stories spread, the original source of the information, along with its context—nuances or even key facts—may become obscured. For users, this obfuscation makes it harder to assess the trustworthiness of news and information online. For content creators, particularly news outlets, this modern-day version of the game of “Telephone” makes use of derivative works without necessarily giving credit to the original source.

The process of amplification is particularly worrisome when it comes to disinformation, false information that is created and distributed with the deliberate intention to cause harm. A 2018 study, which analyzed more than 100,000 news stories and rumors shared on Twitter over 11 years, found that the most popular false stories reached up to 100 times as many people as the most popular true stories. The authors concluded that “falsehood diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information.” This discrepancy was strongest for false political news.²³⁵

To address this range of issues, particularly the spread of disinformation, it is critical to support the development of frameworks that enable researchers, journalists and end users to better track and understand the source of information online.

The Commission considers two potential paths: disclosure and tracking. Disclosure permits content contributors to declare who they are and allows others to assess and verify these sources. Such a system would identify online information as authoritative through consensus and would identify not only what is reliable but what is unreliable.

Researchers and nonprofits are working on methods to address this challenge. One is the Trust Project, which has developed a schema to enable author and publisher declarations that are machine readable and that provide meta-data that can be used by intermediaries to rate the reliability of these sources. Disclosure is not required, as there is value at times in anonymity, but a lack of disclosure could prompt online users to treat the material skeptically.

As for tracking, the Commission supports the research toward automated systems that can determine the original source of a story and provide an analysis of how it was spread. This type of system, coupled with human oversight, could be useful in combating the spread of misinformation and disinformation by identifying those responsible for disseminating false or deceptive content, even unintentionally.²³⁶

The Commission does not take a position on any particular technology that could help identify original sources, but understands that solutions will likely begin as research projects before being implemented at scale. We encourage such research and the sharing of relevant non-personally identifiable information with researchers for that purpose.

As tools such as these are developed, the Commission is cognizant of the importance of protecting the identities of sources that wish to remain anonymous. For example, it would be dangerous to be able to trace stories back to certain sources, such as whistleblowers, confidential sources or dissidents who may be put in jeopardy if their identities were revealed.

Finally, the Commission cautions against the adoption of systems that might offer incentives for content creators to rush stories online—in order to be recognized as the first source—without first verifying their accuracy. The Commission strongly believes in the need for truthful information. The reason for supporting the development of technologies to disclose the sources of information is to encourage the distribution of truthful content from the beginning.

B. Disclose funding sources for online ads.

Online advertising in the U.S. is an \$88 billion industry, with continued growth expected across all formats and platforms (e.g., mobile, social media, audio and video).²³⁷ In an environment in which so much content and so many services are provided to users at no cost, it is revenue from digital ads that supports free online media. Key to its success is the ability for advertisers to reach consumers and for consumers to receive advertising messages.

Unlike with offline advertising, online platforms, publishers and ad networks are able to collect and analyze copious amounts of individual user data to increase the accuracy and efficiency of targeting ads to the right eyeballs. This is a double-edged sword. While ads are efficiently reaching prime targets—say, those looking for a hotel in a particular city—the digital advertising business faces an increasing number of technical, political and ethical challenges.

Political ads. Investigations since the 2016 U.S. presidential election have raised concerns about who funded certain online political ads and the impact of this content in undermining traditional democratic norms. In response, Twitter, Facebook and Google have launched separate efforts to require disclosures about funding of political ads,²³⁸ with a goal of increasing transparency and strengthening protection of elections. The Commission supports these initiatives, as well as efforts in Congress (such as the Honest Ads Act²³⁹) and at the Federal Elections Commission (for example, proposed rules for disclosure requirements²⁴⁰) for more information about the sponsorship of political ads. The Commission also supports greater disclosure regarding how ads intended to affect voting behavior or attitudes toward a specific issue are targeted.

Commercial ads. Taking this further, and consistent with the theme of radical transparency throughout this report, the Commission recommends that all digital advertising be clearly identified as such and that all online media make available to consumers information regarding their advertising funding sources. This requirement should apply not only to display-type ads but also to native advertising, in which online publishers accept payment for sponsored content that looks similar to independently produced editorial or entertainment content.

For this recommendation, the Commission draws its precedent from Section 317 of the Communications Act. That provision requires broadcasters to clearly disclose to listeners or viewers if matter has been aired in exchange for money, services or anything else of value.²⁴¹ We urge policymakers to modernize the law to apply to digital media.

We recognize that some are wary of increased regulation, particularly if it may restrict First Amendment-protected speech. However, the Supreme Court has generally found that advertising disclosure rules do not violate the First Amendment. Even in the *Citizens United* case, the Court assumed that the government could require disclosure of sponsors.²⁴²

Some on the Commission would apply this requirement only to political ads, which is certainly the most important category from the standpoint of trust and democracy. We suggest the broader measure here (1) to remove the decision-making about what is “political,” and (2) to signal that in order to foster trust, the principle is worth applying across the board. We also realize that regulation incurs costs that burden businesses. We do not imagine an extensive regulatory regime, but rather a simple requirement of disclosure. If this is burdensome to small businesses, there could be an exemption for entities that earn less than a certain amount of annual revenue.

Advertiser choice. Finally, the Commission looks to sponsors to exert responsibility by choosing not to place their ads next to content that is damaging to the democracy, such as terrorist recruiting, voter manipulation and disinformation. Most advertisers shy away from controversial advertising, maybe overly so. But they should have a choice and not be penalized for exercising it.

Currently, brands buy digital advertising (or use third parties that place ads for them) according to reach (number of users exposed to an ad) and key words (particular characteristics of users or their interests). Sometimes they pay a premium to avoid sites that contain content they do not want to associate with. The Commission understands that using a formulaic algorithm for ad placement is highly efficient and that there can be costs associated with deviating from it. But we also believe that the inadvertent placement of an advertiser's message next to content that offends the sponsor's values can be harmful to the advertiser's brands and can provide an undeserved revenue source for dubious content. As so much of the digital advertising dollar is concentrated in a few services, the Commission urges those entities to enable their advertisers to opt out of being associated with noxious content without undue costs.



C. Provide end users with information about how algorithms work, and access to customized algorithms and news feeds.

Because of the vast scale of the social media platforms, many decisions about the content that users see are made by algorithms that embody judgments about which content is important or likely to be of interest to users. These platforms make extensive use of algorithms that customize news feeds to individual interests, while search engines rely on algorithms to determine which content is provided in response to user queries.

Many of the concerns expressed about the influence of platforms on civic conversations focus not on the blocking or censorship of content, but on the promotion or de-prioritization of content by algorithms designed to provide users with content of most interest to them.

The Commission understands that the platform companies are constantly revising and improving their algorithms. For example, Facebook has experimented with suggesting alternative content that users might be interested in seeing.²⁴³ As digital services offer customized user experiences, there is a need to clarify the principles for algorithms that determine the content that users see. Specifically, digital service providers should consider the following questions:

- **Are we clear about which content is personalized, and to what extent it is personalized?**
- **Can we provide users with greater clarity about why and how it is customized?**
- **Can users be given the ability to control that customization?**

In employing algorithms that determine such content, providers should offer a clear explanation (in layman's terms) of what is personalized and to what extent, what causes certain content to be recommended, and what a user can do to control this customization. This procedure would present an opportunity to help users understand how customization works (glass-box approach). It also would allow users to adjust the parameters that determine which content appears in their feeds, and which results are shown first (open-box approach).

By clearly articulating the principles behind customized or personalized algorithms and providing end users with the ability to adjust their own feeds, digital services can give users a better understanding of how filter bubbles work and perhaps diminish their impact. We encourage development of these principles and techniques at company and research laboratories.

Recommendation 7**INNOVATION****Invest in new structures and technology-based solutions to address emerging problems.**

Many problems in the digital ecosystem have arisen as the result of poorly understood or unintended consequences of new technology-based capabilities. It is difficult if not impossible for technology developers to anticipate all future consequences of a design, particularly as the internet continues to evolve.

The previous recommendations in this chapter rely mainly on institutional and social responses to problems. The Commission believes, however, that problems caused by technology can also be addressed by methods that make creative use of technology itself. We encourage research into the following ideas.

A. Develop metrics for the health of online dialogue.

A high-level goal for the Commission is to move the internet, social media platforms and other online services toward being a more positive force in supporting democracy. The Commission is aware of activities underway to develop healthier social interactions and metrics to measure these interactions. Such metrics would define and measure the impact of news media outlets and social media platforms on the health of civic dialogue. These measures should be maintained by independent third-party auditors (such as scholars or nonprofit organizations) with the mission of encouraging online providers to support balanced information and promote healthy democratic discourse.

MIT Professor Deb Roy, a member of this Commission, has proposed an initial set of metrics intended to “measure aspects of the health of the public sphere.”²⁴⁴ These indicators focus particularly on the nature of communications on both digital and broadcast media between groups with different, often opposing, social or political perspectives:

- **Shared attention:** Is there overlap in what we talk about?
- **Shared reality:** Are we using the same facts?
- **Varied perspectives:** Are we exposed to different opinions?
- **Receptivity:** Are we open, civil and listening?

The Commission encourages the development of metrics that will foster more civil and productive dialogue, whether online or not. This includes further experimentation by the platform companies, or by influential actors such as media brands, social media influencers and advertisers that may wish to associate their messages with pro-social content. The aim is to reprioritize a system's design goals from the beginning to align better with promoting healthy civic discourse.²⁴⁵

B. Develop techniques to discourage sharing of disinformation and anti-social content.

Because it is human nature to be drawn to stories that are provocative or highly emotionally charged, disinformation (which is often deliberately constructed around these attractive features) tends to be shared more quickly and spread more widely than true information. One potential remedy the Commission recommends is to educate users about the dangers of spreading disinformation and encouraging them to resist the temptation to do so. The Commission endorses an Ad Council initiative to create a campaign on this theme.

Another, complementary approach would be to build mechanisms into social media networks that act to diminish the spread of false information. Some platforms have been attempting to do this. For example, after a year of testing the use of “disputed flags” to mark stories identified by third-party fact checkers as false, Facebook discontinued this approach. The company found that it “inadvertently buried critical information that explained the inaccuracies, and could backfire by entrenching a person’s false beliefs.”²⁴⁶ More recently it has started to experiment instead with suggesting “related articles” that were deemed more factual, and found that it did lead to less sharing of false stories. Other techniques that have been proposed include slowing down sharing and retweets of disputed content, and development of a reputation system that would rate users on the frequency with which they shared content deemed to be false.

Finding techniques that effectively combat disinformation and are acceptable to users may be difficult. Particularly challenging is to develop methods—based on either machine or human judgment—that can reliably distinguish between accurate and inaccurate information. The Commission recommends continued research by technology companies, academics and journalists to develop such techniques.

C. Provide for data portability among social networks.

Since its inception, the World Wide Web has evolved from an open and decentralized architecture to a more consolidated and centralized state. A 2017 study from MIT's Digital Currency Initiative noted that "even though the internet was built on distributed protocols, the web needed to consolidate around a few curated service platforms in order to become practical for everyday people to use. This trend towards consolidation has serious implications for two key functions of the web: publishing and discovery of content."²⁴⁷

The popularity of a small number of publishing and discovery platforms has had great benefits for usability. But this consolidation may also be limiting innovation and diversity within the universe of internet platforms, including social networks. Existing social networks benefit heavily from network effects. On joining the most popular networks, users have potential access to millions of existing users, while on joining a new social network, they might have access only to a few hundred. A major barrier to users' trying a new social network is the prospect of losing the benefit of the time and effort previously invested in the existing network.

To explore ways that social networks can better support democratic values, the Commission encourages an environment where new social networks are more likely to find audiences, and where users can more easily participate in a variety of social networks. While major internet platforms generally allow users to access and/or export their data (posts, photos, videos),²⁴⁸ establishing a right for users to own their own data and social graph (their existing online relationships) would make it easier for new networks to emerge and operate alongside existing ones.

Concerns. The Commission recognizes that some of these proposals may lead to more personalized silos rather than fewer. We also recognize that there is a tension between the rights of individuals and their connections within social networks, and that any data portability solutions must protect the privacy of friends and other connections. However, creating more opportunities for new networks to emerge lessens the pressure to break up existing platforms, as some critics have called for.²⁴⁹

The Commission has differences of opinion on these questions, including whether control over the internet is too concentrated and, if so, what should be done about it. We urge serious and thoughtful consideration of the appropriate application of self-regulation, regulation and antitrust laws to all media, whether print, broadcast or internet. In this case, reducing the barriers to entry could result in a more competitive media ecosystem.

Nonprofit social networks. Finally, we recognize that the free market may not create all the forms of networks that would benefit democratic and open societies. The Commission supports the concept of charitably funded nonprofit internet platforms and social networks for specific purposes. These might include social networks that aggressively enforce anti-bullying rules to protect those who have suffered online harassment, or a locally focused social network that strives to create dialogue among neighbors who are politically divided. Much as a healthy media ecosystem needs both for-profit and nonprofit players, the internet market deserves the same.



D. Create a multi-stakeholder forum to develop and promote pro-social policies for technology providers.

The internet represents a particularly daunting challenge to society to understand the full range of its effects. In short, the internet challenges all of our institutions. It is heartening to see a number of the largest media companies and online services acknowledging that they need to be more proactive in addressing unintended but nevertheless negative effects of their operations.

But they are not—and should not be—alone. Individual users have a large stake in the services on which they depend. Civic organizations, journalists, advocacy groups and academic institutions can offer expertise in analyzing how the ecosystem functions, identifying negative effects and generating ideas for remedies to the problems that may arise. And government has the ultimate power to mandate change, consistent with the Constitution.

The Commission believes that representatives of all sectors, including members of the online industry, and particularly its largest members, have an opportunity and a responsibility to work together to ensure that all operate in ways that support the healthy functioning of a democratic society. These stakeholders include news organizations, academics, NGOs and consumer advocacy groups. They have the opportunity and responsibility, as well, to minimize anti-social effects of the services they offer. As these issues relate closely to restrictions of speech, it is better that the solutions come from a broad swath of the ecosystem. This includes critical discussions on issues such as the application of CDA Section 230, mentioned earlier.

One issue of particular concern to this Commission is the role of the internet in transforming how news is distributed, monetized and consumed. Social media platforms have become a major conduit for news for millions of users. Given their importance, there should be better collective understanding of the algorithms that play a major role in determining what news users see and in making decisions that impact the overall flow of news and information.²⁵⁰

A multi-stakeholder forum could greatly help technology companies, news organizations and consumers develop a better understanding of each other's needs and find mutually beneficial approaches related to how news is disseminated. A multi-stakeholder approach is particularly appropriate for dealing with the complexity and magnitude of challenges like these. As Graham Brooke, director of the Digital Forensic Research Lab at the Atlantic Council, noted, finding effective solutions will “involve a society-wide reckoning with the problem of the vulnerabilities that the internet has uncovered in democratic society.”²⁵¹

One precedent for such an undertaking is the Global Network Initiative (GNI), a “multi-stakeholder platform” launched in 2008 to provide “a concerted and coordinated effort drawing on the perspectives, leverage, credibility and expertise of many different stakeholders

THE VALUES OF FREE EXPRESSION, OF AN OPEN INTERNET FREE TO EVOLVE, OF RESPONSIBILITY TO USERS AND TO THE DEMOCRACY, AND OF INCLUSION, MUST REMAIN **GUIDING PRINCIPLES.**

[to address] the challenge of protecting digital rights globally.”²⁵² GNI’s membership consists of technology companies (including Facebook, Google and Microsoft), academic organizations, NGOs and investors in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, Europe and the U.S. The initiative promotes a set of principles and guidelines for “responsible company decision-making in support of free expression and privacy rights.” It also advocates internationally with governments to adopt laws and policies to protect these rights.²⁵³

Another potential model is PledgeLA, a regional initiative launched in Southern California in the fall of 2018 that involves more than 80 high-tech venture-capital investors and entrepreneurs. With sponsorship from Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and funding from the Annenberg Foundation, the initiative’s members have committed themselves to three goals: “to increase our community engagement...to actively and continuously improve equity, diversity and inclusion at all levels of our organizations and in our investment decisions...[and] to hold ourselves accountable by measuring and transparently reporting on our progress.”²⁵⁴

The Commission recommends that an ongoing forum be established to develop and promote trust-building initiatives and to support the adoption of pro-social policies by platforms, online services and other media entities. One possibility would be to expand the mandate of an existing group such as the GNI to embrace this broader agenda. Another, lesser preferred possibility would be to create a new organization with a new mandate. In either case, such a forum would call on the expertise of industry members while also taking advantage of the more varied perspectives of external groups. While it might initially focus on domestic issues, this effort might well expand to take on a broader international focus, just as the GNI does.

REVITALIZING CITIZENSHIP IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The Commission Finds:

- ▶ America's current loss of faith in shared truth underlies a crisis of citizenship.²⁵⁵

- ▶ In a pluralist democracy, civic identity plays a crucial unifying role.

- ▶ Americans must work together to establish shared civic narratives that support a sense of citizenship.

- ▶ A shared identity that transcends politics could revive American citizenship.

- ▶ Many Americans lack the necessary civic and new-media literacies to participate effectively in the democratic processes of the 21st century.

- ▶ American citizens must exercise their right to participate in, and acknowledge their responsibility to maintain, their democracy.

- ▶ Civic engagement and discourse will allow citizens to take pride in their democracy and identify the shared values that build a common understanding of citizenship.

- ▶ This crisis of citizenship has created a moment comparable to when the Soviet Union launched its first Sputnik satellite in 1957, one that requires significant "moonshot" responses in attaining citizen literacy and engagement.



The Commission Recommends:

Recommendation 8

LITERACY

- ▶ Revitalize education in civics and 21st century literacies for all citizens in order to better align the democratic process with America's modern, highly connected culture.
 - A. Revitalize civic education through rigorous civic literacy standards and a sustainable funding model for new educational initiatives.
 - B. Provide 21st century literacies for all Americans.
 - C. Develop sustainable funding models for civic and other new literacies.

Recommendation 9

ENGAGEMENT

- ▶ Create local spaces for constructive civic dialogue bridging various communities, and encourage broader civic engagement.
 - A. Create inclusive civic spaces for dialogue at local and online levels.
 - B. Develop a campaign to rebuild support for civic institutions.

Recommendation 10

COMMITMENT

- ▶ Encourage widespread commitment to a year of voluntary national service.



America does not simply face a deficit of trust in technology or the media or politics. Underlying the current loss of faith in shared truth and democratic processes is a crisis of citizenship.

“Citizenship,” said businessman and former Ambassador Walter Annenberg, “is every person’s highest calling.”²⁵⁶ It entails the freedom, right, ability and obligation to actively maintain one’s government. It is engagement with democratic governance and the many ways it interacts with the broader society. Citizenship is strengthened by civic knowledge, civic participation, the ability to access and use critical information resources, and ultimately by the unifying role that civic identity plays.

In the United States, civic participation has declined for nearly a half-century. Low levels of voting participation coincide with a larger civic disengagement. Normally only 50 to 60 percent of the eligible population votes for the U.S. presidency, and far fewer vote in off-year elections. Even the significant surge in voting in the 2018 midterm elections, while encouraging, still did not amount to half of eligible voters.²⁵⁷

Low voter turnout is not the sole indicator of disengagement. Other factors, such as declining knowledge of civic matters and familiarity with American history and institutions, suggest that the problem could be structural as well as individual.

Basic civic knowledge in this country is dismal. A 2017 survey²⁵⁸ by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that:

- More than a third of those surveyed (37 percent) could not name any of the rights guaranteed under the First Amendment.²⁵⁹
- Only a quarter of Americans (26 percent) could name all three branches of government, while a third of the country could not name even one branch.²⁶⁰

More ominous, American politics has become increasingly polarized and tribal. People lack the shared civic identity necessary to undergird the country’s sense of citizenship. And Americans are less willing to engage in productive dialogue with individuals who hold different points of view.²⁶¹

In the American system, citizens elect representatives at every level of government and rely on them to represent their interests. Yet attitudes toward the “other” in politics, including statements by elected officials themselves, have become so hostile that the public doubts its leaders’ abilities to lead.

This demonization has had the effect of over-politicizing solutions and increasing polarization, adding to the broader distrust of the democracy.

Instead of a broadly shared understanding of American citizens’ rights and responsibilities, there are now two competing conceptions of citizenship. Some understand citizenship in largely individualist, rights-based terms, though they disagree with one another about which rights to emphasize. Others understand citizenship in terms of virtue and obligation to others, even while disagreeing about what “virtue” entails and to whom obligations are owed.

Furthermore, what constitutes acts of citizenship—beyond traditional behaviors, such as voting or understanding how the government operates—is a question whose answer continues to evolve. The internet and social media platforms present opportunities for digital participation and activism through direct messaging, community engagement and coalition-building. Citizenship in the 21st century thus encompasses a wider array of skill sets, knowledge and experience that aligns with both our democratic process and our highly connected culture. Indeed, the Commission believes that being literate in civics, news, media and digital technologies is a responsibility of the modern citizen.²⁶²

To address these conflicting understandings of the rights and responsibilities of citizens, the Commission calls for a commitment to revitalize American citizenship through education, through constructive dialogue across political divides, and through a year of national service. By adopting the measures proposed below, Americans can begin to reconstruct a shared identity that transcends current political divisions.

CITIZENSHIP IS STRENGTHENED BY CIVIC KNOWLEDGE, CIVIC PARTICIPATION, THE ABILITY TO ACCESS AND USE CRITICAL INFORMATION RESOURCES, AND ULTIMATELY BY THE UNIFYING ROLE THAT CIVIC IDENTITY PLAYS.

Recommendation 8**LITERACY****Revitalize education in civics and 21st century literacies for all citizens in order to better align the democratic process with America's modern, highly connected culture.**

The crisis of citizenship in America coincides with a crisis of civic education. Many Americans, especially young people, lack basic civic knowledge critical for democratic processes. The 2014 Nation's Report Card revealed that fewer than a quarter of eighth-grade students were proficient in civics.²⁶³ And a 2018 report on the state of civics education found that:

- Nationwide, students score very low on the AP U.S. government exam.
- Only nine states and the District of Columbia require one year of U.S. government or civics.
- State civics curricula are heavy on knowledge but light on building skills and agency for civic engagement.
- While almost half of states allow credit for community service, almost none require it.²⁶⁴
- States with the highest rates of youth civic engagement tend to prioritize civics courses and AP U.S. government in their curricula.²⁶⁵

A. Revitalize civic education by setting rigorous literacy standards.

The Commission recommends a revitalization of civic education in America based on more rigorous expectations for civic literacy.

Educators throughout the country need to establish viable frameworks for revitalizing civic literacy with an emphasis on teaching history and government (knowledge), civic behavior (values), the rights and responsibilities of citizens (impact) and digital literacy (engagement).

These frameworks will set local expectations and establish standards for civic literacy rather than mandating a specific curriculum. Our aim is to create a culture in all communities that values civic engagement and collaboration through an understanding of the history and application of American democracy.

Expand experiential learning. Civic education requires more than just knowledge of history and facts. It must also equip students with the skills to apply their knowledge through participation in democratic processes, an important component that is often overlooked.

The whole purpose of civic literacy is to enable and encourage participation in democratic institutions and processes. Thus, communities must foster a culture of engagement. This requires community leaders, including local business executives, to acknowledge and promote the importance of continually participating in an active democracy.

Though many schools offer debate, school journalism and participation in democratic simulations, it appears that none of the 50 states requires “experiential or local problem-solving components” as part of their civic education programs.

Despite the value of community service as a means of encouraging longer-term civic engagement, only the District of Columbia and Maryland maintain a community service requirement to graduate from high school.²⁶⁶

The Commission, then, encourages experiential learning as part of the civic education process. Such a framework will require collaboration across private and public entities to develop a sustainable funding model.

UNDERLYING THE CURRENT LOSS OF FAITH
IN SHARED TRUTH AND DEMOCRATIC
PROCESSES IS **A CRISIS OF CITIZENSHIP.**

COLLABORATIONS TO INCREASE CIVICS EDUCATION

Several promising programs are working to increase civic literacy and citizen engagement through schools and community partnerships. Some examples:

The Center for Civic Education is a nonprofit organization that partners with public institutions and private industry to implement civic education programs in every congressional district in the United States.²⁶⁷

CivXNow is a collaborative effort calling for a national commitment to produce prepared and engaged citizens. Among the partners is CIRCLE: The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University, which has prepared a white paper on the civic mission of schools.²⁶⁸

iCivics, founded by former United States Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, provides free online civic learning tools, such as lesson plans for instructors and interactive video games.²⁶⁹ It is a leader in the CivXNow campaign.

The Democratic Knowledge Project, part of Harvard University's Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics, will bring eight years of development into a partnership with two states, initially, to build new resources in support of civic education organized around a set of five "pillars": agency, responsibility and trustworthiness, bridging skills, political institutions and history and theory of democracy, and U.S. history and history of American political thought in a global context.²⁷⁰

CivicAmerica, still in formation, is a multiyear campaign to make access to high-quality civics education a national priority. The campaign will establish goals for measuring and scaling successful initiatives, and for building a diverse network of partners to support the development of civic literacy skills. These partners should include, among others, media, philanthropy and business.



Setting standards and expectations. Drawing from past educational experiences and promising new initiatives, the Commission recommends the following strategies for civic education:

State and local lead. In the same way that STEM education has been a national priority in recent years, civic literacy should become a shared national priority. The push to improve civic education, however, should be led by state and local policymakers, educators and nonprofits. The first step is to expand access to innovative civic education models within schools and communities.

A recent example of state action comes from Massachusetts. In 2018, the state enacted legislation that requires American history, social science and civics to be taught in all public schools. Notably, the requirements include “the development of skills to access, analyze, and evaluate written and digital media as it relates to history and civics.” It also calls for schools to establish “non-partisan voter challenge programs” that will help students register or pre-register to vote. Notably, this legislation was originally advocated by a group of high school students in the state.²⁷¹

Setting goals. Civic literacy efforts should create a set of robust K–12 civic education standards:

Prior to participating in social media, every child should have a basic understanding of digital media and how to use it safely. Under the federal COPPA law, the minimum age for establishing an individual account online is 13, but in reality, use often begins at a younger age. Schools should therefore start these efforts early.

Prior to reaching the legal voting age of 18, individuals should be digitally-literate as well as civically-literate citizens (i.e., they are able to find and use the information necessary to be knowledgeable voters).

Students should have the knowledge to pass the U.S. citizenship exam or a civic knowledge test prior to high school graduation.²⁷²

Higher education. While the focus of civic education should be on K–12, which is virtually universal among American children, higher education also has a role to play in fostering civic understanding. Indeed, preparing students for the duties of citizenship has long been one of the key goals of a liberal education. Institutions of higher education should ensure that their students graduate with an essential understanding of America's civic institutions and processes. Therefore, these institutions should incorporate civics education in their curricula, encourage community service and civic engagement, promote experiential learning in civics, and, as many already do, host civics-centered events on their campuses.²⁷³

Metrics. Civic literacy experts should establish concrete metrics to measure effective citizen education efforts. The Commission supports efforts such as those of CivicAmerica, currently in development.²⁷⁴

Restraint. Finally, while the Commission strongly supports these efforts, it understands the possibility that some may devolve into exercises in propaganda rather than the educational efforts contemplated. We need to encourage civic pride and understanding, but not at the cost of overzealousness. As in all that the Commission is advocating, common sense and restraint are paramount.

B. Provide 21st century literacies for all Americans.

America is arguably the global leader in the creation and use of digital technologies. It is, after all, the place where the internet was invented and the home of many of the world's most dominant digital platforms.

The United States, however, is not the leader in ensuring that all its citizens have the skills to use digital media well.²⁷⁵ In fact, this country is in the midst of an undeclared and underappreciated crisis in the new literacies. Alarming research has documented the widespread inability of Americans, even presumably well-educated college students, to distinguish between news and opinion, news and advertising, real news and disinformation.²⁷⁶

And yet, citizens today cannot carry out their civic responsibilities without understanding how to use and consume digital media. Accordingly, the United States needs a multigenerational plan to provide its citizens with the skills needed to access, analyze, evaluate, create and act on digital information.

New literacies. The fundamental literacies of the 21st century (also described here and in the 2009 Knight Commission report as the “new literacies”) include information, digital, news, media literacies as well as civic literacy.²⁷⁷ And of course, they all begin with basic literacy skills in reading and writing.

The media literacy movement emanated in the last quarter of the 20th century from concerns that television was overly affecting children of vulnerable ages. It asserts that one must have the ability to “access, analyze, evaluate, create and act using all forms of communication.”²⁷⁸ The new literacies essentially extend that approach to newer forms of media. And “news literacy” specifically targets these skills for a better understanding of the news, obviously a more complex challenge in the world of mis- and disinformation.

Individuals who lack these literacies are less able to assess the reliability of information sources in order to tell fact from fiction, and are thus less likely to trust institutions based on facts. They are easier to harass, mislead or defraud online. They can find it harder to gain knowledge, pursue education or careers, stay healthy, protect their rights and help their communities improve.²⁷⁹

A plan for America to become the world's most digitally literate nation would aim to attain several ambitious goals set forth below. Key to the success of this recommendation is the need to develop a consensus among educators on the fundamental elements of the “new literacies” and strong tools for measuring these capabilities.

The Commission also underscores that intertwined with the goal of a digitally literate constituency are underlying issues of accessibility and income inequality. In order for people to acquire these new literacies, access to connectivity (either via broadband or mobile) and content (information accessible without a subscription) are imperative for success.

Moonshot goals. As we believe this is a crisis moment, the Commission proposes the following moonshot goals for media and digital literacies:

1. All young people, even before the legal age of 13 for participating in social media, should know enough about digital literacy to conduct themselves safely on social media platforms. Specifically, young users need to know the fundamentals of cyber safety, spam and hoaxes; understand the difference between news and advertisements, and news and opinions; and be able to question the accuracy of news and information they find online—and offline. All individuals should be “digitally literate citizens” by the time they reach voting age. Accordingly, by the age of 18, individuals should be able to find and make use of the information necessary to be knowledgeable voters.
2. All citizens should have access to the resources needed to become self-learners. Civic institutions such as public libraries, which already provide broadband connectivity and quality content, should play a vital role in achieving this goal.

Twenty percent of adults already express interest in improving the literacy skills required in the 21st century.²⁸⁰ While progress in teaching new literacies has occurred, various literacy skills are often taught independent of one another. The Commission believes that progress could accelerate substantially if literacy programs are integrated in a comprehensive manner. Each type of literacy is valuable independently, but combining them can have much greater impact.

Digital literacy and government. New literacies are important not only for exercising acts of citizenship but also for governance. In an era driven by data, technological literacy for policymakers and policy literacy for technologists is critical.²⁸¹

The Commission applauds efforts such as Code for America at the local level²⁸² and the United States Digital Service in the federal government,²⁸³ which bring coders and other technology-savvy individuals into government positions. We are aware, as well, of efforts by foundations to bring technical capacity to nonprofit organizations.

Congress has several bipartisan caucuses that focus on new technologies. But we would urge Congress to revive its Office of Technology Assessment or a modern equivalent to advise members on important questions raised by the ever-advancing technologies. The new literacies are important at every level.

C. Develop sustainable funding models for civic and other new literacies.

Civic literacy. The current civic literacy and engagement efforts across the country are laudable. But the lack of a bold funding model to sustain them is a major barrier to bringing them to scale. The success of this recommendation will require collaboration among government at all levels, educators, corporations and the broader public to identify and develop ways to support a national program on civic literacy—funding that is commensurate with the scale and seriousness of the crisis of citizenship. We envision that private foundations would provide significant seed money, with the aim of securing state and federal government financing as a longer-term financial base.

The Commission also proposes the creation of a corporate giving campaign to fund civic education initiatives. Given the growing distrust of big business among consumers,²⁸⁴ the campaign could serve as an investment opportunity for corporate America. A trusted nonprofit should administer the funds.

Wide engagement with businesses, especially in the technology industries, can also build literacies and competencies through hands-on learning. Technology companies could offer apprenticeships and cultivate skills and literacy in an applied way. For instance, while creating civic opportunities for employees, firms could create and support a tool that allows students to participate in open-source fact-checking.

Finally, the Commission stresses the importance of structuring civic literacy efforts in a way that will improve, rather than aggravate, existing disparities in access to civic literacy among low-income and other disadvantaged citizens.

New literacies. The Commission acknowledges that education reform in the United States is not a simple task. To date, only a handful of states have approved standards for digital media literacy.²⁸⁵ Meeting the Commission's moonshot goals would require a substantial expansion of existing programs, with attendant expenditures that many schools simply do not have.

Furthermore, the proposed reforms would not be a one-time fix. To mitigate the risks of declining digital literacy as new technological innovations arise, education standards will need to evolve with technologies. For example, the use of digital media as an educational tool has led to an explosion of in school and extracurricular learning, from self-directive, adaptive courses to video games.²⁸⁶ Emerging technologies such as augmented reality and virtual reality are likely to offer new learning tools.

To achieve these goals, educators and experts in the field must lead. Although educators are already undertaking some of these actions, each community needs a comprehensive approach. Accordingly, the Commission proposes the following actions:

- **Create learning modules on key new-literacy topics that can be incorporated in different curricula.**
- **Develop tools and clear metrics to measure the effectiveness of new-literacy education efforts.**
- **Develop new opportunities and increase awareness of current opportunities for adult education in libraries.**

Some nonprofits and educators have modules or other materials that can be a first step.²⁸⁷ Ultimately, however, local leaders must take the initiative to move this forward with action in their communities.

Recommendation 9

ENGAGEMENT**Create local spaces for constructive civic dialogue bridging various communities, and encourage broader civic engagement.****A. Create inclusive civic spaces for local dialogue.**

The political divide in this country is particularly acute at the national political level, and somewhat at the state level. Locally it is less pervasive,²⁸⁸ though polarization is stronger in some communities than in others.²⁸⁹

Current forums for problem-solving at the local level—e.g., city councils, citizen advisory committees—do not necessarily provide ideal structures for addressing complex issues that need sustained dialogue. Nor are they necessarily the best venues for building the social capital (especially “bridging” capital that strengthens ties across disparate groups) that is critical to restoring healthy civil discourse and democratic processes.

There is a need for inclusive spaces where American citizens can meet and discuss issues. Through skillfully moderated face-to-face discussions with the “other,” individuals should better understand and empathize with those who hold different perspectives.

Accordingly, the Commission recommends that communities develop programs within trusted institutions to convene local dialogue among citizens. These discussions should address questions of importance to the community, ranging from local issues and initiatives to larger constitutional issues. One obvious location present in almost every community is the public library, which typically ranks as among the most used and most trusted local institutions.²⁹⁰

Because of the pervasive geographic segregation of Americans along racial, socioeconomic and even political lines, these exchanges should be designed to bring people together across such boundaries. For example, urban libraries in a metropolitan area should collaborate to create dialogue among residents of different neighborhoods. Or they might collaborate with a library from neighboring rural communities. Such programs have the potential to gain national momentum and develop larger campaigns.

There is reason to believe that in these times, bringing together conflicting “tribes” may actually increase hostility.²⁹¹ But the Commission believes that with proper framing and moderation, seeing and listening to the other will breed understanding and greater consideration of their views. To ensure that civic dialogue on contentious issues does not devolve into acrimony and prove counterproductive, the Commission suggests that the conveners of these dialogues utilize well-trained facilitators to frame the issues and moderate the dialogue.

EXAMPLES OF LOCAL CIVIC DIALOGUES

There are currently several models in development that could serve as examples of civic dialogues intended to rebuild trust and bridge divisions, including the following:

Local Voices Network. A big story in recent years has been the movement of civic conversations online, sometimes at the expense of face-to-face dialogue, especially among groups with different political perspectives. Cortico, a nonprofit 501(c)(3), in cooperation with MIT’s Laboratory for Social Machines,²⁹² is developing methods for combining these two modalities to encourage local public conversations across tribal boundaries that are deeper, more civil and more constructive. Slated for testing in Wisconsin and Alabama in 2019, Cortico’s Local Voices Network (LVN) is designed around three core efforts:

- Facilitating in-person conversations at scale
- Connecting facilitators and conversations digitally to enrich local dialogues
- Opening a new channel for journalists, leaders and the community at large to understand residents’ concerns

Deliberation Day, proposed by political scientists Bruce Ackerman and James Fishkin, suggests a framework in which small groups from specific communities jointly view political debates and then engage with experts and policymakers.²⁹³ The Commission supports a similar framework, with participants from each community representing diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Another organization developing programs for civic discussion is the nonprofit **Citizen University**, which leads initiatives ranging from weekly civic education seminars and local civic-themed festivals to local and national roundtable discussions.²⁹⁴

The Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries, in collaboration with major urban libraries, is proposing the creation of **America’s Civic Square** to develop a network of libraries committed to hosting community dialogue.

B. Develop a campaign to rejuvenate civic institutions.

Communities with strong social capital are more likely to collaborate and find common solutions. Conversely, declines in civic engagement increase the likelihood of negative outcomes in “education, urban poverty, unemployment, crime and drug abuse, and even health” as well as “job placement and many other economic outcomes.”²⁹⁵

Civic engagement is critical to the health of local communities. To address this issue, the Commission recommends that communities and organizations partner to produce public service campaigns that will educate American citizens on relevant civic matters and encourage healthy civic interaction. The goal is to drive engagement in local trusted institutions, such as libraries, parks and civic organizations. Engagement can also come through participation in civic-minded institutions such as Rotary or the Girl Scouts.

Such a campaign could take the form of a national awareness day, a holiday, or as we suggest here, a large-scale integrated media campaign. The efficacy of such campaigns to alter behavior is well documented in efforts such as antismoking, reduce-reuse-recycle and no-drinking-and-driving campaigns.²⁹⁶ The Foundation for a Better Life’s “Pass It On” campaign aims to promote basic American values through various media.²⁹⁷ The Commission endorses a new Ad Council initiative that would seek to combat the spread of mis- and disinformation.

Ultimately, this recommendation addresses American polarization and political bias by using public service campaigns to reinforce positive cultural norms and to encourage political discourse among citizens.

With respect to funding, these recommendations represent an opportunity for private businesses, both large and small, to prioritize civic needs and produce positive change in communities across the nation. The Commission urges a strong commitment from corporations, foundations and local governments toward the creation and implementation of local civic dialogues and campaigns.

Recommendation 10

COMMITMENT**Encourage widespread commitment to a year of voluntary national service.**

As American politics has become increasingly tribalized, citizens have lost a shared narrative and a sense of citizenship. To address this loss, the time has come to revitalize efforts to encourage a year of voluntary national service.

General Stanley McChrystal has articulated the case for national service:

Democracy grants rights and requires responsibilities. This reciprocal notion of citizenship is as old as the concept of self-government.

Civic participation grants a sense of ownership to citizens....

Active citizenship, when tied to a common endeavor, instills pride in a nation—it's why we point to those who fought together in World War II as the Greatest Generation, not only for what they did from 1941 to 1945, but for how much they accomplished for the country in the following decades.

Today, the need for such a common experience of citizenship is more poignant than ever.²⁹⁸

The Commission agrees.

Private and public donors should fund national service programs that will bring people of differing views together for a shared purpose. While the primary target populations would be upper-level high schoolers and college students, national service programs could include older Americans as well. This recommendation seeks to revive the concept of giving back to the country and to foster a sense of common obligation as American citizens.

The Commission defines a “year of voluntary national service” as a full school year. As envisioned by David Walker of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, opportunities for service should:

...involve more than serving in the government, either in a civilian or military role. It can also involve service in the not-for-profit or citizen sector and even in selected occupations in the for-profit sector that are designed to help others (e.g., teaching, nursing, elder care).²⁹⁹

The proposed year of service seeks to close the gap between *knowledge* of civic duties and *active engagement* in civic duties. It would encourage a willingness to serve the nation and empathize with others as well as to encourage a greater commitment to one’s responsibility as a citizen. In establishing an expectation of civic service, there is an opportunity to renew American cultural and civic organizations.

A current initiative to promote voluntary service is the Service Year Alliance.³⁰⁰ General McChrystal and John Bridgeland, co-founders of the Franklin Project at the Aspen Institute, in partnership with ServiceNation at Be The Change, Inc. and the Service Year Exchange at the National Conference on Citizenship, have all combined to create this alliance. It includes an online database that allows individuals to search for areas of need in their communities and find opportunities to serve.

NATIONAL SERVICE IN LITERACY AND MEDIA

The Commission identifies three specific areas where national service could help reverse the negative trends in civic engagement, enhance citizenship and renew trust among Americans: traditional and digital literacy, journalism and libraries.

Existing year-long national service initiatives related to these primary areas include:

Literacy. AmeriCorps, which provides a broad range of civic service opportunities, works with national literacy programs, such as the Literacy Lab (theliteracylab.org) and Literacy First (www.literacyfirst.org), to train teachers for work in schools and community centers throughout America. Efforts should also include digital and civic literacy projects.

Journalism. Report for America (www.reportforamerica.org) provides service opportunities by connecting talented young journalists to newsrooms across the country to report on under-covered issues in specific communities. This could expand to newer areas of public-interest information and network services as well.

Libraries. Libraries throughout the country have employed volunteer Homework Helpers (www.techsoupforlibraries.org/blog/library-homework-help-what-works-what-doesnt) to aid children in need. This could develop into a larger yearlong program for national service.



BENEFITS OF SERVICE—AMERICORPS CASE STUDY

Adapted from *The Economics: Why National Service Is Worth It* by Clive Belfield³⁰¹

Studies of AmeriCorps find a significant upgrading of participants' skills as well as gains in civic engagement and improvements in community infrastructure. For youth, there are substantial benefits such as lower delinquency, a greater sense of worth and improved health status. Studies also associate national service with lower criminal activity,³⁰² better health³⁰³ and increased lifetime incomes.³⁰⁴

Older volunteers also benefit. Those in Senior Corps or Experience Corps see improvement in health (physical and psychological), self-esteem, life satisfaction and civic commitment. There are also gains in financial security (from expanded employment opportunities after service).

Communities, meanwhile, stand to gain from improvements in local services—most notably in schools—as many seniors provide tutoring and educational assistance. Mentoring programs may motivate students to invest more in their education and communities to make greater investments in their schools. Conservation or crime-prevention projects may lead to increased property values and encourage investment in civic infrastructure. And society and taxpayers benefit from a healthier population, particularly one that is more civic minded and productive.

How do the benefits of service, expressed in monetary terms, compare with the estimated \$2 billion cost of service? The youth and senior programs listed above produced an estimated \$7.9 billion in total social benefits of national service, a net benefit of \$5.9 billion. In other words, for every dollar invested in national service programs for youth and seniors, the programs return almost \$4 to society in future benefits.



Expand incentives. The Commission recommends expanding incentives from public and private organizations to encourage involvement in a year of voluntary national service. One potential model is the GI Bill, which helped military service members and eligible veterans cover the costs associated with getting an education or training.

Similarly, the Commission urges state legislatures, institutions of higher education and community colleges to consider incentives such as tuition benefits, student loan forgiveness or admission advantages for those who participate in a year of voluntary national service.

Bridging differences. One criticism of voluntary national service is that economic disparities could dictate which populations are most likely to volunteer. The great advantage that military service offered—particularly during the draft, and thus in the World Wars, Korea and Vietnam Wars—was that it mixed young Americans of all backgrounds and classes.

As with all this Commission recommends, it is important that administrators create opportunities for people of all socioeconomic classes to participate. One of the main rationales for national service is for Americans to meet, understand and empathize with fellow Americans from all sections, sectors and classes of society. It would not serve that purpose if disadvantaged people did not have equal opportunities to engage and if the more advantaged did not have meaningful incentives to participate.

For those who go on to college, the Commission has several suggestions to expand a shared narrative and sense of citizenship. Colleges and universities need to find more effective ways of diversifying their students' experiences, creating more inclusive encounters across socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, religious and geographic lines. These might include outreach programs to recruit students in underserved communities. They might also engage students in service learning programs that integrate volunteer participation with academic study of these experiences, or in curricular and co-curricular programs that bring students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives together. Creating student and professor exchanges with colleges that have a distinctively different student body is an additional tactic. We suggest that admission offices consider national service as a plus in the application process, as many colleges and universities already do.

The time for national service has come. The Commission hopes that highlighting current initiatives will catalyze a new movement in that direction.

WE MUST TAKE **RESPONSIBILITY.**

CALL TO ACTION

Democracy and the news media are inextricably intertwined, and it is clear that both are in crisis. American democracy suffers not only from a decline of trust in the “other” to govern, but also from a breakdown of our shared concept of citizenship.

The news media face increasing skepticism based on perceptions of bias. Social media are being criticized for insufficiently restricting material noxious to the well-being of the democracy. And local media, while more trusted than “the media” as a whole, are struggling with economic shortfalls that challenge their ability to serve democratic aims.

The 50-year trend of declining trust is now even more pronounced amid increased political polarization, a shortage of quality local information and the rapid change in technology, altering how Americans experience the news.

THIS IS A WATERSHED MOMENT.

This Commission envisions a 21st century American democracy that can work at all levels—if we act now. Therefore, the Commission calls for news organizations, media creators and distributors, government, political, business and nonprofit leaders, and every American citizen to do what they can to restore trust in our democracy.

To help guide us all in this journey, the Commission identifies the following values as necessary components of a functioning democracy.

RESPONSIBILITY. It is every citizen's responsibility to become literate in civics and to be able to use any medium to access, evaluate and create information. It is the duty of every elected official to foster the positive values of the republic and to resist the temptation to exacerbate polarization, tribalism and discord. It is all business executives' responsibility to serve the broader democracy in the course of conducting their businesses, and to care for their various stakeholders, including, where applicable, their readers, viewers and users. It is every journalist's responsibility to write the truth and to provide proper context for facts. And it is the government's duty to preserve the principles and underlying goals of the Constitution.

FREE EXPRESSION. A basic assumption running throughout this report is the belief that a free society must allow for and protect open and free expression. But speech that is protected under the First Amendment is not always responsible. Those who create and those who distribute information need to attend to both values.

TRANSPARENCY. The Commission believes that transparency breeds trust. We urge all media entities to be radically transparent so that users can understand how they select stories to cover, what sources they are using and how they reach their conclusions. This applies to newspaper stories, to news on cable and broadcast TV and to news feeds on social networks. Transparency extends as well to the technology companies that distribute news and to government organizations and officials.

LITERACY. Having a literate public is critical to the health of the body politic. Abundant information does no good if users are not capable of using that information effectively. In the 21st century, literacy has multiple dimensions: news, media, digital and civic.

INNOVATION. The Commission recognizes that innovation is a continual imperative for both technology and journalism, and that new challenges and new opportunities to respond to them are inevitable. The news business has endured significant disruption. Some of that was self-inflicted, the result of a lack of foresight. Innovation in technology and business models can reinvigorate the news ecosystem in many ways. The Commission suggests a number of areas where innovation will be particularly useful to rebuilding trust, and it calls for more research into ways that technology can serve rather than undermine this goal.

DIVERSITY. Inclusion of diverse stakeholders serves all. Gender and racial diversity are always important in remaining relevant to a broad public and in being fair to all audiences. Rural residents and people from disadvantaged communities need their voices and perspectives heard as well. In calling for greater diversity, the Commission focused not only on journalistic and technological businesses but also on educational institutions and on efforts to bridge the political divide in this country. The concept of diversity also applies to the type of information one receives and the need for those providing it to help individuals escape from their echo chambers.

Building on these values, the Commission calls for a range of efforts involving all stakeholders at all levels.

- **For information and news producers**, the Commission advocates becoming far more transparent—what we call “radical transparency”—and engaged with their audiences. By reflecting more of America in the newsrooms and in stories, in spokespeople and in ownership, the media become more accessible. These measures renew trust.

We also call for new resource-sharing partnerships among journalistic entities—local-local, local-regional and local-national—in order to provide more robust news coverage. And the Commission strongly supports expanding efforts to find sustainable business models for journalism rooted in the civic missions of holding power accountable and informing the electorate. Innovative funding approaches such as crowdsourcing can apply to for-profits as well as nonprofits. But the Commission specifically calls on philanthropic and other sources to expand support of nonprofit news operations that cover state and local issues.

- **For news and information distributors** on the internet, such as search engines and social media networks, the Commission recognizes that the online ecosystem has grown and evolved rapidly and is now contending with issues based on that growth. In particular, these companies, which grew from small startups to global enterprises in a remarkably short period of time, are now facing a unique set of challenges concerning trust of their users. To restore trust, the Commission believes that the principle of transparency should apply to the entire online media ecosystem. It calls for information and data collectors, including information platforms, to adopt a fiduciary responsibility to their users, assuming a duty of care for the personal information they gather.

And the Commission urges even more innovation in the field. It particularly calls for technologists to collaborate on devising metrics to measure healthy civic dialogue online, on building tools to track the spread of disinformation, and on giving users the ability to understand and to modify how personalized algorithms work. It also recommends allowing users to reclaim their data and transfer it to other social networks if they wish.

- **For political leaders and individual American citizens**, having a basic understanding of our Constitution, our system of government and our Bill of Rights is critical for our nation's survival. The Commission recognizes that in order to reclaim a shared sense of citizenship, individuals must have both the capacity and the opportunities to do so. Thus it calls for greater civic literacy, with new requirements that our youth graduate from high school with a knowledge of this nation's history and governance mechanisms. High school graduates should have the knowledge to pass the American citizenship test. We recommend, as well, moonshot-like goals for schools and others to teach new-media literacy skills.

Finally, the Commission urges increased efforts to establish a year of voluntary national service for all Americans. And it recommends convening a series of local community dialogues that bridge racial, ethnic, gender, generational, class and geographical differences. Not only are schools and libraries appropriate venues for these efforts, but there is value in supporting these vital and trusted local institutions through such an initiative.

This Commission began, and now ends, with the current crisis in trust. We, as individual citizens of a great nation, need to take measures now, not next year, to maintain the democracy that has developed over nearly two and a half centuries. We need to maintain the free and open press that undergirds American democracy, and to catalyze the citizenry at all levels to engage in their own governance in whatever ways they choose.

This report comes after a year and a half's effort and is issued in early 2019. But the crisis we address is not a static issue that has a one-time solution. It is an ongoing problem that will require continued attention and action. This report is only a beginning point—a compass, not a map.

**WE ARE CITIZEN-SOVEREIGNS.
WE MUST ACT AS SOVEREIGNS,
TAKE RESPONSIBILITY AND
MOVE FORWARD.**

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 - **Author/Reporter Expertise:** Who made this? Details about the journalist, including their expertise and other stories they have worked on.

- **Type of Work:** What is this? Labels to distinguish opinion, analysis and advertiser (or sponsored) content from news reports.
- **Citations and References:** For investigative or in-depth stories, access to the sources behind the facts and assertions.
- **Methods:** Also, for in-depth stories, information about why reporters chose to pursue a story and how they went about the process.
- **Locally Sourced?** Lets you know when the story has local origin or expertise. Was the reporting done on the scene, with deep knowledge about the local situation or community?
- **Diverse Voices:** A newsroom's efforts and commitment to bringing in diverse perspectives. Readers notice when certain voices, ethnicities, or political persuasions are missing.
- **Actionable Feedback:** A newsroom's efforts to engage the public's help in setting coverage priorities, contributing to the reporting process, ensuring accuracy and other areas. Readers want to participate and provide feedback that might alter or expand a story.

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 - Disinformation, when false information is knowingly shared to cause harm.
 - Malinformation, when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere.
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 - The percentage of students who are active, engaged participants in democracy, including voting and serving in their communities and nationally.

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APPENDIX

GLOSSARY

The following are key terms featured throughout the Knight Commission Report.

21st Century Literacies (also described as the “new literacies”) – Basic literacy skills in reading and writing, plus information, digital, news, media and civic literacy.

American Journalism Project (AJP) – A national venture philanthropy entity, dedicated to fund and support the development of new and existing Community News Organizations (CNOs) across the country.

Attention Economy – An economy built on a business model that is based on maximizing the time spent online by users in order to maximize advertising revenue.

Citizen Journalists – Non-professionals who act as reporters and commentators, typically online.

Citizenship – The right and obligation to voice one’s beliefs and grant the same to all fellow citizens in search of truths. The atomic element of American democracy is to exercise one’s rights and responsibilities as citizens.

Civic Education – The process of imparting the knowledge of history, facts, values and skills required to maintain active participation in democratic processes.

Civic Engagement – Participation in the activities associated with maintaining one’s government.

Civic Literacy – The basic civic knowledge and skills required for engagement in democratic processes. The whole purpose of civic literacy is to enable and encourage participation in democratic institutions and processes.

Civic Spaces – Whether online, in local libraries, in national service programs, or in other trusted institutions, civic spaces offer opportunities for Americans with varying political perspectives to come together, to get to know and understand each other and renew their common bonds.

Community Information Corporation – A form of CNO modeled after Community Development Corporations (CDC), local nonprofits aimed at developing a local geographical area. A Community Information Corporation (CIC) works with community members to cover issues and affect change in the community. Similar to CDCs, the CIC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization created to support and revitalize communities, especially those that are information-impooverished or struggling. A CIC would also be involved in a wide range of community services that meet local needs such as education, job training and other social programs.

Community News Organization (CNO) – These enterprises are designed specifically to meet civic information needs of the communities they serve. They also pose a promising alternative for financial sustainability of local journalism entities. Although CNOs will depend on philanthropic contributions to provide startup capital, they should move as rapidly as possible to achieve self-sufficiency by tapping into a variety of revenue streams.

Comstock Act – Named after anti-obscenity crusader Anthony Comstock who led the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, the Comstock Act made it a crime to send through the mail “any publication of an indecent character.”

Crisis in Believability – The inability to agree on facts. In 2018, unwelcome facts are labeled as “fake,” false information is regularly sent out over the internet and increasingly sophisticated “deepfake” video technologies can manipulate images and voices to realistically portray something that never happened.

Crisis of Democracy – Indications of the current crisis of democracy in America are the loss in shared bonds and increased polarization amongst Americans. Their faith in democratic institutions has declined, along with civic engagement and a sense of a common American identity.

Crisis in Trust – A broad decline of trust in societal, democratic institutions, including government and the media.

Deepfake Technology – Digital technology that makes it possible to place the voice and/or likeness of a person into a wholly different context to create false statements seemingly made by that person, or otherwise place them in a “false light.”

Digital Citizens – The Knight Commission sets the following expectations for digital citizens: prior to the age of 13 years old, individuals should know enough about digital literacy to conduct themselves safely under the service agreements provided by social media platforms. Prior to the legal voting age of 18 years old, individuals must be able to find and use the information necessary to be knowledgeable voters.

Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) – A 1998 update to existing copyright laws that addressed new issues of digital content. Specifically, this Act offered companies the opportunity to accept a set of intellectual property rules defined by the government in return for exemptions and safe harbor provisions against highly variable state-level rules.

Disinformation – Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan define disinformation as false information that is knowingly shared to cause harm.

Echo Chamber – The intellectual isolation that results from self-selection of information that is consistent with an individual's existing beliefs and opinions.

Fairness Doctrine – A policy of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission that required broadcasters to “present controversial issues of public importance” and to do so in a manner that was “honest, equitable and balanced.” This policy, in effect from 1949 until 1987, effectively prevented broadcasters from promoting a political viewpoint.

Filter Bubble – According to Eli Pariser, filter bubbles refer to the intellectual isolation that results from the customized search results generated by algorithms.

General Trust – In relation to politics, general trust is enduring trust in a political process that expects disagreements between competing factions and assumes an orderly sharing of power.

Glass-Box Approach – A design approach that enables users to understand how algorithms that provide customization work.

Institutionalists and Insurrectionists – According to Christopher Hayes, institutionalists are individuals who believe in the fundamental legitimacy and necessity of a “central repository of authority,” and therefore are committed to defending the current government, despite its flaws. Insurrectionists are convinced that “there is something fundamentally broken about our current institutions . . . and believe that the only way to hold our present elites accountable is to force them to forfeit their authority.”

Malinformation – Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan define malinformation as genuine information that is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere.

Memetic Warfare – The process of creating false but sensational narratives that are specifically designed to be picked up and spread by others who are attracted to the messages but have little idea of their origin.

Misinformation – False information that is shared without the intent to cause harm.

Moderation – The ongoing process of making decisions about the content that users do and do not see on social media and other platforms.

News Desert – Communities that have no newspaper or other local media to provide information on local events and issues.

Open-Box Approach – A design approach that provides access to options that would allow users to adjust algorithmic criteria settings to provide the content that they want to see.

Particular Trust – In relation to politics, trust in a specific administration or individual official, which may be contingent.

Platform – An online service that connects a group of users with content or services of interest to them. Successful platforms operate at a scale large enough to create and orchestrate an entire ecosystem of activity among its participants.

Propaganda – Information that is usually manufactured by a government or a powerful interest group to influence the attitudes and opinions of its own citizens or the citizens of another country.

Public Benefit Corporation (PBC) – A PBC by definition and design, makes clear that the corporation's goals are not solely for profit. Forming as a PBC or including PBC-like clauses in their corporate charters will allow for-profit news organizations to invest in serving their local communities without fear of shareholder suit for failure to maximize profits.

Section 230 of Title V of the 1996 Telecommunications Act (known as the “Communications Decency Act”) – This section of the Telecommunications Act states that “No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.”

Section 317 of the Communications Act (47 U.S.C. § 317) – This section of the Communications Act requires broadcasters to disclose to their listeners or viewers if matter has been aired in exchange for money, services or other valuable consideration.

The Sedition Act of 1798 – Passed less than a decade after ratification of the Bill of Rights—the Act made it a crime to “write, print, utter or publish...any false, scandalous and malicious writing against the government, Congress or the President.” The Act was an attempt to suppress the expression of political dissent at a time when conflict between two parties, the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans, was growing in intensity.

Social Media – Online entities that monetize the networks that arise, connect users to each other and to content by selling access to their audiences to advertisers.

Social Network (or Social Platforms) – Online services whose primary function is to connect people together to share personal information.

Spatial Polarization – A form of polarization that entails the split in values and perspectives between rural residents and urban dwellers, or more generally, political differences between residents of different geographical regions.

Tabloidization – The tendency to pursue popularity over objectivity or factualness in news media.

Trust – The firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability or strength of someone or something.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE KNIGHT COMMISSION

W*e would like to thank the following:*

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, headed by Alberto Ibargüen, President and Chief Executive Officer, and Jennifer Preston, Vice President, Journalism. As well, Sam Gill, Vice President, Communities and Impact and Senior Advisor to the President; Andrew Sherry, Vice President, Communications; and their teams added significantly to the Commission's work in their respective areas. We also appreciate the help of Nancy Watzman, consultant to the Knight Foundation and this Commission, who edited our Medium channel, blogged on Commission issues there and summarized citizen feedback for the commissioners.

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Richard Adler served as the rapporteur and primary writer of the report. Peter Kaufman expertly edited the final version. Ethan Zuckerman served as special advisor. Penelope Abernathy and Eric Newton served as consultants who wrote white papers for the Commission and continued as valued experts during the process. We also thank Jeffrey Abramson, Luke Chang and Susan Robinson for writing white papers for the Commission and danah boyd, Jeff Jarvis, Tim Marema and Mark Meckler for supplying shorter "thought pieces" for the Commissioners.

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New York, New York – October 11, 2017

Emily Bell, Founding Director, Tow Center for Digital Journalism, Columbia Graduate School of Journalism

danah boyd, Microsoft Research and Founder, Data & Society Research Institute

Eve Burton, Senior Vice President and General Counsel, Hearst Corporation

Jason Ehrich, Senior Vice President, Social Media, Fox News / Fox Business

Ari Fleischer, President, Fleischer Communications

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Lydia Polgreen, Editor-in-Chief, The Huffington Post

Claire Wardle, Director, First Draft News

Palo Alto, California – January 16, 2018

Maneesh Agrawala, Forest Baskett Professor of Computer Science and Director of the Brown Institute for Media Innovation, Stanford University

David Besbris, Vice President of Engineering, Google, Inc.

Gina Bianchini, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Mighty Networks

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Tristan Harris, Design Ethicist, Time Well Spent

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Miami, Florida – February 19, 2018

Sara Lomax-Reese, President and CEO, WURD Radio, LLC

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Jay Rosen, Professor of Journalism, New York University

María Elena Salinas, Independent Journalist and Producer

Craig Silverman, Media Editor BuzzFeed News, BuzzFeed

Jimmy Wales, Co-Founder, Wikipedia

Nashville, Tennessee – April 27, 2018

Governor Bill Haslam, 49th Governor of Tennessee

Penelope Abernathy, Knight Chair in Journalism and Digital Media Economics and Professor, UNC-Chapel Hill School of Media and Journalism

Jim Brown, Author of *Ending Our Uncivil War* and Tennessee Director, National Federation of Independent Business

Dana Coester, Associate Professor, WVU Reed College of Media and Creative Director and Executive Editor, 100 Days in Appalachia

Michael Cormack, Jr., Chief Executive Officer, Barksdale Reading Institute

Colin Crowell, Vice President, Global Public Policy, Twitter

Racine, Wisconsin – May 30-31, 2018

Speaker Robin Vos, Wisconsin State Assembly

Darryl Holliday, Co-Founder & Lab Director, City Bureau

Additionally, we recognize those who engaged with us publicly and participated in our Medium channel. The Trust, Media and Democracy publication on Medium is the principal platform for public engagement with the Knight Commission. Launched in November 2017, it publishes research, commentary and analysis related to the Commission's mission, inviting public comment. As of October 2018, the site included nearly 90 articles; viewership on one piece reached 48,000, and many received more than 1,000. These include:

- **Public opinion research**, including a 2018 Knight-Gallup poll of 19,000 U.S. adults on why trust in the media is in crisis, as well as follow-up surveys testing possible approaches for interventions.
- **Knight Papers**, which collects white papers by leading academics commissioned by the Knight Foundation on topics including why misinformation flourishes online, the problem of factions in governance and why people are wired to believe what they want to believe. The Knight Foundation also collaborated with Medium.com on its inaugural monthly magazine, which was focused on the issue of trust, with a white paper on how to build public trust in a polarized age.
- **Guest columns** on innovation in local news, how the media can better represent and listen to the public, why the military earns trust, and much more.
- **Drafts of the Knight Commission's report chapters in progress**, along with summaries on comments received. Knight also collaborated with Hearken and WPLN, Nashville's public radio station, to collect questions from listeners for the Commission. Readers have also been asked to contribute ideas about recommendations.

We chose Medium because it's a nonpartisan platform and is structured to provide high-quality comments. We summarized the comments in the briefing books for each Knight Commission meeting to ensure that public participation affected the outcome. In addition, most Knight Commission meetings included public sessions.

The Knight Commission believes public engagement is integral to the effectiveness of its efforts and will continue to reach out with the publication of its final report and recommendations.

As a final point, we recognize that the organizations cited as examples in the text are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive, and that some worthwhile efforts have undoubtedly been left out. All are to be commended.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

Anthony W. Marx

(Co-Chair)



Anthony W. Marx is president of the New York Public Library, the nation's largest library system, with 88 neighborhood libraries and four scholarly research centers that receive about 17.4 million physical visits each year.

Since joining NYPL in 2011, Marx has strengthened its role as an essential provider of educational resources and opportunities for people of all ages. Under his leadership, the Library has created new early-literacy and after-school programs for children and teens, dramatically increased free English language classes and citizenship support for immigrants, and improved services for scholars and students who rely on the Library's world-renowned research collections.

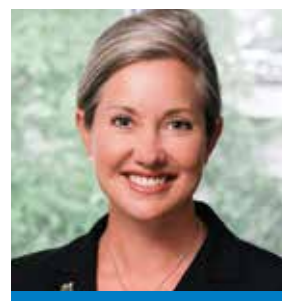
During his tenure, Marx has helped facilitate the largest set of physical renovations in the Library's history and the single largest increase in city funding NYPL has ever received. Under Marx, the Library has also become a national leader in bridging the digital divide through its efforts to increase access to e-books, expand computer classes and coding training, and commence a groundbreaking program that provides home internet access to families of low-income students.

Before joining the Library, Marx served as president of Amherst College from 2003 to 2011, during which time the college nearly tripled enrollment for low-income students. Before Amherst, Marx was a political science professor and director of undergraduate studies at Columbia University and a Guggenheim Fellow. Marx has a B.A. from Yale, an M.P.A. from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, and a Ph.D., also from Princeton.

Jamie Woodson

(Co-Chair)

Jamie Woodson has been at the forefront of Tennessee's work to raise student achievement for more than 20 years. As a policymaker in the Tennessee General Assembly, she was instrumental in Tennessee's elevation to national prominence in education reform. More recently, as executive chairman and CEO of the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE), she has led collaboration on education policy and practice, work that has supported Tennessee's success as the fastest-improving state in the nation in K-12 student achievement.



Before joining SCORE in 2011, Woodson served in both houses of the Tennessee General Assembly. During her 12 years in the legislature, where she was Chairman of the Education Committee and Speaker Pro Tempore, she spearheaded efforts to identify and support effective teaching, raise academic expectations for Tennessee students, turn around low-performing schools and support student-focused innovation.

At SCORE, Woodson sets the strategic vision for the organization, leads its executive team and builds and strengthens its partnerships with educational leaders in Tennessee and across the nation. Founded in 2009 by former U.S. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, SCORE is a nonpartisan, nonprofit education organization that drives collaboration to support K-12 education in Tennessee. It is a national model for state-based policy advocacy, technical assistance and collective impact.

Woodson also supports student-focused education policy and practice by serving on the boards of the PIE (Policy Innovators in Education) Network and the Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association (TICUA). She is an alumna of the Pahara-Aspen Institute in Entrepreneurial Leadership in Education, the Hunt-Kean Leadership Fellows, Leadership Tennessee and the Aspen Institute-Rodel Fellowship in Public Leadership.

In addition to her work in education, Woodson serves as chair of the Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission, the governing body of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. Woodson also serves on the boards of the Governor's Foundation for Health and Wellness and the Tennessee Business Roundtable.

Woodson holds her B.A. and J.D. from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. She and her husband, Bill, live on a farm in Middle Tennessee.

Alberto Ibargüen

(Ex-Officio)



Alberto Ibargüen is president of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which promotes informed and engaged communities through investments in journalism, the arts, and in the success of cities where the Knight brothers once published newspapers.

He is the former publisher of *The Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald*. During his tenure, *The Miami Herald* won three Pulitzer Prizes and *El Nuevo Herald* won Spain's Ortega y Gasset Prize for excellence in Spanish language journalism.

He graduated from Wesleyan University and the University of Pennsylvania Law School. He served in the Peace Corps in Venezuela and Colombia, practiced law in Hartford, Connecticut, and joined the *Hartford Courant*, then *Newsday* in New York, before moving to Miami.

Over time, Alberto has chaired the boards of PBS, the Newseum and the World Wide Web Foundation. He is a member of MIT's Visiting Committee for the Media Lab and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. For his work to protect journalists in Latin America, he received a Maria Moors Cabot citation from Columbia University.

He is currently a member of the board of American Airlines and previously served on the boards of PepsiCo and AOL.

Daniel R. Porterfield

(Ex-Officio)

Daniel R. Porterfield, Ph.D., has served as president and CEO of the Aspen Institute since June 2018. He was selected by the Institute's Board of Trustees because of his intellectual depth, commitment to inclusivity and diversity, and ability to lead a complex, mission-driven organization to create impact and make a difference in the world. His career embodies the ideals of values-based leadership upon which the Aspen Institute was founded.



Prior to leading the Aspen Institute, Dan served for seven years as the president of Franklin & Marshall College (F&M), a leading national liberal arts college founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1787. Under his leadership, F&M set records for applications, fundraising and fellowships; developed cutting edge new centers for student wellness, career services and faculty excellence; constructed a new athletics stadium; and embarked upon the process of building a groundbreaking new visual arts center.

Perhaps most important, Dan led F&M in the development of the Next Generation Initiative talent strategy, through which the College strengthened its academic excellence and competitiveness by tripling its percentage of incoming low-income students and more than doubling its percentage of domestic students of color. The Next Generation Initiative helped to galvanize the creation of a national project of the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program, the American Talent Initiative (ATI).

Dan has been recognized as a visionary leader and advocate for expanding educational opportunity and improving the human condition by the KIPP Foundation, the "I Have A Dream" Foundation, the Posse Foundation, and the Kaplan Educational Foundation. He was named a White House Champion of Change in 2016.

Prior to his appointment at F&M, Porterfield served as senior vice president for strategic development for his alma mater, Georgetown University. In this role, he led Georgetown's institutional positioning, strategy formation, communications, government relations, community relations, and intercollegiate athletics, and spearheaded the University's relationship with D.C. Public Schools and founded a number of Georgetown programs for immigrant children, D.C. students and at-risk youth. He was also an award-winning professor of English.

Before coming to Georgetown in 1997, Porterfield served for four years as a senior aide to then-U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala. He earned B.A. degrees from Georgetown and Oxford—where he was a Rhodes Scholar—and his Ph.D. from The City University of New York Graduate Center, where he was awarded a Mellon Fellowship in the Humanities.

A native of Baltimore, Dan and his wife, attorney Karen A. Herrling, have three children.

Raney Aronson-Rath



Raney Aronson-Rath is the executive producer of FRONTLINE, PBS' flagship investigative journalism series, and is a leading voice on the future of journalism. She has been internationally recognized for her work to expand FRONTLINE's reporting capacity and reimagine the documentary form across multiple platforms. From the battle for control of Mosul to the hidden history of the NFL and concussions, and the rise of white supremacy groups in America, Aronson-Rath oversees FRONTLINE's acclaimed reporting on-air and online and directs the series' evolution and editorial vision.

A leading voice on narrative journalism, documentary filmmaking, and visual storytelling, Aronson-Rath pioneered a collaborative model for investigative journalism that *The New York Times* described as “increasingly important...as a way to reach new viewers and produce more in-depth reports.” She has developed and managed nearly 30 in-depth, cross-platform journalism partnerships with outlets including ProPublica, *The New York Times* and Univision—and has significantly grown both FRONTLINE's broadcast and digital audiences in the process.

Under her leadership, FRONTLINE has won every major award in broadcast journalism and dramatically expanded its digital footprint. Efforts have included a YouTube channel with original content, interactive projects like *Concussion Watch* and the Emmy-nominated *Targeting the Electorate*, and the new Transparency Project, which makes the source material behind FRONTLINE's journalism not just available but easy to navigate and share.

A 2014–2015 fellow at the MIT Open Doc Lab, Aronson-Rath has spoken on the future of journalism at the Skoll World Forum, the TV Next Summit, the National Scholastic Press Association's High School Journalism Convention, Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, the Power of Narrative Journalism Conference and at universities including Stanford, UC Berkeley, NYU and MIT. Aronson-Rath is a member of the Board of Visitors for Columbia University's Journalism school, and serves on the Advisory Board of Columbia Global Reports, a new publishing imprint that's producing ambitious works of journalism and analysis on underreported stories around the globe.

Aronson-Rath joined FRONTLINE in 2007 as a senior producer. She was named deputy executive producer by David Fanning, the series' founder, in 2012, and then became executive producer in 2015. Before managing FRONTLINE, Aronson-Rath produced several notable FRONTLINE documentaries including *News War*, *The Last Abortion Clinic*, *The Jesus Factor*, *Law & Disorder*, and *Post Mortem*.

Prior to FRONTLINE, Aronson-Rath worked at ABC News and *The Wall Street Journal*. She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin and her master's from Columbia Journalism School.

Meredith Artley

Meredith Artley is the editor-in-chief and senior vice president of CNN Digital Worldwide. She oversees the content creation, programming and publishing of CNN.com, CNNi.com and CNNMoney across mobile, social, desktop and emerging platforms and products. She leads a team of hundreds of talented reporters, producers and editors to fuel the world's top digital news brand. Under Meredith's leadership, CNN Digital has become number one in multiplatform uniques, visits, video streams, mobile and the most-followed news organization across social media.



Before joining CNN, Artley was a managing editor for *The Los Angeles Times* and the executive editor of LATimes.com. Prior to that, she was based in Paris as the editor and digital development director for the *International Herald Tribune*.

Meredith began her career at *The New York Times*, where she pioneered digital journalism in the early days, starting as a web producer and eventually building and managing the editorial team of NYTimes.com.

She is a graduate of the University of Missouri, the wife of an ex-journalist and the mother of a rambunctious 8-year-old boy.

Stephen L. Carter

Stephen L. Carter is the William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Law at Yale University and a long-time Aspen moderator. At Yale, he teaches courses ranging from Intellectual Property to The Law and Ethics of Warfare. A graduate of Stanford University and Yale Law School, he served as law clerk to the late Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. He has published seven non-fiction books, including *God's Name in Vain: The Wrongs and Rights of Religion in Politics*, and *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy*. His first novel, *The Emperor of Ocean Park*, spent 11 weeks on *The New York Times* bestseller list. His fourth novel, *Jericho's Fall*, will be published this summer. Professor Carter is a member of numerous learned societies and has received eight honorary degrees.



Perry Chen



Perry Chen's work as an artist often explores systems—both social and technological—and how they intersect with and reveal our humanity. His projects have been exhibited in New York, Berlin, Vienna, São Paulo and Mexico City.

During Perry's tenure as Kickstarter's founding CEO he was named one of *TIME* magazine's 100 Most Influential People in World. Today, as its Chairman, he works on the company's mission, values and long-term thinking, including leading the organization to reincorporate as a Public Benefit Corporation in 2015.

Perry was a TED Fellow in 2010 and is currently a Director's Fellow at the MIT Media Lab.

Nonny de la Peña



One of the most influential pioneers in developing virtual reality as a modern means of expression, Nonny de la Peña is founder of Emblematic Group, a leader in creating immersive virtual, mixed and augmented reality. Emblematic's partners range from news organizations, including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and PBS FRONTLINE, to world-class companies such as Cartier, Standard Chartered Bank and Google. A Yale Poynter Media Fellow and former correspondent for *Newsweek*, she has over 20 years of award-winning experience in print, film and TV.

Nonny is widely credited with helping create the genre of immersive journalism and launched the first virtual reality film in 2012 at the Sundance Film Festival.

Richard Edelman

Richard Edelman is the president and CEO of Edelman, a leading communications marketing firm.

The firm was named “PR Agency of the Decade” by both Advertising Age and The Holmes Report.

Richard has extensive experience in marketing and reputation management, having led assignments with major corporations, NGOs and family businesses in over 25 industries around the world.



Richard topped PRWeek's list of most powerful executives (2013), was recognized as the third-highest-rated CEO by Glassdoor (2014) and was inducted into the Arthur W. Page Society's Hall of Fame (2014). He is regarded as an industry thought leader and has posted weekly to his blog since 2004. Richard is consistently mentioned as one of the top 25 experts on corporate trust.

He serves on the Board of Directors of the Ad Council, the Atlantic Council, the Children's Aid Society and the 9/11 Museum. He is a member of the World Economic Forum and PR Seminar.

Richard has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Harvard College and an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School.

Francis Fukuyama



Francis Fukuyama is Olivier Nomellini Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies (FSI), and the Mosbacher Director of FSI's Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law. He is professor (by courtesy) of political science.

Dr. Fukuyama has written widely on issues in development and international politics. His book *The End of History and the Last Man* was published by Free Press in 1992 and has appeared in over twenty foreign editions. His most recent book, *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*, was published in September 2014. Other books include *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy*, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*, and *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*.

Francis Fukuyama received his B.A. from Cornell University in classics, and his Ph.D. from Harvard in political science. He was a member of the Political Science Department of the RAND Corporation, and of the Policy Planning Staff of the U.S. Department of State. He previously taught at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of Johns Hopkins University and at George Mason University's School of Public Policy. He served as a member of the President's Council on Bioethics from 2001–2004.

Dr. Fukuyama is chairman of the editorial board of *The American Interest*, which he helped to found in 2005. He is a senior fellow at the Johns Hopkins SAIS Foreign Policy Institute, and a non-resident fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Center for Global Development. He holds honorary doctorates from Connecticut College, Doane College, Doshisha University (Japan), Kansai University (Japan), Aarhus University (Denmark), and the Pardee RAND Graduate School. He is a member of the Board of Governors of the Pardee RAND Graduate School, the Board of Directors of the National Endowment for Democracy, and a member of the advisory board for the *Journal of Democracy*. He is also a member of the American Political Science Association, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Pacific Council for International Affairs. He is married to Laura Holmgren and has three children.

Theaster Gates

Theaster Gates was born in Chicago in 1973. He first encountered creativity in the music of Black churches on his journey to becoming an urban planner, potter and artist. Gates creates sculptures with clay, tar and renovated buildings, transforming the raw material of urban neighborhoods into radically reimagined vessels of opportunity for the community. Establishing a virtuous circle between fine art and social progress, Gates strips dilapidated buildings of their components, transforming those elements into sculptures that act as bonds or investments, the proceeds of which are used to finance the rehabilitation of entire city blocks.



Gates's nonprofit, Rebuild Foundation, manages the many projects in his Chicago hometown—including the Stony Island Arts Bank, Black Cinema House, Dorchester Art and Housing Collaborative, Archive House, and Listening House—while extending its support to cities throughout the American Midwest. Many of the artist's works evoke his African-American identity and the broader struggle for civil rights, from sculptures incorporating fire hoses to events organized around soul food, and choral performances by the experimental musical ensemble Black Monks of Mississippi, led by Gates himself.

Theaster Gates attended Iowa State University (M.S., 2006; B.S. 1996) and University of Cape Town (M.A., 1998). Gates's awards and residencies include the Kurt Schwitters Prize (2017), American Academy of Arts & Sciences Award (2016), Smithsonian American Ingenuity Award for Social Progress (2015), Artes Mundi Award (2015), honorary doctorates from the San Francisco Art Institute (2015) and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2014), Knight Foundation Grant (2014), Creative Capital Grant (2012), United States Artists Fellowship (2012), Graham Foundation Grant (2011), and the Joyce Award (2009). Gates has had major exhibitions at Art Gallery of Ontario (2016), Kunsthaus Bregenz (2016), Istanbul Biennial (2015), Venice Biennale (2015), MCA Chicago (2013), Fabric Workshop and Museum (2013), and Documenta (2012), among others. Theaster Gates lives and works in Chicago, IL, USA.

Richard Gingras



Richard Gingras is vice president, news, at Google. In that role Gingras guides Google's strategy in how it surfaces news on Google search, Google News and its smart devices. He also oversees Google's effort to enable a healthy, open ecosystem for quality journalism, which includes Accelerated Mobile Pages, Subscribe with Google, the Trust Project and various other efforts to provide tools for journalists and news providers. In March 2018, Gingras announced the Google News Initiative, a global effort including \$300 million to elevate quality journalism, explore new models for sustainability, and provide technology to stimulate cost-efficiency in newsrooms.

For more than 35 years, Gingras has led highly regarded efforts in the development of online services and new media. He also serves on the boards of the First Amendment Coalition; the International Center for Journalists; the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard; and the Manship School of Mass Communication at LSU.

From March 2009 to June 2011, he was CEO of Salon Media Group, which operated Salon.com and the pioneering virtual community The Well. Gingras assembled Salon's initial seed financing in 1995. Salon featured the work of many acclaimed journalists, including Pulitzer Prize winner Glenn Greenwald.

Gingras was a strategic adviser to the senior team at Google (2007–2009), strategic adviser to Storify (sold to LiveFyre), founder and CEO of Goodmail Systems, a founding vice president of pioneering broadband provider @Home Network, and senior vice president and general manager of Excite@Home (1996–2001). He led the design and development of Apple's online service eWorld (1993–1996) and was founder and CEO of MediaWorks (1987–1992), an early developer of news-agenting technology. He is also a strategic adviser and seed funder of numerous startups.

In 1979, Gingras created the first interactive online newsmagazine, done in partnership with CBS, NBC and PBS, and using interactive television technology known as broadcast teletext. In the fall of 2012, he was recognized with the Manship Prize for contributions to the evolution of digital media.

Sean Gourley

Sean Gourley is founder and CEO of Primer. Previously, he was CTO of Quid, an augmented intelligence company he co-founded in 2009. Prior to Quid, Sean worked on self-repairing nano-circuits at NASA Ames.

Sean holds a Ph.D. in physics from Oxford, where his research as a Rhodes Scholar focused on graph theory, complex systems and the mathematical patterns underlying modern war. He has served as a political advisor to the Iraqi government, briefed USCENTCOM at the Pentagon and addressed the United Nations in Vienna.



A native of New Zealand, Sean helped start the country's first nanotech company, ran for national elected office and is a two-time New Zealand track and field champion. He sits on the Board of Directors at Anadarko (NYSE: APC) and also serves as a TED Fellow.

Amy Gutmann



Since becoming president of the University of Pennsylvania in 2004, Amy Gutmann has been widely recognized for her transformative leadership, including increasing Penn's diversity, interdisciplinary excellence, innovation ecosystem, and civic engagement both locally and globally.

The first in her family to graduate college, Dr. Gutmann has made access to a Penn education a top priority. She has more than doubled the number of students from low-income, middle-income and first-generation college families at Penn. Under her leadership, Penn is the nation's largest university offering all-grant financial aid that meets the full need of undergraduate students, three quarters of whom graduate debt-free.

Global engagement has been a centerpiece of her presidency, with the creation of the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement in Washington, led by Vice President Joseph Biden, the opening of the Perry World House on campus and the opening of the Penn Wharton China Center in Beijing, all of which mark major new university-wide initiatives that promote global solutions and bring the world to Penn and Penn to the world.

She has also led the creation of an innovation ecosystem on a vibrantly expanded campus, which includes the 23-acre Pennovation Works, located close to Penn's academic core.

The Pennovation Center is a flagship business incubator and laboratory, and the Penn Center for Innovation fast-tracks Penn discoveries and technologies to meet social needs.

Dr. Gutmann leads a preeminent healthcare system, featuring a premier medical school, the Perelman School of Medicine and six major hospitals. As Philadelphia's largest private employer and healthcare provider, Penn has an economic impact of \$14 billion annually in Pennsylvania.

Dr. Gutmann has continued her award-winning scholarship and pathbreaking public service. Her seventeenth book, *Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven but Nobody Wants to Die: Bioethics and the Transformation of American Healthcare* (with Jonathan D. Moreno) will be published in 2019 by W.W. Norton. President Barack Obama selected her to chair the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues from 2009 to 2017. The Commission published major reports on important issues of science and healthcare.

Dr. Gutmann graduated from Radcliffe College of Harvard University. She earned her master's degree in political science from the London School of Economics and her doctorate from Harvard.

H. Fisk Johnson

H. Fisk Johnson is chairman and CEO, and chairman of the board of S. C. Johnson & Son, Inc. Fisk joined S.C. Johnson in 1987, and he has served in a variety of senior level management and marketing positions, both domestically and internationally. Fisk Johnson is the fifth generation Johnson family leader of the 130-year-old company.



He serves on The Consumer Goods Forum Board of Directors. Fisk served as a member of the President's Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiation (ACTPN) from 2002 to 2010, and was appointed to ACTPN again in 2011.

Fisk served on the Cornell University Board of Trustees from 1993 to 2001 and now is a Trustee Emeritus. From 2002 to 2011, he served on the Board of Directors of Conservation International. Previously, he served as director of Energizer Holdings, Inc. and Johnson Outdoors Inc. He also was a member of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development from 2004 to 2008.

He was named Florida Southern College's 77th Honorary Chancellor and received an Honorary Doctorate. Fisk also received an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Wilfrid Laurier University in June of 2011.

In 2016 Fisk was the recipient of CECP's Founders Force for Good award, recognizing his commitment to transparency and sustainable business strategies. Under Fisk's leadership, S.C. Johnson was awarded the World Environment Center's Gold Medal for International Corporate Achievement in Sustainable Development in 2015. He was honored to be the 2009 Robert S. Hatfield Fellow in Economic Education, delivering Cornell University's annual Hatfield Lecture. In 2013, he was honored by the Samuel Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management at Cornell University with the Dean L. Joseph Thomas Leadership Award, the highest honor bestowed on its most accomplished alumni leaders.

Fisk holds a B.A. in Chemistry and Physics; an M. Eng. (Master of Engineering); M.S. in Physics; M.B.A.; and Ph.D. in Physics, all from Cornell University.

Fisk is a devoted father who enjoys spending a great deal of time with his daughter. He enjoys flying as a pilot, scuba diving, racquet sports and skiing.

Joanne Lipman



Joanne Lipman is the bestselling author of *THAT'S WHAT SHE SAID: What Men Need to Know (and Women Need to Tell Them) About Working Together*. A veteran journalist, she most recently was chief content officer of Gannett and editor-in-chief of *USA TODAY* and the USA TODAY NETWORK, comprising the flagship plus 109 local newspapers including the *Detroit Free Press*, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, *The Des Moines Register*, and *The Arizona Republic*. In that role, she oversaw more than 3,000 journalists and led the organization to three Pulitzer Prizes.

Lipman began her career as a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*, ultimately rising to deputy managing editor—the first woman to attain that post—and supervising coverage that won three Pulitzer Prizes. At the *Journal*, she created Weekend Journal and Personal Journal and oversaw creation of the Saturday edition. She subsequently was founding editor-in-chief of *Conde Nast Portfolio* magazine, which won Loeb and National Magazine Awards.

Lipman's work has been published in numerous outlets, including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Fortune*, *Newsweek* and the *Harvard Business Review*. She has appeared as a television commentator on ABC, NBC, CNN, CNBC, MSNBC and PBS, among others. She is also a frequent public speaker, with recent engagements including the World Economic Forum in Davos, the Aspen Institute Ideas Festival, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Lean In international conference, and the Milken Institute Global conference in addition to numerous corporations. She also is co-author, with Melanie Kupchynsky, of the acclaimed music memoir *Strings Attached*.

A winner of the Matrix Award for women in communications and a 2017 honoree for New York City's Literacy Partners, Lipman is a member of the Yale University Council; the Council on Foreign Relations; and the boards of the World Editors Forum, the Yale Daily News and the advisory boards of Data.World, Breastcancer.org and the Yale School of Music. She and her husband live in New York City and are the parents of two children.

Nuala O'Connor

Nuala O'Connor is the president & CEO of the Center for Democracy & Technology, a global nonprofit committed to advancing our digital rights. She is a vocal advocate for harnessing the potential of the internet and emerging technologies to increase equality, amplify voices and promote human rights. At CDT, Nuala leads a diverse team that is driving policy solutions that advance the rights of the individual in the digital age. Her experience working in the federal government, multinational corporations, tech startups and noted law firms informs her innovative and collaborative leadership approach.



Nuala began her career in the private sector, working at the law firms of Venable, Hudson Cook and Sidley. She entered the technology sector when she joined the start-up DoubleClick as deputy general counsel. While there, and in her later position as vice president & chief privacy officer of email & emerging technologies, she worked on numerous class actions, a multistate settlement with state attorneys general, and an FTC investigation before helping to create the company's privacy compliance department, which still serves as an influential model for companies in the technology sector and beyond. She later served as global privacy leader at General Electric (GE) and was responsible for privacy policy and practices across GE's numerous divisions. Her most recent corporate experience was at Amazon.com, where she served as vice president, compliance & consumer trust, and associate general counsel data & privacy protection.

Between her stints in the private sector, Nuala served in various capacities within the federal government. At the U.S. Department of Commerce, she worked on global technology policy, including internet governance and industry best practices, in her roles as deputy director of the Office of Policy & Strategic Planning, chief privacy officer and chief counsel for the Technology Administration. She later became the first statutorily appointed chief privacy officer (CPO) in federal service when she was named as CPO at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). At DHS she was responsible for groundbreaking policy creation and implementation regarding the use of personal information in national security and law enforcement. Under her leadership, the DHS Privacy Office issued a seminal report criticizing the use of private-sector data in national security efforts.

Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Nuala grew up in and around New York City. She holds an A.B. from Princeton, a Master's in Education from Harvard, and a J.D. from the Georgetown University Law Center. She lives in the Washington, D.C., area with her three school-aged children and one large dog. You can find her on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

Eduardo Padrón



An American by choice, Eduardo Padrón arrived in the United States as a refugee at age 15. Since 1995, he has served as president of Miami Dade College, a national model of student achievement and the largest institution of higher education in America, with more than 165,000 students.

An economist by training, Dr. Padrón earned his Ph.D. from the University of Florida. In 2009, *TIME* magazine included him among the “10 Best College Presidents” in the United States; in 2010, *Florida Trend* magazine named him “Floridian of the Year”; and in 2011, *The Washington Post* recognized him as one of the eight most influential college presidents in the country. In addition, the Carnegie Corporation of New York granted him its prestigious Centennial Academic Leadership Award; he is the first college president to receive the National Citizen Service Award from Voices for National Service; he has been named an Ascend Fellow by the Aspen Institute; and he is the recipient of the Hesburgh Award, the highest honor in U.S. higher education. In 2016, President Barack Obama awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom for being a national voice for access and inclusion in higher education.

During his career, Dr. Padrón has been selected to serve on posts of national prominence by six American presidents. He currently chairs the White House Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics. His energetic leadership extends to many of the nation's leading organizations. He is former chair of the Board of Directors of the American Council on Education and the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Dr. Padrón is widely recognized as one of the top educational leaders in the world. He presently chairs the Business/Higher Education Forum and serves on the boards of RC-2020, the White House Fellows Selection Panel (chair), the International Association of University Presidents, Achieving the Dream, and the National Young Arts Foundation. He has held leadership positions on the American Academy of Arts & Sciences/Humanities Commission and on the boards of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities (chair), the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Campus Compact, and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute. He is also a past board chair of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Miami Branch.

President Padrón's transformational accomplishments at Miami Dade College have been acknowledged by the national media. He has received some of the most prestigious awards in and out of academia and more than 15 honorary doctorates from leading universities such as Rollins, Princeton and Brown. He is also the recipient of highest honors by the governments of foreign nations, including France, which named him Commandeur in the Ordre des Palms Académiques; Argentina, which awarded him the Order of San Martin; and Spain, whose King Juan Carlos II bestowed upon him the Order of Queen Isabella.

Eduardo M. Peñalver

Eduardo M. Peñalver is the Allan R. Tessler Dean and Professor of Law. He became Cornell Law School's 16th dean on July 1, 2014. Dean Peñalver most recently served as the John P. Wilson Professor of Law at the University of Chicago Law School.

He received his B.A. from Cornell University and his law degree from Yale Law School. Between college and law school, he studied philosophy and theology as a Rhodes Scholar at Oriel College, Oxford. Upon completing law school, Dean Peñalver clerked for Judge Guido Calabresi of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, and at the Supreme Court for Justice John Paul Stevens.



Dean Peñalver's scholarship focuses on property and land use, as well as law and religion. His work explores the way in which the law mediates the interests of individuals and communities. His writing on property has appeared in numerous leading law journals. His book *Property Outlaws* (co-authored with Sonia Katyal), published by Yale University Press in February 2010, explores the vital role of disobedience within the evolution of property law. His most recent book, *An Introduction to Property Theory* (co-authored with Gregory Alexander), was published by Cambridge University Press in 2011.

Dean Peñalver previously taught at Cornell Law School (2006–2012) and at Fordham Law School (2003–2006). He has also been a visiting professor at Harvard Law School and Yale Law School.

Deb Roy



Deb Roy is an associate professor at MIT where he directs the Laboratory for Social Machines (LSM) based at the Media Lab. His lab conducts research in applied machine learning and human-machine interaction with applications in children's learning, social listening and understanding large scale media ecosystems. Roy is also co-founder and chairman of Cortico, a social venture that develops scalable media technologies and services to foster a healthy public sphere.

Roy was co-founder and CEO of Bluefin Labs, a media analytics company that analyzed the interactions between television and social media at scale. Bluefin was acquired by Twitter in 2013, Twitter's largest acquisition of the time. From 2013 to 2017 Roy served as Twitter's chief media scientist. An author of over 150 academic papers, his popular TED talk *Birth of a Word* presents his research on his son's language development that led to new ideas in media analytics. A native of Canada, Roy received his Bachelor of Applied Science from the University of Waterloo and Ph.D. in Media Arts and Sciences from MIT.

Christopher Ruddy



Christopher Ruddy, a noted journalist and entrepreneur, is CEO and president of Newsmax Media Inc., one of the nation's leading media companies.

In 1998, Ruddy founded Newsmax, a multimedia company that publishes online and offline content in the fields of news, politics, health and finance. Newsmax.com ranks consistently as one of the country's most trafficked news websites.

Ruddy previously worked at the *New York Post* and the *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*.

A *Newsweek* cover story named him one of America's 20 most influential news media personalities. He also studied as a Media Fellow at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University.

Ruddy sits on the Board of Directors of the Financial Publishers Association, the organization representing investment publications that reach 25 million Americans monthly.

He holds a B.A. summa cum laude in history from St. John's University in New York and a master's in public policy from the London School of Economics.

Mizell Stewart III

In more than three decades as a journalist, Mizell Stewart III has been an award-winning reporter, top newsroom editor in three states, radio and television broadcaster and corporate news executive. He is passionate about developing the next generation of newsroom leaders, community service and advancing the critical role journalists play in a democratic society.



Today, Stewart is senior director of talent, partnerships and news strategy for Gannett and the USA TODAY Network, the largest local-to-national news network in the United States. He is an adjunct faculty member at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies and the founder of Emerging Leaders, LLC, a leadership development consulting firm focused on mid-career professionals.

His prior roles include chief content officer of Journal Media Group, vice president / content of the newspaper division of the E.W. Scripps Company and senior leadership posts at the *Akron Beacon Journal*, *Evansville Courier & Press* and *Tallahassee Democrat*. He also worked as a reporter and editor at the *Dayton Daily News* and *Springfield News-Sun*. A true multiplatform journalist, Stewart also was an on-air personality at WNIN-TV in Evansville, Ind. and WIOT-FM in Toledo, Ohio.

A four-time Pulitzer Prize juror, Stewart helped lead the team at *The Sun Herald* in Biloxi, Miss. that won the 2006 Pulitzer Gold Medal in Public Service for its coverage of Hurricane Katrina. He is a past president of the American Society of News Editors and the current president of the American Society of News Editors Foundation.

He is a frequent speaker and teacher on local journalism, leadership, newsroom diversity and community service at national journalism conferences and at colleges and universities throughout the U.S. In 2018, the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication recognized Stewart with the Gerald R. Sass Distinguished Service Award for his efforts to strengthen journalism education.

Stewart is a journalism graduate of Bowling Green State University and completed the Advanced Executive Program, a joint program of the Kellogg School of Business and the Medill School of Journalism, at Northwestern University. He also earned a master's degree in Executive Leadership and Organizational Change from Northern Kentucky University, where he received the Distinguished Student Award.

Stewart is the proud husband of Valerie Morgan-Stewart, a fellow graduate of Bedford High School in suburban Cleveland. They reside in Aurora, Ohio.

Charles Sykes



Charles Sykes is a contributing editor at the *Weekly Standard*, and the host of the magazine's Daily Standard podcast, as well as a regular NBC/MSNBC contributor.

He is also author of nine books, including *A Nation of Victims; Dumbing Down Our Kids; Profscam; The Hollow Men; The End of Privacy; 50 Rules Kids Won't Learn in School; A Nation of Moochers;* and *Fail U. The False Promise of Higher Education*. He was co-editor of the *National Review College Guide*.

His most recent book, *How the Right Lost Its Mind*, published by St. Martin's Press, was released in October 2017. An updated paperback edition was released in October 2018.

Sykes has written for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Politico*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time.com*, *Salon*, *USA Today*, *National Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, *the New York Daily News*, *The Weekly Standard* and other national publications. He has appeared on Meet the Press, This Week with George Stephanopoulos, State of the Union with Jake Tapper, the Today Show, ABC, NBC, Fox News, CNN, PBS, the BBC, and has been profiled on NPR. He has also spoken extensively on university campuses.

Until he stepped down in December 2016 after 23 years, Sykes was one of Wisconsin's top-rated and most influential conservative talk show hosts. In 2017, he was co-host of the national public radio show "Indivisible," which originated from WNYC.

Sykes is on the advisory board of the Democracy Fund and is a member of the board of Stand Up Republic.

He lives in Mequon, Wisconsin with his wife and three dogs. He has three children and two grandchildren.

John Thornton

John Thornton joined Austin Ventures in 1991 and serves as general partner. His investment focus is in the early-stage software sector. Previously, John was with McKinsey & Co., where he served clients in the U.S. and Europe.

John received his M.B.A. from the Stanford Graduate School of Business, and his B.A. summa cum laude from Trinity University, where he graduated first in his class. He previously served on the Boards of Directors for Ballet Austin, the Austin Museum of Art and the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas. He is a founding board member of the Entrepreneurs Foundation of Central Texas and a former trustee of Trinity University. In 2009, John founded the Texas Tribune, the nation's first statewide nonprofit and nonpartisan online news organization.



Anthea Watson Strong

Anthea Watson Strong is a product manager who designs and builds technology that supports our shared civic infrastructure. She currently works on local news at Facebook.

Before joining Facebook, she worked on the Google's Civics team, building products that helped people access public services more efficiently and helped users engage in the civic process. Most recently, for the 2016 U.S. elections, her team launched features on Google search to help voters participate in the elections by registering to vote, researching candidates, and understanding the outcome and impact of the elections.

During the 2012 campaign cycle, she spent 12 months working as the director of voter experience with the Obama technology team. Before joining the campaign, she ran an open data effort, the Voting Information Project—a nonpartisan effort to collect, standardize and distribute, through an open API, a nationwide database of polling locations and election related information.

She lives with her husband, Reid Strong, her son, Milo Strong, and her cat, Wallace. Reid is a civil rights attorney at the USDA, the kid is learning how to overcome child locks, and the cat spends his days being grumpy about life. When she's not working or taking care of the baby, she likes to make cakes.



Jonathan Zittrain



Jonathan Zittrain is the George Bemis Professor of International Law at Harvard Law School and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, professor of computer science at the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, director of the Harvard Law School Library, and faculty director of the Berkman Center for Internet & Society. His research interests include battles for control of digital property and content, cryptography, electronic privacy, the roles of intermediaries within internet architecture, human computing, and the useful and unobtrusive deployment of technology in education.

He performed the first large-scale tests of internet filtering in China and Saudi Arabia, and as part of the OpenNet Initiative co-edited a series of studies of internet filtering by national governments: *Access Denied: The Practice and Policy of Global Internet Filtering*; *Access Controlled: The Shaping of Power, Rights, and Rule in Cyberspace*; and *Access Contested: Security, Identity, and Resistance in Asian Cyberspace*.

He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the Board of Advisors for *Scientific American*. He has served as a Trustee of the Internet Society, and as a Forum Fellow of the World Economic Forum, which named him a Young Global Leader, and as Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence at the Federal Communications Commission, where he previously chaired the Open Internet Advisory Committee. His book *The Future of the Internet—And How to Stop It* is available from Yale University Press and Penguin UK—and under a Creative Commons license. Papers may be found at www.jz.org.



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