



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Distrust in the news - the beginning or the end of a vicious circle?



Will you trust the information and opinions in the next 800 or more words of this article? It is more likely that you will not than that you will. If you are in a group of 10 readers, even six of you will not trust what you will read in the next five minutes.

The recently **released** Annual Digital News Report from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism confirmed a multi-year trend of declining public trust in the news.

With some variation from country to country and in relation to individual media brands, distrust in media reporting has been global and steadily declining.

The greatest scepticism within the news audience is among those under 35, those with lower incomes and lower levels of education. Trust in the news increases with age, income, and education. But it does not exceed 50%.

The extensive research conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism is encouraging because a large percentage of trust in reporting is based on the belief that it is news obtained according to the rules of the profession.

Around 70% of people worldwide said they will have confidence in the reporting of those media outlets that are transparent about how the news is made, i.e., that have high journalistic standards.

A vicious circle of distrust

Is the general distrust in the news and media coverage the beginning or the end of a vicious circle of long-standing distrust in many other social systems—in institutions, experts, political leaders, and NGOs?

This year, global distrust in the establishment has increased. **According** to the Edelman Trust Barometer for 2024, more than 60% of people worldwide believe that government leaders, business leaders, journalists, and reporters “are purposely trying to mislead people by saying things they know are false or gross

exaggerations.”

When trust in news is low, the issue is thus generally not that people do not know what to look for – Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

If one perceives the media and journalists as merely transmitting the messages and attitudes of society's leaders to the public, the previous indicator provides a valid reason for the low trust in the media and its news. But is that just an excuse?

“When trust in news is low, the issue is thus generally not that people do not know what to look for. It is that many do not feel they are getting it. If they are right, the news has a product problem. If they are wrong, news has a communications problem,” **said** Prof. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen and Dr Richard Fletcher of the Reuters Institute in the interpretation of the Annual Digital News report.

Who decides the global elections?

When the far-from-encouraging results of their research overlap with the fact that this year almost half (49%) of the world's population in more than 60 countries will go to the polls to elect the various levels of government, we must be concerned about the outcome of such an election.

Such an outcome cannot reflect a competent voter's decision based on access to objective information about the policies and candidates that voters believe in.

A recent **report** by electoral expert Sir John Curtice for the National Centre for Social Research said that nearly 60% of UK voters “almost never” trust politicians to tell the truth when cornered. Nearly 80% said that Britain's system of governance needs to be improved “quite a lot” or “a great deal.”

In the European Parliament elections two weeks ago, Europeans had slightly more trust in the EU (58% on average across the 27 member states), but at the same time very low trust in national institutions (only 41% trust and even 55% distrust).



Developed democracies have a far greater problem with distrust in their institutions, including professional media and news, than developing countries, especially those with autocratic regimes

In the US, trust in federal institutions **fell sharply** within two years, from 2022 to this spring, from 35% to 23%, with as many as two-thirds of citizens believing their government to be "incompetent."

Developed democracies have a far greater problem with distrust in their institutions, including professional media and news, than developing countries, especially those with autocratic regimes.

China, India, and the United Arab Emirates are at the top of the list of countries with more than 70% public trust in institutions (government, companies, experts, media), and the UK, Japan, South Korea, Germany, and the United States are at the end of the list.

I believe in "someone like me"

The traditional media are losing trust in their information at the expense of the "localisation" of trust, which is seen as a new phenomenon, i.e., the constant increase in trust in "someone like me."

This is largely the result of the increase in

communication and information consumption via social media rather than direct media access.

In this conformist transmission, a large number of people do not want to receive information that deviates from their world views, even if it is objective, but rather move to their information bubbles, where they will hear the views that suit them from "someone like me." Even if they were not objective and accurate.

Adapting to a bad trend is the worst option, leading to the expansion of populism and extremist ideas, as well as opening up space for false narratives

Making decisions this way risks incompetence and is based more on perceptions than facts. However, their strength at the polling station or where decisions are made is just as significant as the strength of a decision based on objective and accurate information.

Political, business, and media leaders have been losing the battle with the phenomenon of a general decline in trust in what they are doing, and they have not found a particularly efficient countermeasure.

Adapting to a bad trend is the worst option, leading to the expansion of populism and extremist ideas, as well as opening up space for false narratives, all of which we have witnessed in the last few decades.