

# Trust in Journalism: Why So Low? What to Do About It?

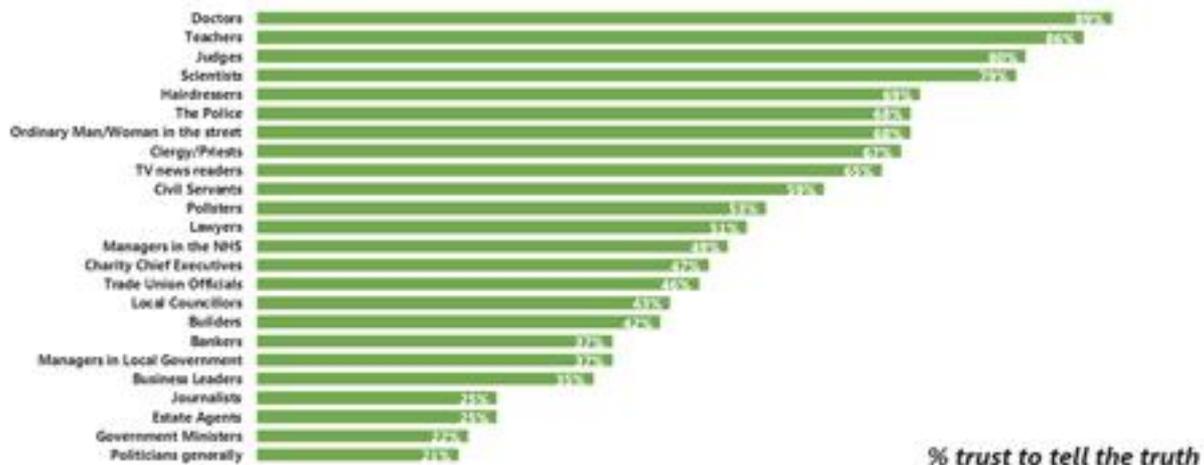
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# A Downward Trend

Trust in journalism is surprisingly low— and has been markedly declining over the last 20 years.

## Veracity Index 2015 – all professions overview

"Now I will read you a list of different types of people. For each would you tell me if you generally trust them to tell the truth, or not?"



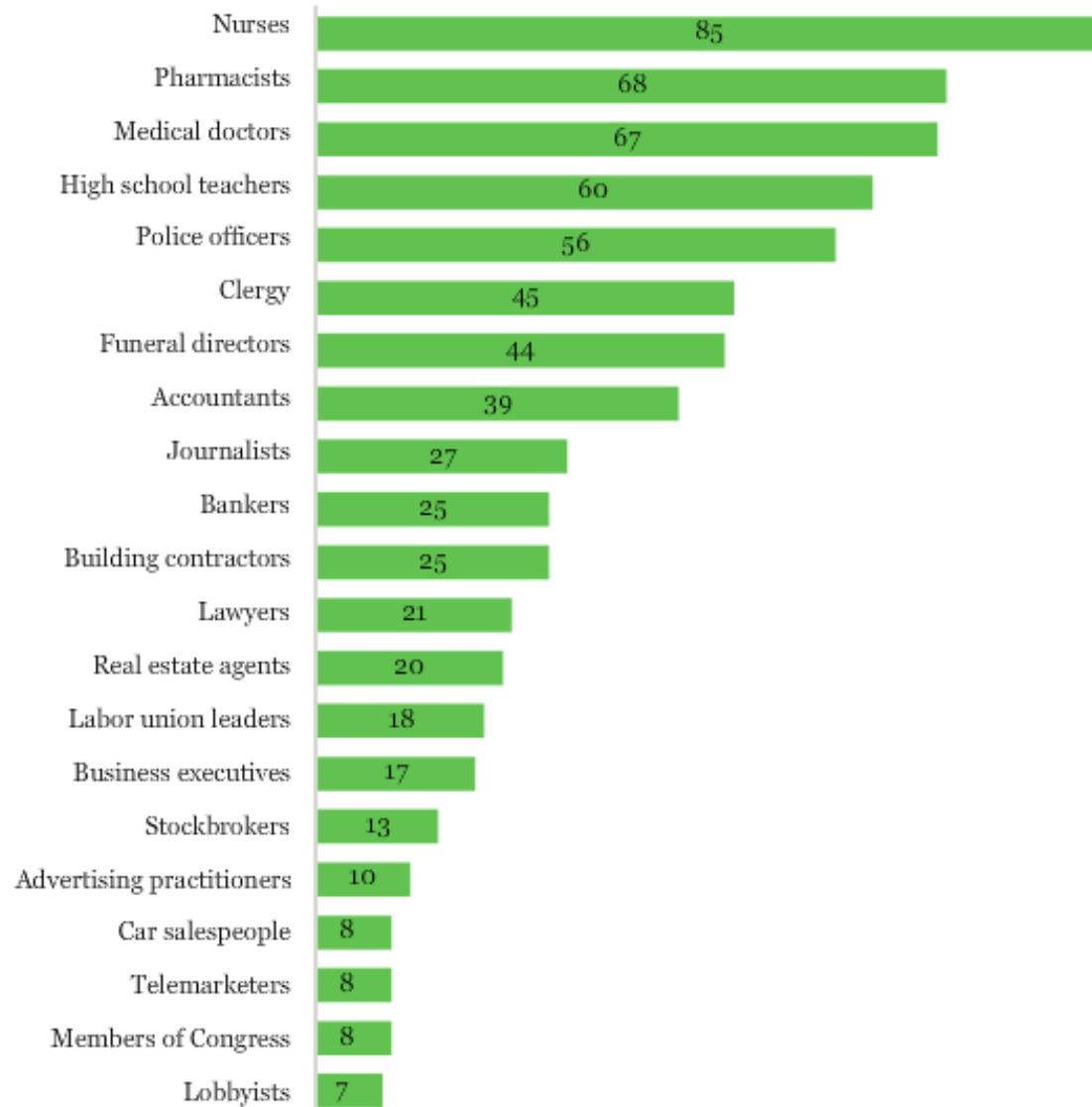
% trust to tell the truth

- 69% trust hairdressers to tell the truth.
- 53% trust lawyers to tell the truth.
- 35% trust business leaders to tell the truth.
- 25% trust journalists to tell the truth.

*Please tell me how you would rate the honesty and ethical standards of people in these different fields -- very high, high, average, low or very low?*

Dec. 2-6, 2015

■ % Very high/High



*Journalists*

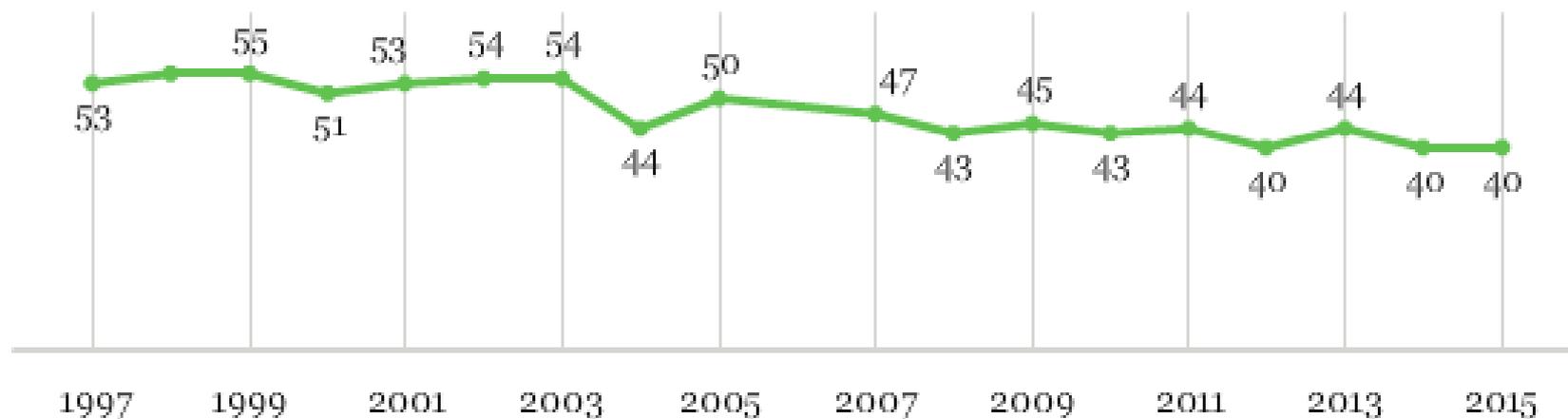
	<b>Very high</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Very low</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Very high/High</b>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
2015 Dec 2-6	4	23	42	21	9	1	27
2012 Nov 26-29	5	19	45	21	9	1	24
2011 Nov 28-Dec 1	4	22	46	21	6	1	26
2009 Nov 20-22	4	19	45	22	9	1	23
2008 Nov 7-9	4	21	44	21	10	1	25
2006 Dec 8-10	3	23	48	18	7	2	26
2005 Nov 17-20	4	24	44	21	6	1	28
2003 Nov 14-16	4	21	49	18	7	1	25
2002 Nov 22-24	4	22	50	18	4	2	26
2001 Nov 26-27	5	24	50	14	5	2	29
2000 Nov 13-15	2	19	51	21	5	2	21
1999 Nov 4-7	3	21	53	18	4	1	24
1998 Oct 23-25	4	18	54	17	5	2	22
1997 Nov 6-9	2	21	53	17	4	3	23
1996 Dec 9-11	3	20	50	19	4	4	23
1995 Oct 19-22	4	19	50	19	5	3	23
1994 Sep 23-25	3	17	50	24	5	1	20
1993 July 19-21	4	22	53	16	3	2	26
1992 Jun 26-July 1	4	23	54	13	2	4	27
1991 May 16-19	3	23	52	13	3	6	26
1990 Feb 8-11	4	26	51	13	2	4	30
1988 Sep 23-26	3	20	49	18	4	6	23
1985 July 12-15	5	26	47	12	4	5	31
1983 May 20-23	4	24	47	13	4	8	28
1981 July 24-27	4	28	44	12	3	9	32
1977 July 22-25	5	28	48	11	4	3	33
1976 June 11-14	7	26	49	13	3	2	33

# Declining Trust

- In 1977, 15% of Americans ranked the ethical standards of journalists as “low/very low.”
- By 1999, that number had grown to 22%.
- In 2015, that number reached 30%.

In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media -- such as newspapers, TV and radio -- when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly -- a great deal, a fair amount, not very much or none at all?

■ % Great deal/Fair amount



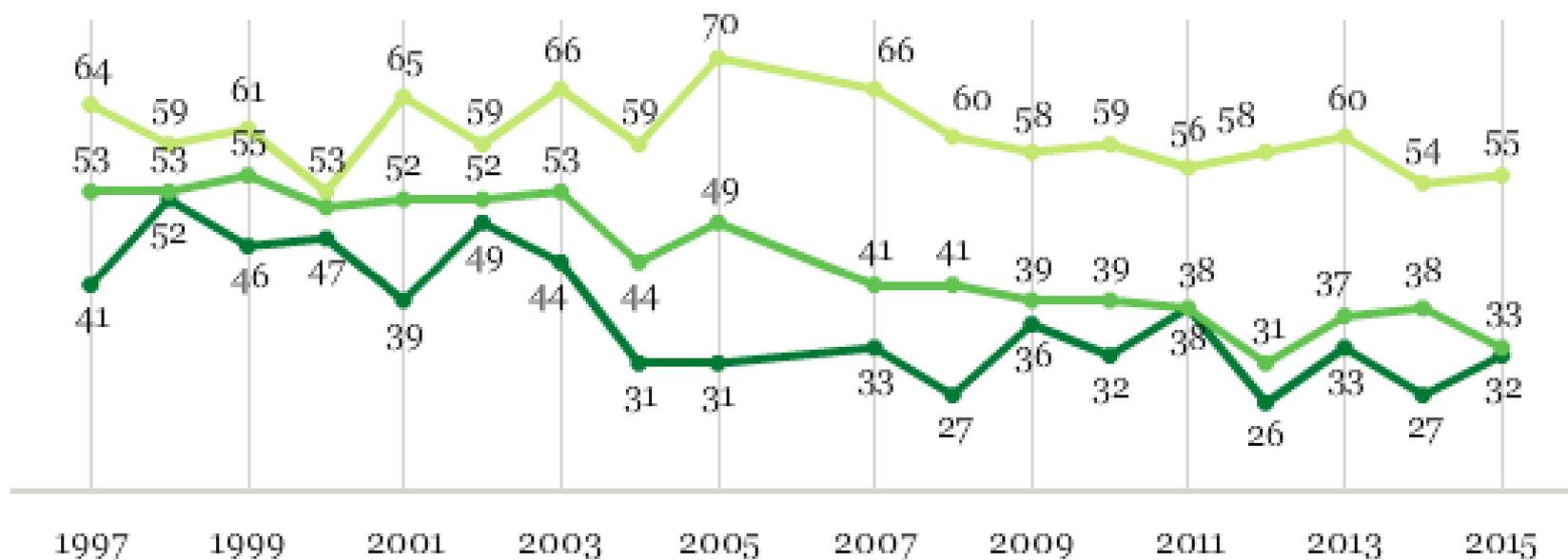
Gallup trend since 1997

% Great deal/Fair amount of trust

■ Republicans

■ Independents

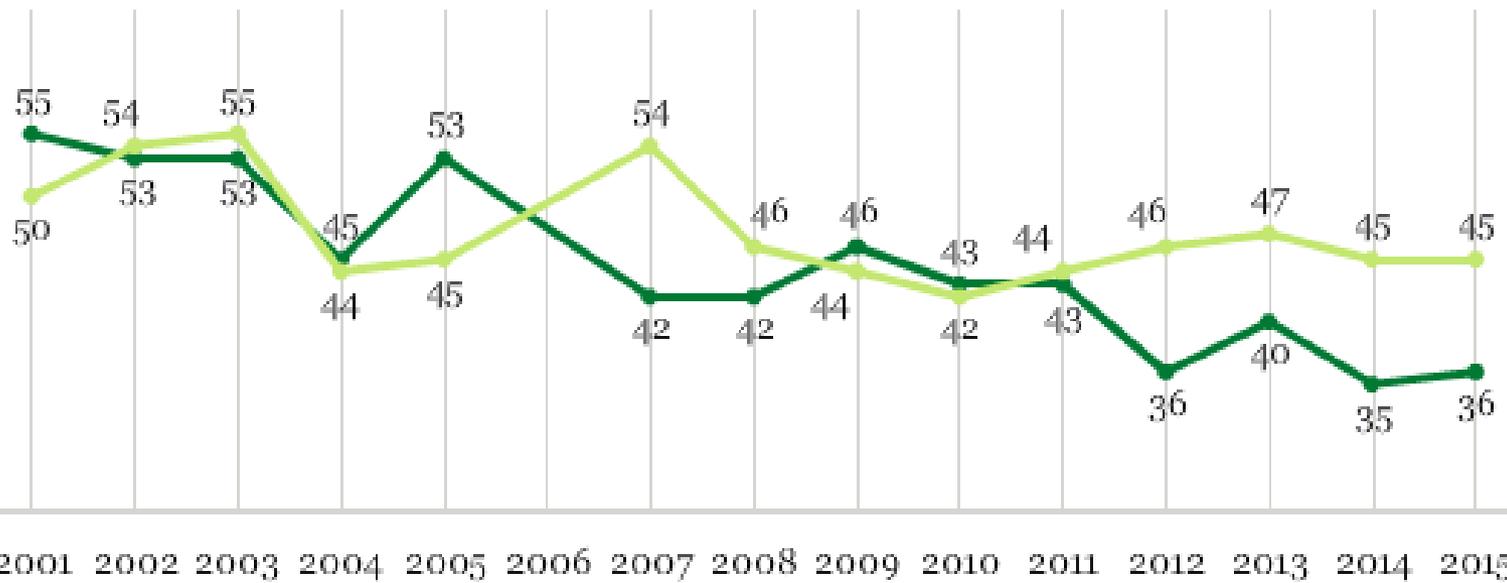
■ Democrats



Gallup trend, 2001-2015

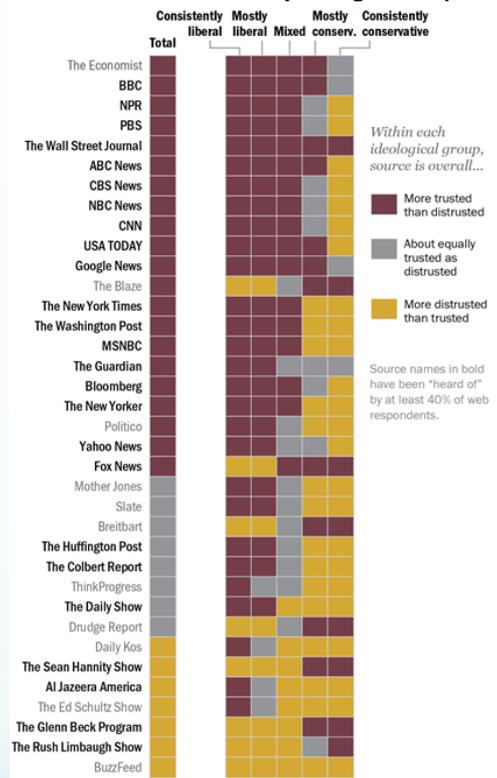
% Great deal/Fair amount of trust

■ 18 to 49 years old    ■ 50 or older



Gallup trend, 2001-2015

### Trust Levels of News Sources by Ideological Group



American Trends Panel (wave 1). Survey conducted March 19-April 29, 2014. Q21a-21b. Based on web respondents. Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see about the survey). Grouping of outlets is determined by whether the percent who trust each source is significantly different from the percent who distrust each source. Outlets are then ranked by the proportion of those who trust more than distrust each.

# Costs of Declining Trust

- Bad for Democracy: journalists are the key source of information for Americans and their distrust of journalists allows ideology to trump facts (e.g. the birther movement, climate change deniers).
- Bad for Business: consumers avoid paying for news that they can get for free, and if it's all garbage, why pay for any of it?

# What is Trust?

Trust is an attitude we take towards others by which we are willing to make ourselves vulnerable to them in light of the expectation that they will responsibly care for an important interest of ours.



# Three-Part Trust

Trust is typically “three-part”— Bo (1) trusts (2) Luke to (3) do X [ or in action domain X]

# What is Trustworthiness?

One is trustworthy when one possess properties by which one can be relied upon to responsibly care for the important interests of others.



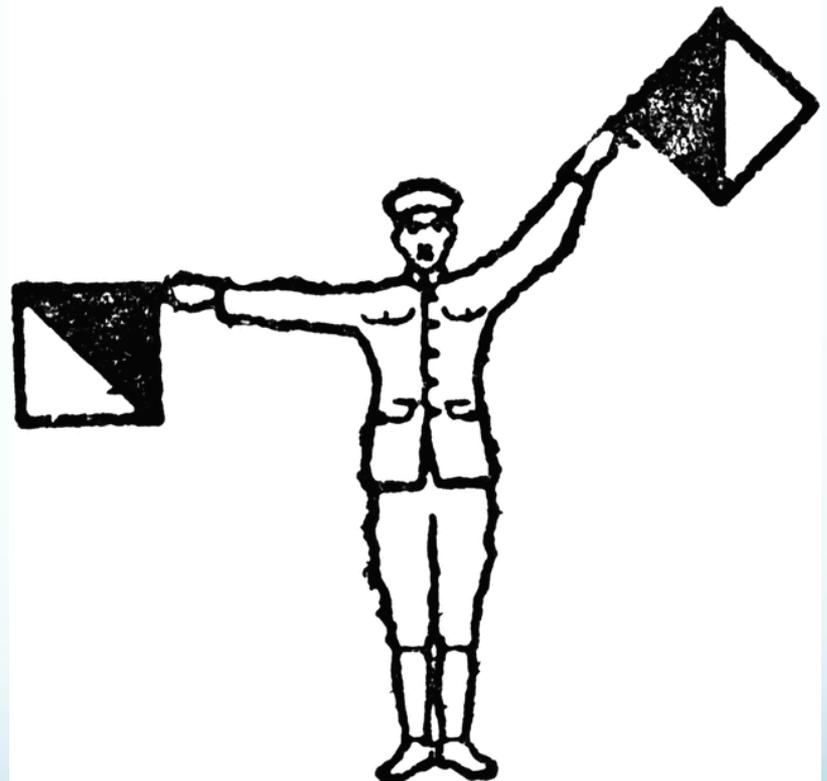
# Two Kinds of Trustworthy Properties

Instrumental: It is in Luke's interests to be reliable relative to Luke and regarding X.

Character: Luke is the type of person disposed to be reliable relative to Luck and regarding X.

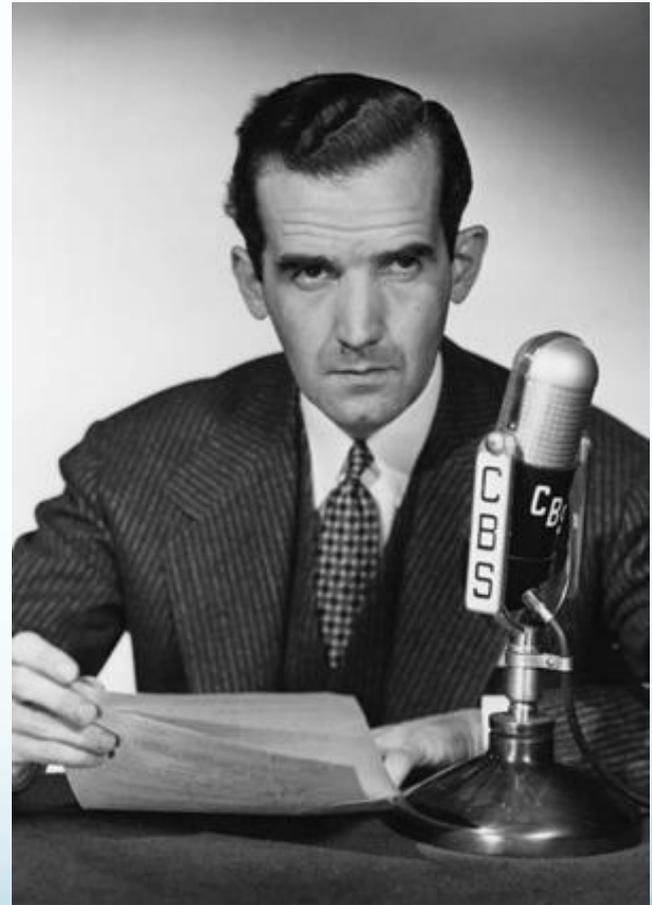
# Effective Trustworthiness

The ability to effectively signal or communicate one's trustworthy properties to trust-evaluators.



# The Virtues of the Trustworthy Journalist

- Objective—Fair, Balanced, Honest
- Accurate
- Timely
- Concise



# Two Questions

- 1) Why has the perceived trustworthiness of journalism declined over the last 20 years?
- 2) Why are journalists perceived to be less trustworthy than other professions?

# Some Explanations

- Postmodernism— increasing polarization of ideologies and meta-narratives.
- More sources of news, many designed to cater to ideological groups.
- Economics of industry makes high quality journalism difficult (e.g. smaller news staff, tighter deadlines, need to entertain)
- Journalism since Watergate has been more aggressive and advocates more, blurring line between journalism and commentary.

**How can we improve the  
effective trustworthiness of  
journalists?**

# Anonymous Trust

Trust in professionals is typically “anonymous”— the public has no personal familiarity with the professional.

Trust is based on *reputation* and *past experience* with the social role.

# Transparency: The Trust Project

- Richard Gingras (head of Google News) and Sally Lehrman (Markula Center for Applied Ethics)
- Ethics Statements, Missions (less than half do now)
- Journalist disclosure statements (now standard in science and medicine)
- Full authorship statements (editors, even lawyers)
- Methodology statements and new ethos of source citation (again standard in science)

# Google It!

Jeffrey Jarvis (CUNY) suggests that one way to promote the transparent journalism suggested by Gingras and Lehrman would be to have Google search engines favor transparent news sources!

# Professions and Trust

- The professions promote effective trustworthiness by assuring the public that professionals:
  - 1) Have the character traits (e.g. honesty, impartiality, competence) that make them reliable; and
  - 2) Have ***incentives*** to be reliable.

# Example: Nursing

- 85% of Americans rank nurses “very high/high” for honesty and ethics (compare with journalism= 27%).
- Nursing programs develop and evaluate students in light of “Good Moral Character” (GMC) requirements.
- Licensing and disciplinary processes incentivize reliability.



# Informal vs. Formal Professions

Informal

Formal

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—

Expertise

+Gatekeeping

Service Ideal

+Discipline

Anonymous Trust

Organized

+Monopoly

# Formal Professions and Effective Trustworthiness

- Gatekeeping = Quality Control of Practitioners
- Standardized Ethical Expectations
- Compliance and Discipline System
- Enhanced Reputation for character and interest-based trustworthiness

# Increasing Professionalism in Journalism

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- It would not be appropriate to make journalism a fully formal, state-regulated profession like law or medicine (e.g. censorship problems)
- But a more formal professionalism may increase the effective trustworthiness of journalists.
- One Suggestion: Standardize the process by which inappropriate journalistic (including editorial and publishing) conduct (e.g. incompetent fact gathering; bias; dishonesty) is assessed and disciplined.

# Independent Monitor for the Press (IMPRESS)

- Voluntary Non-Governmental Association
- Code of Ethics for Journalists, Editors, and Publishers
- Standardized, transparent complaint process (both internal/external to organization)
- Mechanisms for Whistleblowing
- Independent Review (from government and publishers)
- Resolution Recommendations
- Sanction System (including fines on publishers)

# Summary

- Trust in journalism is at an all time low.
- Effective trustworthiness can be bolstered by increased journalistic transparency and rigor.
- The creation of more professionalized systems of journalistic review and discipline could also increase the effective trustworthiness of journalists.

# Thank You!

- Questions?
- Feel free to contact me: [tmkelly2@alaska.edu](mailto:tmkelly2@alaska.edu)