

# Whose News Do You Trust? Explaining Trust in Private versus Public Media in Africa

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## Abstract

Why do citizens in postauthoritarian African democracies trust government-owned broadcast media more than they trust private broadcasters, given the public media's lack of independence and history of state propaganda? Analysis of Afrobarometer data from sixteen countries indicates that low political sophistication, illiberal attitudes, and support for incumbents are all associated with greater relative trust in government media. Citizens also prefer public broadcasters in polities with greater press freedom and lower corruption. These results suggest that private media need more democratic and critical citizens, rather than higher quality reporting and greater press freedom, to compete with the state media for influence and resources.

## Keywords

media trust, democracy, Africa, freedom of the press, political communication, media ownership

On the main thoroughfare in Kampala, there is a twenty-foot-tall red billboard advertising the *Daily Monitor*, Uganda's largest privately owned newspaper. A giant pair of scissors cuts through hanging ropes, and bold lettering pronounces, "You get the truth because we've no strings attached. The one to trust—Daily Monitor." The newspaper's regular slogan, "Truth every day," is written across the bottom. The billboard is a thinly veiled dig at the independence of the *Daily Monitor*'s larger rival, the predominantly government-owned *New Vision* newspaper.

This rivalry between private and government-owned media for audience trust is played out daily across most of Africa. Two decades ago, private presses were limited and governments maintained strict control of all mass communications. Today, only Eritrea has an official monopoly over all forms of mass media. Aside from Eritrea, no other sub-Saharan African country has a monopoly over print media, and seven countries even lack a government-owned daily newspaper.<sup>1</sup> Government ownership of broadcast media is more widespread, but private–public competition has become the norm for radio as well. Out of forty-seven sub-Saharan countries, thirty-nine have both public and private radio stations; there are only eight countries where government radio is the only choice available.<sup>2</sup> While private media operate under various restrictions<sup>3</sup> and with far fewer resources, most African countries now have a diversity of news sources.

To investigate whether the burgeoning private media are likely to be influential and sustainable, this article analyzes mass trust in private versus public broadcast media in sixteen postauthoritarian African democracies, using data from Afrobarometer rounds 2 and 3.<sup>4</sup> There are strong reasons to expect that citizens in new democracies would place considerably more trust in private media organizations than in public ones. Government-owned media in Africa have a history of subservience to authoritarian regimes, and even today most are not independent of the government. In contrast, privately owned media outlets, both in Africa and around the world, are more responsive to the public, critical of the government, and open to opposing perspectives.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the private media play the role of watchdog much more than the public media do, investigating allegations of corruption, theft, and election fraud (Tetty 2002).

Surprisingly, the survey reveals that citizens have higher levels of trust in government broadcast media outlets than in private ones, even though all sixteen countries

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had experienced recent transitions away from authoritarian rule. That public media are perceived as equally or more trustworthy than private media is problematic for African democracies. Even relatively democratic African administrations centralize power to a considerable degree, dominating all levels of government and playing a critical role in both the economy and society. There are few checks on governing parties, either inside the government or out. Because the government's position is so strong, the private media cannot function effectively as a counterweight to the power of the ruling party unless they are trusted *more* than official sources.

To explain the reasons for this puzzling and worrisome finding, this article examines the individual-level traits that determine the relative levels of trust in private versus public media broadcast organizations. We find that low political sophistication, undemocratic and uncritical attitudes toward political authority, and progovernment partisan orientations are all implicated in the relative preference for public media over private media. This article also investigates national-level influences by combining data on media, democracy, and the economy with micro-level survey data and employing hierarchical analysis. The results suggest that the relative distrust of private media is more the product of political culture and political biases than the result of an immature and poor-quality private media sphere.<sup>6</sup> We conclude that the international community's focus on improving media quality and press freedom will not be sufficient for private media to engender trust and to become influential and economically viable. Private media and their supporters must seek to propagate democratic attitudes and encourage critical appraisals of the incumbent performance if the private press is to thrive in Africa and probably in new democracies in other regions as well.

The article proceeds as follows. Section one reviews recent changes in the African media landscape that have led to an explosion of new privately owned media sources. It also discusses the challenges that the private media face in establishing credibility<sup>7</sup> and, by extension, financial security and political influence. The second section examines African attitudes about the trustworthiness of news broadcasters. Section three hypothesizes about the sources of relative trust in private versus government-owned radio and television, and section four evaluates these hypotheses using multivariate analysis at the individual and national levels. We conclude with a discussion of ways to improve the standing of private media in Africa.

## I. The Development of Private Media in Africa

A fully functioning democracy requires a population that is informed by multiple competing sources of news. In

this respect, the explosion of privately owned mass media outlets is one of the most notable developments on the African continent today. Private newspapers, radio broadcasters, and television stations are now numerous and vocal, even in countries where other democratic institutions are weak or absent. This current media pluralism contrasts sharply with the virtual absence of independent media in Africa just two decades ago.<sup>8</sup>

### *The History of Private Media*

While the private press played an important role in African independence movements, the media soon fell victim to government repression. Governments throughout the continent established total monopolies over radio and television broadcasting, and state-owned news outlets became mouthpieces for authoritarian governments. Historical accounts consistently indicate low trust in government media during periods of authoritarian rule. For example, during the period of Kwame Nkrumah's one-party rule in Ghana, the word for "radio" in the Ewe language, *asankasa* (literally "the bird who sings"), became a synonym for "propaganda."

The media environment only began to change in the late 1980s when donors and financial institutions demanded economic reforms and activists insisted on greater political and civil freedoms. Journalists exploited modest openings offered to the print press in order to push for additional concessions. Even after newspapers were liberalized, leaders continued to resist opening the airwaves to private investment. Radio has long been the primary source of media in Africa, and its mass appeal endowed it with heightened political importance. Eventually, in the 1990s, government broadcast monopolies gave way in many African countries. The widespread popularity and initial profitability of radio ensured that once political restrictions were lifted private FM radio stations proliferated rapidly. While in 1985 there were only 10 independent radio stations in the whole African continent, by 2005, there were 150 private stations in Mali alone (Tower 2005), 118 private radio stations in Uganda (Leighley 2004; Uganda Communications Commission n.d.), and 68 private stations broadcasting freely in Ghana (Ghana National Communications Authority 2005; Yankah 2004).

Initially, private entrepreneurs eschewed political and controversial topics in favor of entertainment programming or conservative reporting. Over time, emboldened owners began to encourage heated political debates in their newspapers and on air, largely in response to audience demand. While government-owned media in Africa have also undergone changes, on average they remain less critical of the government than the privately owned media are.<sup>9</sup>

### *The Effects of Nascent Private Media and Citizen Attitudes*

What are the effects of these dramatic changes in the media landscape in Africa? To date, most researchers have answered this question by analyzing the content, quality, distribution, and ownership of media in Africa. Many have heralded the dramatic explosion of private media in the past two decades as a boon for peace, democracy, and economic development in Africa.<sup>10</sup> Others counter that private media are generally of poorer quality and strength than the more established public media, which maintain significant advantages in terms of access to state financing, advertising dollars, information, professionally trained staff, infrastructure, and materials (Hyden, Leslie, and Ogundimu 2002; Bourgault 1995; Tettey 2002; Wanyeki 2002; Hasty 2005; Nanguè 2001). They worry that private media will not be able to challenge the dominant messages of the more ubiquitous, familiar, and better funded state-owned competitors. Some also worry that private media will inflame passions through unprofessional and inflammatory broadcasts.

To this lively and unresolved debate about the effects of private media we add a heretofore neglected factor: citizen attitudes toward private versus public news sources. Citizen perceptions of media credibility will help us to understand the likely influence of the different media sources and forecast the future sustainability of private media businesses. Previous research shows that media credibility affects media consumption and political attitudes (Stockmann 2006, 3). Empirical studies conducted in other regions of the world found that trust is related to media exposure and support for free expression (Tsfati and Cappella 2003; Stockmann 2006; although see Blake and Wyatt 2002). More important, research on media effects and political knowledge shows that individuals are only persuaded to consider and act on new information when the provider is perceived to be knowledgeable and trustworthy (e.g., Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Ladd 2004; Gussin and Baum 2004). Other recent studies have documented a link between trust and media effects such as framing (Druckman 2001), agenda setting (Iyengar and Kinder 1985), priming (Miller and Krosnick 2000), and perception of the climate of public opinion (Tsfati 2003). Therefore, it is critically important to the development of democracy not only that citizens have access to independent sources of information but that they also have access to independent sources that they trust.<sup>11</sup>

We measure the reputation and influence of media by looking at relative trust in private versus public media, which, in our view, is more important than absolute levels of citizen trust in media. Public media in Africa have a comparative advantage in access to resources, government information, and distribution channels. In contrast,

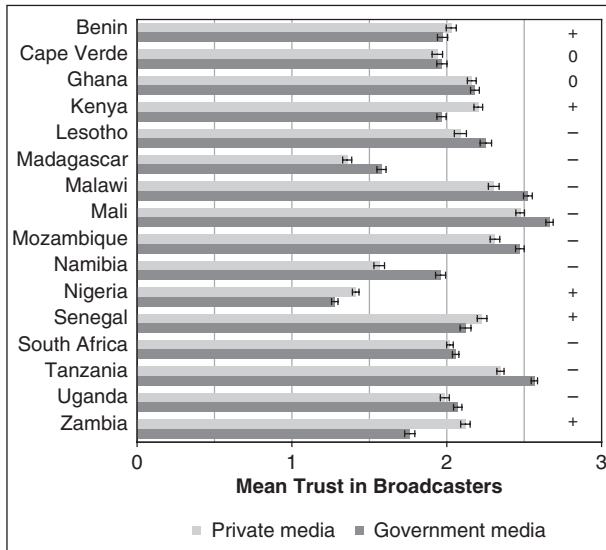
private media's comparative advantage hinges on their reputation for independence and credibility. Given the stronger foothold that government media enjoy in Africa, we argue that private media must earn substantially *more* trust than government media in order to woo audiences and advertisers away from government media and act as a counterweight to the sitting government. We therefore proceed with an examination of what ordinary citizens in sixteen African states say about the trustworthiness of private versus public broadcast media in their countries.

## **II. Trust in Private versus Government Broadcast Media**

We focus our analysis on broadcast media because of the greater familiarity with and use of broadcast media, mainly radio, in Africa.<sup>12</sup> To what extent do people trust privately owned and state-owned radio and television stations in Africa? Does the credibility of the nascent private broadcasters exceed or lag behind that of the well-established state broadcasters? How do opinions differ among countries?

There are strong reasons to expect that most respondents will have greater trust in private media than in public media. The state-owned media have been closely associated with past authoritarian regimes and to this day are less critical of serving governments than private media are. Given that despotic and corrupt regimes held power in recent memory, one might expect citizens of these countries to continue to be wary of the public media.<sup>13</sup> The private media, on the other hand, are independent of the government and therefore better able to hold it to task. In some countries, private radio helps to monitor elections by broadcasting the results of precinct vote counts as they are completed, making it far harder to steal the election. Most investigative journalism and stories of government malfeasance originate from the private press. In general, the private media are more responsive to the public because they cannot rely on tax subsidies and government advertising and must generate their revenue by being relevant or entertaining. For these reasons, our initial expectation is that trust in private media will exceed trust in public media.

To evaluate this claim, we employ data from round 3 Afrobarometer surveys. In 2005, respondents in eighteen African countries were asked a battery of questions to assess trust in a range of public and private institutions.<sup>14</sup> Toward the end of the battery, they were asked how much they trust (1) "the government broadcasting service," followed by the names of the government television and radio stations, and (2) "independent [or privately owned] broadcasting services," which were further described as "other TV or radio." Respondents were given four choices: *not at all* (coded as 0), *a little bit* (coded as 1),



**Figure 1.** Comparison of mean trust in private and government broadcast media  
 A plus sign indicates that the mean trust in private sources is significantly higher than the mean trust in public sources ( $p < .05$ ), a zero indicates that differences are not statistically significant, and a minus sign indicates that mean trust in private sources is significantly lower than trust in government sources.

a lot (coded as 2), and a very great deal (coded as 3). Only those respondents who provided one of the above answers to the questions about public and private media were included in the following analysis.<sup>15</sup>

Our measure of media credibility is admittedly coarse; it records trust in public and private media only along a single dimension using a four-point scale. Studies of source credibility argue that media trust is multidimensional, although the number and nature of these dimensions are contested and may even vary by media type and context (Metzger et al. 2004, 298; see also Kiousis 2001; Kohring and Matthes 2007). For example, Miller and Krosnick (2000) measure media trust along three dimensions: factual accuracy, bias, and importance of issues covered. Compressing such assessments into a single dimension may result in respondents saying that they trust both public and private media the same amount even though they feel that one is highly accurate, biased, and trivial and the other is shoddy, only somewhat biased, but focused on the important issues of the day. Unfortunately, more refined survey measures are not publicly available for Africa at this time. The measure of relative trust allows an initial glimpse at media credibility, although not a comprehensive picture.

The survey indicates that there are high levels of trust in both private and government broadcasters. Nearly three quarters of respondents reported that they trust each media type a lot or a very great deal: 71 percent for private

broadcasters and 73 percent for government broadcasters. Trust in media in Africa appears to exceed media trust in advanced industrial democracies, although comparisons are highly tentative given variation in question wording and time period.<sup>16</sup> In addition, media trust equals or exceeds trust in other national institutions.<sup>17</sup>

While trust in the media in general is high, trust in private broadcast media lags behind trust in government sources, a finding contrary to our initial expectations. A means comparison test shows that the mean value for trust in private broadcast services (2.04) is significantly lower than the mean value for trust in government broadcast services (2.09).<sup>18</sup>

It is troubling that trust in private broadcasters does not exceed trust in government broadcasters in countries that have recently democratized. Private radio and television provide the main source of independent political information in Africa; alternative sources such as associations and opposition political parties are typically small and weak. If private sources of news are not more trusted than government sources, they will be unable to counterbalance the power and influence of the government. If the first three estates are dominated by the same political party—as is often the case in Africa—and the fourth estate is also dominated by government-owned sources, then there will be few if any checks on power holders.

There is considerable variation across countries in the degree to which citizens think their private media sources are less credible than public sources. Figure 1 shows the mean levels of trust in private and public broadcast media for each country, and the 95 percent confidence intervals of the mean. A plus sign indicates that the mean trust in private sources is significantly higher than the mean trust in public sources ( $p < .05$ ), a zero indicates that differences are not statistically significant, and a minus sign indicates that mean trust in private sources is lower than trust in government sources.

Of the sixteen countries examined, there are only five where citizens trust private more than government broadcasters: Benin, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, and Zambia. By comparison, there are nine countries where trust in private broadcasters is significantly lower than trust in their government competitors.<sup>19</sup> This demonstrates that the relative distrust of private broadcasters is widespread and not simply an artifact of pooling; private broadcast media have higher levels of trust than do government media in fewer than a third of the African postauthoritarian democracies examined. It seems private radio will have trouble capturing the attention of citizens in eleven of the sixteen countries.

To investigate the issue of relative trust further, we created a measure called “broadcast trust gap,” which is

equal to trust in private broadcast services minus trust in public broadcast services. Individuals who trust private broadcasters more than public broadcasters have positive scores, whereas those who trust private broadcasters less than public broadcasters have negative broadcast trust gaps. Although the largest category of Africans surveyed (69 percent) report equal levels of trust in both sources (broadcast trust gap = zero), this large number of indifferent respondents does little to assuage our concerns about the consequences of the trust gap. First, it indicates that citizens in new African democracies trust private media only as much as they trust the less critical and once fully obsequious public media. Second, the private media will be limited in their ability to function as watchdogs in such a situation, given the government's other resources and its ability to argue its case among a far larger group of people than are reached by the private media. We expect that private media will only thrive if it is trusted more than the public media, and yet less than 15 percent of the population express greater trust in private broadcasters.

### III. Explaining the Negative Trust Gap

To help understand why private media are trusted less than public media, we theorize and then model the relevant individual-level and then national-level factors related to the media trust gap. Evaluating determinants of relative trust in private versus public media helps diagnose the drivers of relative citizen distrust of the nascent private media. It also provides insights into the sectors of the population that are likely to be most open and responsive to the influence of the private media and the conditions under which private media are likely to be influential.

How can we understand the private media's relative lack of credibility? We are unaware of prior research on the subject of confidence in private versus government media.<sup>20</sup> To develop hypotheses, we draw upon the literature on trust in media, the hostile media effect, and trust in political institutions more generally, adapting the arguments from this scholarship to predict the differential levels of trust between private and public media.<sup>21</sup> For the purposes of this article, we assume that media trust is a specialized form of institutionalized trust and that respondents form opinions concerning trustworthiness by comparing what they know about a particular news source to their expectations of how it should behave.<sup>22</sup> This pragmatic approach sidesteps the substantial debate in the scholarly literature concerning the nature of trust (Nannestad 2008), a debate concerning the fundamental nature of various forms of trust that this article cannot resolve. In fact, the results we present are robust to a wide range of possible definitions of trust because this article examines

the differences in media trust at an individual level, thus effectively stripping away the effects of both generalized trust and trust in media.

The literature offers two general types of explanations for media trust: those that focus on the qualities of the media and those that focus on the characteristics of the audience (Gunther 1992, 148). This division corresponds roughly to the two main factors identified in the source credibility literature: the perceived expertise of the source and an assessment of how similar the receiver believes the source is to herself (Metzger et al. 2004, 298).

The most frequent explanations of media credibility point to the quality of its output (Gunther 1992, 148). This is an area in which the private media in Africa face significant challenges on a variety of different fronts. Governments impose significant judicial and extrajudicial obstacles, including denying journalists access to important political information, harassment, and use of colonial-era libel and sedition laws (Tettey 2002, 11). This makes it difficult for the media to develop expertise about the topics they report. The private media in Africa are also subject to intense market pressures. Owners may encourage journalists and on-air personalities to use inflammatory language, exaggerate discord, and present shocking news in order to attract audiences.<sup>23</sup> To stay afloat in a market with few advertising dollars, media owners sometimes align themselves with wealthy patrons in return for coverage that promotes the patrons' interests. At the most extreme, this takes the form of "gombo journalism," where journalists are expected to supplement their pay with what are essentially bribes by the subjects being covered (IREX 2008, x). Finally, the private media may lack mechanisms for establishing credibility, given low levels of professionalism, weak penalties for inaccurate reporting, and lack of third-party verification.<sup>24</sup>

These problems are not unique to either Africa or the developing world. Scholars argue that the private press in new democracies lacks independence from major commercial interests, produces vacuous coverage, and is responsible for a "trivialization and tabloidization of the news" (Hughes and Lawson 2004, 84). Similar criticisms are leveled against the privately owned media in America. However, the constraints associated with limited resources are more severe in Africa because African democracies include some of the poorest populations in the world.

A second explanation for this phenomenon has less to do with the quality of the private media and more to do with the lenses through which its social role is interpreted. We know from studies of the "hostile media effect" that assessments of the media are based on factors other than just message credibility. This research found that "neutral" treatments of news topics are seen as highly

negatively biased by partisans, with both sides claiming that the same article is slanted in favor of their opponents (Vollone, Ross, and Lepper 1985). In addition, when the same article is presented as a student report rather than as published news, perceptions of bias vanish and can even reverse (Gunther and Liebhart 2006). The argument that media assessments are determined by more than the content of the broadcasts is further supported by studies that find that ideology and partisan affiliation are strong predictors of trust in the media in America.

When applying these findings to new African democracies, we expect that the most important factors will be attitudes toward state authority and whether one belongs to the party in power. It has been argued that African publics are more democratic than they are liberal and, in particular, that they are more oriented toward social consensus and less appreciative of the partisan rancor and bickering that often accompany opposition activities. If this is an accurate characterization, then Africans are less likely to trust private media sources not because of the media's poor quality but instead because of their fractious and confrontational style and because they attack the party in power.

The literature on media trust suggests that both the individual-level characteristics of citizens and the character of the media environment in a country are influential. To gain a greater understanding of the reasons for the relative distrust of private media, we examine first individual-level characteristics, and then national-level influences, associated with differential levels of media trust.

### *Political Sophistication Hypotheses*

Our first set of hypotheses attempts to indirectly assess the impact of media quality on the trust gap by using political sophistication as a proxy.<sup>25</sup> We do this because we lack direct measures of the quality of the private versus public broadcast media in the countries in our sample. Instead, we attempt to identify the respondents in our sample who should be the most sensitive to the quality of the private media to see if they distrust the private media more (relative to public media) than other respondents do.

Politically sophisticated citizens are interested in politics, informed, and able to use the information they have gathered in a discerning fashion (Luskin 1990). If trust in private media is being depressed by poor quality (relative to public media), then we would expect to see a larger negative trust gap among the most politically sophisticated respondents; respondents who are better informed about politics would be more observant of errors in reporting by the private media, and those who are more interested in politics would be more sensitive to sensationalism and shoddiness. Similarly, those with less

knowledge, interest, and engagement would not notice the failings of the private media and therefore would not penalize the media for relatively poor quality.

If the negative trust gap is primarily a function of the poor quality of the private media, which would be more apparent to political sophisticates, we would expect to see support for the following claims:

*Hypothesis 1:* Education is negatively related to the media trust gap (trust in private media minus trust in public media).

*Hypothesis 2:* Knowledge and understanding about politics are negatively related to the media trust gap.<sup>26</sup>

*Hypothesis 3:* Exposure to media news is negatively related to the media trust gap.

### *Political Attitude Hypotheses*

Democratic theory states that an important role of the media is to serve as watchdogs and critics of the government, serving as a check on the power of the incumbent. It argues that deliberation within the polity is improved if a variety of heterogeneous viewpoints are aired and that contrasting opinions lead to more sound decisions. However, it would be a mistake to assume that all citizens will necessarily trust a media source that fulfills these functions. With respect to the United States, Gronke and Cook (2002) argue that "when the media acts as critic of the established order . . . [during times of national crisis] its stature will further erode." Similarly, we argue that in new democracies, where criticism is often labeled as disloyalty by those in power and the appropriate role of both the political opposition and the media are still contested, respondents' trust in the media will vary according to their beliefs concerning how a democracy should function.

In particular, we expect individuals with more pro-democratic and liberal attitudes to better appreciate the private media's criticism of the government, seeing it as an essential aspect of a free polity rather than as disrespect toward authority. In addition, liberal democrats are likely to be less trusting of government media institutions because of their historical legacy as mouthpieces of authoritarian leaders and current proincumbent bias. Individuals with less liberal values, in contrast, are less likely to accept the necessity of the acrimonious spectacle presented by the private media.<sup>27</sup>

Individuals with high levels of trust in state institutions broadly can also be expected to have high levels of trust in state media institutions since they are identified with the state. Because this trust would not necessarily be extended to private media institutions, individuals with high political trust are more likely to evince a negative media trust gap (trusting public media more than private

media). These same individuals are also less likely to question the official line and therefore less likely to see the need for private media institutions. This argument is consistent with the finding that Americans with high levels of trust in political institutions have lower levels of trust in the media, since the U.S. media are almost entirely private and often oppositional to the state (Gronke and Cook 2002). Those who distrust public officials will be more likely to appreciate the critical reporting of the private media relative to the state media.

Lastly, we expect that individuals who believe that state officials are corrupt will likely also believe that journalists and editors working for the state media are corrupt. While they will have low levels of trust in state media, they will be positively disposed toward the private media because the private media are more likely to report on issues of government corruption. Individuals who think government officials are corrupt are therefore more likely to prefer private to public media.

These arguments lead to the following three hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 4:* Liberal democratic attitudes are positively related to the media trust gap (trust in private media minus trust in public media).

*Hypothesis 5:* Trust in political institutions (electoral commission, army, police, courts) is negatively related to the media trust gap.

*Hypothesis 6:* Belief that government officials are corrupt is positively related to the media trust gap.

### Partisan Orientation Hypotheses

The final set of hypotheses concerns the role of partisan beliefs in shaping assessments of the private and public media in Africa. Research into media trust and media hostility has found that partisanship plays an important role in beliefs concerning the existence of media bias, its direction, and its magnitude. In the United States, studies of media trust have found that “those from the party in power are substantially less likely to express confidence in the press” (Cook, Gronke, and Rattliff 2000, 15). Similarly, investigations into the hostile media effect have found that partisanship shapes perceptions of bias. “Neutral articles” (those rated by nonpartisan observers as neutral in content) are seen by partisans on both sides as biased against them; highly slanted articles are perceived as only slightly biased if the article favors their position and highly biased if the article is in opposition to their views (Gunther et al. 2001; see also Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken 1994).

Given that government-owned media in Africa report more favorably about the incumbent than private media do, we would expect progovernment respondents to view government media as more trustworthy than private media, and opposition supporters to feel the opposite

way. In short, respondents should be more trusting of media outlets that confirm their opinion of the government and less trusting of media outlets that contradict it, leading to the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 7:* Feeling close to the party in power is negatively related to the media trust gap (trust in private media minus trust in public media).

*Hypothesis 8:* Satisfaction with the performance of the president is negatively related to the media trust gap.

In sum, confirmation of the political sophistication hypotheses suggests that the negative trust gap is the product of low-quality private media. Confirmation of the political attitude and partisanship hypotheses would tend to support the argument that the trust gap is due to a discomfort with the political role played by the independent media.

## IV. Influences on the Media Trust Gap

We evaluate the theoretical arguments presented earlier by estimating an ordered logit model for the broadcast media trust gap. The trust gap serves as the dependent variable for this analysis because we are interested in the relative level of trust between private and public media rather than the absolute level of trust in private media. It is the relative level of trust in the private media that dictates whether media are able to function as a counterweight to government power and survive in a competitive marketplace with better funded and established government broadcasters. Furthermore, the construction of the gap strips away both generalized trust in institutions and generalized trust in the media as a whole, laying bare the extent to which trust in private and public media differs.<sup>28</sup> This allows us to ignore factors like individual life satisfaction, which may be determinants of trust broadly but which should have the same impact on both kinds of media and therefore are not relevant to the question at hand.

Our individual-level analysis is presented in the first column of Table 1, and a description of the variables appears in the online supplemental material (available at <http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental/>). For the sake of parsimony, this article first focuses on interpreting the results from round 3 of the Afrobarometer and then briefly notes the consistency of results from round 2 and the pooled data, also presented in the online supplemental material.

### Political Sophistication Results

Most of the measures of political sophistication have a clear and statistically significant effect on the media gap; however, they all are consistent with the claim that

**Table 1.** Ordered Logit Regressions of Broadcast Trust Gap

	Fixed effects		Multilevel random effects					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
<b>Political sophistication</b>								
Education	0.111	(0.024)***	0.110	(0.024)***	0.111	(0.024)***	0.110	(0.026)***
Knowledge	0.036	(0.014)**	0.036	(0.014)***	0.036	(0.014)**	0.034	(0.014)**
Exposure to radio news	-0.012	(0.018)	-0.011	(0.018)	-0.011	(0.018)	-0.018	(0.018)
Exposure to television news	0.014	(0.015)	0.015	(0.015)	0.015	(0.015)	0.018	(0.016)
Exposure to newspaper news	0.042	(0.016)**	0.042	(0.016)**	0.041	(0.016)**	0.040	(0.016)**
<b>Attitudes about political authority</b>								
Democratic attitudes	0.178	(0.033)***	0.184	(0.033)***	0.183	(0.033)***	0.189	(0.033)***
Institutional trust	-0.160	(0.028)***	-0.156	(0.028)***	-0.156	(0.028)***	-0.165	(0.028)***
Corrupt officials	0.059	(0.030)*	0.062	(0.030)**	0.062	(0.030)**	0.069	(0.031)**
<b>Partisan orientation</b>								
Winner status	-0.201	(0.027)***	-0.203	(0.027)***	-0.202	(0.027)***	-0.214	(0.028)***
Presidential performance	-0.189	(0.023)***	-0.191	(0.023)***	-0.191	(0.023)***	-0.184	(0.023)***
<b>Control variables</b>								
Age	0.000	(0.001)	0.000	(0.001)	0.000	(0.001)	0.000	(0.001)
Gender (female)	0.013	(0.038)	0.013	(0.038)	0.013	(0.038)	0.016	(0.039)
Urban residence	0.292	(0.044)***	0.289	(0.044)***	0.290	(0.044)***	0.275	(0.044)***
Basic needs	-0.024	(0.021)	-0.023	(0.021)	-0.023	(0.021)	0.019	(0.021)
<b>National-level variables</b>								
Press freedom			-0.014	(0.007)**	-0.011	(0.007)*	-0.016	(0.007)**
Development					0.000	(0.000)		
Democracy							0.034	(0.035)
<b>Country variables</b>								
Benin	0.084	(0.113)						
Cape Verde	-0.109	(0.145)						
Kenya	0.678	(0.105)***						
Lesotho	-0.062	(0.129)						
Madagascar	-0.440	(0.112)***						
Malawi	-0.105	(0.120)						
Mali	-0.318	(0.111)**						
Mozambique	-0.037	(0.126)						
Namibia	-0.988	(0.142)***						
Nigeria	-0.079	(0.096)						
Senegal	0.701	(0.117)***						
South Africa	-0.185	(0.094)*						
Tanzania	-0.046	(0.112)						
Uganda	0.038	(0.102)						
Zambia	0.567	(0.109)***						
Clusters			16		16		16	
Observations	13,468		13,468		13,468		13,155	

The dependent variable is broadcast trust gap, which is equal to trust in private broadcast services minus trust in public broadcast services. Entries are ordered logit regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. Coefficients from the multilevel model were estimated using a generalized linear latent and mixed model (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2005) for ordered dependent variables. All data except for national-level variables were taken from round 3 of the Afrobarometer survey. Coefficients for intercepts and their standard errors were dropped to save space.

\*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \* $p < .10$ .

sophistication leads to more relative trust in the private media, not less. The evidence is significantly opposite of Hypotheses 1 and 2. Although the measures are by necessity indirect, the argument that the media gap is driven by

poor private media quality finds no support in these data. The respondents that should be the most sensitive to the poor quality of the private media do not withhold trust from the private media for that reason. Instead, the



opposite it true: those expected to be most sensitive to media quality are significantly more likely to trust the private media. For example, an individual's level of education is positively associated with levels of trust in the private media relative to the state media. The same is true for political knowledge: the better able a respondent was to answer factual questions about the political system, the more likely was the respondent to have a positive trust gap.<sup>29</sup>

The evidence suggests an alternative understanding from that initially hypothesized. The negative trust gap results not from a concern about quality among sophisticates but from a poor appreciation of the watchdog role of the private media among less knowledgeable citizens.<sup>30</sup> Individuals who are less informed about politics are less likely to notice and penalize government media for a proincumbent bias. They also are also less likely to value independent sources of information.

The weakest evidence concerns the connection between consumption of news media and trust in media. The nonsignificant results on exposure to radio and television belie Hypothesis 3.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps if the measures of exposure allowed us to distinguish between exposure to private media from exposure to public media, the analysis would be more enlightening.

In sum, we can tentatively infer that those who are most likely to be aware of, sensitive to, and exposed to the quality of the private media are not more distrustful of it. The data suggest the opposite is true. Firmer conclusions will have to await data with more direct measures of media quality and how citizens perceive the quality of private media as opposed to that of public media.

### *Political Attitude Results*

All three hypotheses concerning attitudes about political authority are supported by the data. As predicted, individuals with more liberal and democratic attitudes have greater levels of trust in private media relative to public media. Similarly, respondents who have high levels of trust in political institutions have lower levels of relative trust in the private media, while individuals who believe there are high levels of governmental corruption also have higher levels of relative trust in the private media. These results are consistent with the claim that respondents judge the private media's relatively more confrontational stance toward the state in light of their beliefs concerning appropriate discourse within the polity and the integrity of state officials.

### *Partisan Orientation Results*

Lastly, both of the hypotheses associated with partisan attitudes are also consistent with the data. Individuals who support the party in power or who strongly approve

of the incumbent president's performance are more likely to have a negative trust gap, that is, to have higher relative levels of trust in government-owned broadcast media. These results suggest that citizens view the media's behavior through partisan frames in addition to frames about political institutions. Furthermore, partisan beliefs are sufficiently distinct from those about political institutions for both sets of variables to be significant even in the presence of the other. Those who are more democratic and discerning are more approving of private media relative to public media.

### *Magnitude of Effects on the Trust Gap*

To understand the substantive effects of different variables on the size of the trust gap, we simulate the attitudes of a modal individual toward private and government broadcast media. We estimate that our modal respondent (a man in rural Ghana in 2005 with mean values of all other variables) has a 13.1 percent chance of preferring private broadcast media to government broadcast media (i.e., having a positive trust gap), a 15.6 percent chance of preferring government media to private media (having a negative trust gap), and a 71.3 percent chance of trusting both sources equally. On balance, his confidence in broadcast media is skewed in favor of trusting government media. This estimate serves as a baseline against which we can evaluate the relative impact of the variables in our model. Table 2 demonstrates how much of a net effect selected variables have on relative trust levels as each is varied over its entire range.<sup>32</sup>

Table 2 shows that the variables associated with the expectations held by respondents concerning the proper role of the media (those that measure attitudes and partisanship) have the largest effect on trust in public and private media. Democratic attitudes have the strongest effect on relative trust levels of all variables simulated. The impact of democratic attitudes is roughly four times that of political knowledge, suggesting that trust in private media has less to do with factual knowledge concerning democratic institutions and more to do with core democratic and liberal beliefs about the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Similarly, the impact of high levels of political skepticism (i.e., low levels of institutional trust) is around three times that of political knowledge.

Consistent with the relative hostile media effect theory, the effect of partisanship is large and negative. The influence of approval of presidential performance is nearly as strong as that of democratic attitudes, although the effect is in the opposite direction. The impact of supporting the party in power is not as strong in magnitude as the effect of approval of presidential performance is but it is still much stronger than either of the political sophistication variables.

**Table 2.** Substantive Effects of Varying Selected Variables Over Their Range (in percentages)

	Trust private media more	Indifferent	Trust government media more
Political sophistication			
Education	+3.9	+0.3	-4.3
Political knowledge	+2.4	+0.4	-2.8
Attitudes about political authority			
Democratic attitudes	+10.2	-4.3	-5.9
Institutional trust	-8.2	+4.2	+4.0
Partisan orientation			
Loser → winner	-6.9	+3.6	+3.3
Presidential performance	-9.8	+5.2	+4.6
Control variables			
Rural → urban	+3.7	-0.2	-3.5

The figures presented are first differences between each variable's maximum and minimum variable, given a particular hypothetical respondent.

### Direction of Causation

This statistical analysis demonstrates a correlation between the variables described above and the trust gap, but it cannot establish the direction of causation. With some of these variables, the causal direction is clear: it is highly unlikely, for example, that high levels of relative trust in the private media makes respondents more educated. With others, such as beliefs about corruption, there is a plausible argument in either direction: those who believe in the integrity of state institutions probably distrust private media, and consuming private media may also lead citizens to believe that the state is more corrupt. This problem of determining the causal direction between attitudes and media exposure is well known and cannot be resolved with these data.

### Consistency and Summary of Individual-Level Results

While this article describes in detail regression results analyzing the broadcast trust gap using round 3 Afrobarometer data, these findings are surprisingly robust to variations in the data used and even to the formulation of the dependent variable. For example, the same analysis using data from Afrobarometer round 2 or pooled data from Afrobarometer rounds 2 and 3 produces virtually the same results, with all but one of the variables that were significant for round 3 retaining their signs and significance for the alternate specifications.<sup>33</sup> The same variables retain their signs and significance again, even if one examines the trust gap for newspapers rather than broadcast media, and this is true whether data from round 2, round 3, or both are used.<sup>34</sup> The consistency of the relationship between the media trust gap and its causes, no matter how measured, is striking.

We also investigated the possibility of cross-level interactions; that is, we were concerned that some of the

effects might be systematically different in different subsets of countries. We estimated the same model separately for each country and found that the resulting 239 coefficient estimates did not produce any findings significantly opposite from what we had hypothesized.<sup>35</sup> The main area of difference was that in Mozambique, Namibia, and Tanzania, respondents with more liberal democratic attitudes had increased trust in government media relative to private media, while in the sample overall and in Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia, respondents with more liberal democratic attitudes trusted the private media more than the public media.

In sum, several inferences can be drawn from the results presented in this section. First, with the individual-level proxies available, we did not find evidence that the negative trust gap is driven by the perceived lower quality of the private media. It could be that more direct measures of perceived media quality would portray a different story, but it is telling that the available evidence yielded results that are opposite (and significant) of the predictions from the media quality thesis. Second, it seems that the private media are perceived as gadflies, which is why evaluations of trustworthiness are so strongly influenced by beliefs about how open and free politics should be, how trustworthy the state is, and how much one approves of the president in power. Respondents with a more negative opinion of the private media relative to the public media are those who are more likely to believe that the state is doing its job well and that authority should be respected instead of questioned. They are also less likely to be as educated or factually informed about politics. Third, the effects of partisanship are distinct from the effects of attitudes respecting political authority. Even once attitudes toward the state and regime are controlled for, partisanship still has a powerful effect on trust. Lastly, given that audience effects have proved effective at explaining media trust in the United States

and in new African democracies it seems likely that they are an important explanatory factor in a broad range of countries around the world.

### *National-Level Influences on the Media Trust Gap*

To account for country-specific effects, our initial analysis includes controls for each respondent's country. Seven of the fifteen country dummies in our model have coefficients that are statistically different from zero, indicating that they are significantly different from our baseline country of Ghana. The magnitude of the effects indicates that there are clearly important factors that vary at the national level and that shape relative trust in the private broadcast media over and above the individual-level factors that we have been exploring.

To explore national-level influences further, we employed multilevel analysis to examine the effects of media freedom, sustainability, plurality, and penetration, as well as levels of democracy, development, and corruption on the broadcast gap. The sample includes only sixteen countries, so we included national-level variables one at a time or in pairs in a single-step hierarchical model. The model includes the same individual-level variables used in the initial analysis. Selected results from this analysis are displayed in Table 1, models 2, 3, and 4.<sup>36</sup>

Our main finding is that greater press freedom has a robust negative significant estimated effect on the broadcast gap: the less free the media in a country, the greater the levels of relative trust in the private media. This is logical considering the likely effect of low levels of press freedom on media trust. In a highly restrictive media environment, the independence and quality of the public media would suffer more than that of the private media, leading to a corresponding decline in trust in the state-owned media and a greater level of relative appreciation of the private media.

This result for press freedom is consistent across three different measures of press freedom: the Freedom House 2005 measure of freedom of the press, the Media Sustainability Index 2006 indicator of free speech, and the Reporters Sans Frontiers 2005 media freedom index.<sup>37</sup> The negative effects of these variables remain significant (with one exception) even when controlling for level of development (measured by gross domestic product [GDP] per capita, GDP, infant mortality rate, or the United Nations Development Program [UNDP] Human Development Index) or level of democracy (measured by Polity or Freedom House).<sup>38</sup> The negative relationship between media freedom and the broadcast gap is also robust to the choice of estimators.<sup>39</sup>

The negative influence of press freedom on relative trust in private press over public press constitutes both good and bad news for democratic development. On one hand, it is good news that citizens recognize the biases of more authoritarian-dominated public media and are likely to pay more attention to the private media in environments where the public media are most captured by the state. On the other hand, citizen faith in the public media of more democratic but still fragile states is troubling in this new era of democratic decline. Leaders who inherit democratic polities may be able to manipulate the advantage of the public media to delay citizen reactions to authoritarian actions. Citizens may not be sensitive to initial changes in media bias and thus not react fast enough to attempts by the government to close democratic spaces and reduce media freedom.

Of the remaining national-level variables examined, only corruption (as measured by the inverse of the World Bank's Control of Corruption indicator) had a significant positive effect on the media trust gap.<sup>40</sup> Consistent with our findings on press freedom, respondents had higher levels of relative trust in the private media in countries where government institutions were more corrupt and therefore less trustworthy. This effect was robust to controls for both the level of development and democracy in the country. We were unable to explore the joint effects of corruption and press freedom, however, because the two variables were highly correlated. In our sample, the absolute-level correlations between the measure of corruption and each of the three measures of press freedom were just as high as the correlations of the press freedom measures with each other, making it difficult to ascertain the affects of corruption when controlling for press freedom or vice versa.

Other national-level variables were not significantly related to the media trust gap.<sup>41</sup> This includes not only the measures of economic development (GDP per capita, GDP, infant mortality rate, and UNDP Human Development Index) and democracy (Polity and Freedom House) mentioned earlier but also a range of measures associated with the media, including proxies for professional journalism, media business development, the level of supporting institutions for the media, media plurality, media penetration, literacy, and percentage urban.<sup>42</sup>

Great caution is warranted in interpreting null results, given the small number of observations at the national level of analysis. Nonetheless, we see no indication at the national level that the trust gap is primarily a product of poor media quality. Although we have no direct measures of private and public broadcast quality, factors that are implicated in the quality of the private broadcast media are not correlated with the trust gap in the appropriate fashion, namely, professional journalism, level of

economic development, and press freedom. However, the analysis is limited to indirect measures of media quality and sixteen observations, so we are unable to draw firm conclusions about the influence of media quality from the available evidence.

### *Topic for Future Research*

Because we lack direct measures of the quality of public and private news broadcasts, our conclusion that media quality does not play the dominant role in the trust gap is based on the analysis of indirect proxies at the individual and national levels. We cannot measure how much of a role is played by media quality, nor can we test more subtle hypotheses concerning whether private media quality has the same effect on trust when public media quality is high or low. In the future, researchers might find it fruitful to take an experimental approach to the question, one that allows them to present respondents with particular radio or television clips for assessment, varying the accuracy of the content, the tone of the presenter, and the level of technical polish. Such experiments might also expose the mechanisms by which citizens form opinions about the trustworthiness of the media and its effect on citizen attitudes and knowledge.<sup>43</sup>

## **VI. Conclusion**

In this article, we have examined why, on balance, African respondents have greater levels of trust in public media than in private media. At the individual level of analysis, we find that political sophistication, attitudes toward political authority, and partisan orientation are all implicated in the media trust gap. Politically sophisticated and democratic individuals who doubt the integrity of government officials, who are unsatisfied with presidential performance, and who feel close to opposition parties are more likely to trust private media as opposed to public media. The largest impact on relative trust levels came from democratic attitudes and approval of presidential performance. Citizens in new African democracies, like their counterparts in the United States, evaluate the trustworthiness of the media in light of partisan and ideological expectations.

At the national level of analysis, we found that lower press freedom or higher levels of corruption in a country are associated with greater preference for private over public media. It seems that the private press is more resilient than the public press to pressures of the poor quality of the media environment, and thus, citizens value the private press more and the public press less when media freedom is limited and government corruption is high.

Surprisingly, we did not find evidence to suggest that the negative trust gap is a product of an immature and poor-quality private media sphere; while our findings are based on indirect measures of media quality at the individual and national levels, factors other than these measures of media quality proved more influential.

Although this article examines the determinants of media trust in new African democracies, it has implications more broadly. Currently, the policy prescription for a robust media sphere in new democracies focuses on supply-side factors such as journalistic skills and norms and press freedom. However, the private media must garner significantly more trust than the public media if they are to counterbalance the better funded government media and perform the functions expected of media in a democratic society.<sup>44</sup> According to our analysis, this will not happen simply by increasing the quality of private broadcast output or improving press freedoms. To the contrary, our findings indicate that increased press freedoms will have the opposite effect. Without the right political culture, a diverse media ecosystem will not thrive.

These findings also present the private media with a difficult but not insoluble problem. They need to be trusted in order to be influential and profitable, and in order to be trusted they need to help to propagate democratic attitudes and encourage critical appraisals of the incumbent's performance. In other words, in order to thrive, the private media need to help change the political culture in these consolidating democracies. It seems that the gap yokes the private press to the public good, linking its self-interest to the broader needs of the polity.

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The data analyzed are publicly available from online sources. Stata Do-files necessary to replicate analysis are available upon request.

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### **Notes**

1. Despite the rapid rise of the private press, government newspapers maintain larger circulation figures than do private newspapers. One study examined a sample of the top five newspapers in each of twenty-one African countries in 1999 and found that government-owned newspapers generated 61 percent of the circulation figures (Djankov et al. 2001).
2. We coded the figures from the BBC Africa country summaries on March 10, 2007.

3. In 2004, Freedom House rated the press “free” in only 14.6 percent of sub-Saharan African countries.
4. We show that the results of our analysis are consistent if we use data from rounds 2 or 3 of the Afrobarometer survey, or if we pool rounds 2 and 3. For more information about the Afrobarometer project, see [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)
5. Private media were found to be less subject to capture by government officials than were public media in multicountry studies spanning all regions of the world (Besley, Burgess, and Prat 2002; Djankov et al. 2001; Hughes and Lawson 2004; Madamombe 2005; Milton 2001) as well as in African country studies (Media Foundation for West Africa 2001; Karikari 1994b; Petersen 2001; U.S. Department of State 2005; Kenya Domestic Observation Programme 2003; Temin and Smith 2002; Mwesige 2004; Democracy Monitoring Group 2006).
6. We lacked direct measures of the quality of public and private news broadcasts, and therefore our conclusion that media quality does not play the dominant role in the trust gap is based on the analysis of indirect proxies at the individual and national levels.
7. Although we use the term *credibility* interchangeably with *trust* in this article, we recognize that trust is only one component of credibility, which also depends on factors such as perceived expertise (which is also referred to as *competence*, *qualification*, or *knowledgeability*) and related concepts such as bias, accuracy, and objectivity (Stockmann 2006, 10).
8. The historical review of African media in this section is derived from the following sources: Alhassan (2005); Bourgault (1995); Fardon and Furniss (1994); Hasty (2005); Hayward (1976); Hyden, Leslie, and Ogundimu (2002); Karikari (1994a); Madamombe (2005); Mwesige (2004); Nganguè (2001); Nyamnjoh (2005); Sandbrook (1996); Tettey (2002); Yankah (2004); and Wanyeki (2002).
9. Regardless of these general trends, individual private media houses may be more biased in favor of government than are public media houses, especially if they are owned by government officials.
10. The private media are charged with a large number of diverse goals, including promoting tolerance and reconciliation; providing an arena for inclusive discussion; educating citizens about their civic rights and responsibilities; mobilizing the public to become engaged in politics; monitoring government and exposing malfeasance; informing the public about government performance; and informing policy makers about citizen interests and policy outcomes. Along with political development, private media are thought to play a critical role in furthering economic and human development. Amartya Sen (1994) famously asserted that no substantial famine has ever occurred in a country with a democratic government and a relatively independent press.
11. We expect that in Africa media trust is also related to persuasion, framing, agenda setting, and priming, although this is still an unsubstantiated empirical question.
12. Available data clearly show that broadcast media are far more widely used than print media. Round 3 Afrobarometer surveys from the sixteen newly democratic countries record that 59 percent of respondents say they get news from the radio every day, 29 percent say they watch television news every day, and 11 percent claim to read a newspaper daily. On the other end of the spectrum, only 9 percent say they never get news from the radio, 44 percent never watch television news, and 55 percent never read newspapers. In 1997, UNESCO estimated that for every 1,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa there were about 198 radios, 12 daily newspapers, and 38 televisions, and 1 Internet user (World Bank 2004). Newspapers are less popular because of high illiteracy rates and weak newspaper distribution networks. In addition, the cost of a radio and batteries is much lower than the cumulative cost of newspapers (or the price of a television and electricity).
13. Trust in the U.S. government has still not recovered from the impact of Watergate, more than three decades ago. Once institutional trust is lost, it is difficult to regain (Damico, Conway, and Damico 2000). Given that each of these countries experienced authoritarian rule more recently than the United States experienced Watergate, and that the media have changed less often than the U.S. presidency, it seems reasonable to expect trust in government media in Africa to be somewhat handicapped by both its past and present activities.
14. There are eighteen countries in Afrobarometer round 3, but we drop two—Botswana and Zimbabwe—since neither of them has recently transitioned to democracy. Botswana was never an authoritarian state, while Zimbabwe is not even nominally democratic according to Freedom House.
15. Respondents who did not answer or who answered *don't know* to either question were not included in the analysis. For example, a respondent who answered the question about government broadcasters but said she or he did not know about private broadcasters was dropped from descriptive statistics for both questions and the broadcast trust gap.
16. Based on World Value Surveys in the early 1990s, Newton and Norris (2000, 55) report that 40 percent of respondents in seventeen advanced industrial democracies had *a great deal* or *quite a lot* of confidence in the press. Ladd (2004) reports similar results for the United States in 2000.
17. Compared to trust in government broadcasters, a slightly smaller percentage of respondents to the Round 3 Afrobarometer surveys expressed *a lot* or *a very great deal* of trust in the president (69 percent), the national parliament (62 percent), the electoral commission (61 percent), the ruling party (61 percent), opposition parties (37 percent), the army (68 percent), the police (61 percent), and the courts (67 percent).

18. For these figures,  $t = -6.35$ , degrees of freedom = 18,180, and  $p < .000$ .
19. In the remaining two countries, Cape Verde and Ghana, the difference is negative but not significant.
20. Empirical questions concerning private and public media are rarely asked in surveys. One exception is found in Gibson, Duch, and Tedin's (1992, 349) study of democratic values among Moscovites, where only 55 percent of respondents agreed that private radios, television, and newspapers should exist alongside state-owned media. In a related study, Stockmann (2006) examines trust in media according to variation in the degrees of commercialization and autonomy from the state, although all the media organs are state owned.
21. The literature on media trust has tended to examine questions either of confidence in the media in general or of confidence in specific media providers, neither of which provide readily adaptable hypotheses. Any theory concerning broad trust in the media will not explain why citizens trust private and government media at different levels, and theories concerning trust in specific media providers are not portable to situations where we have little information about the specific media outlets involved.
22. This is a broader understanding of media trust than that used by Tsfati and Cohen (2005); they assume that citizens judge the news media according to whether it lives up to the media's own professional standards. We do not presume to know, a priori, what standards are used to judge the broadcast media, especially in new democracies where it has only recently been liberalized.
23. Studies of source credibility have shown that intense and opinionated language reduces perceptions of source credibility (Metzger et al. 2004, 298).
24. For comparative studies on challenges faced by the African media, see Bourgault (1995); Hyden, Leslie, and Ogundimu (2002); Islam (2002); Madamombe (2005); Nanguè (2001); Nyamnjoh (2005); Sandbrook (1996); Tetey (2002); and Wanyeki (2002). For country studies that discuss the political economy of media production, see Alhassan (2005), Hasty (2005), Karikari (1994b), Mwesige (2004), Tower (2005), and Yankah (2004).
25. See Luskin (1987) for a useful summary of the literature on political sophistication and Luskin and Bullock (2004) for a discussion on the best ways to operationalize this variable. We have not seen political sophistication used in other studies of media trust, although Gronke and Cook (2002) say that education is an important predictor of overall media trust in the United States.
26. Round 2 did not include the political knowledge questions, so frequency of political discussions serves as a proxy.
27. Although the measure we employ is named *democratic attitudes*, its component questions reflect both liberal and democratic beliefs.
28. Incidentally, the gap variable has the nice property that it is nearly normally distributed, thus giving us more variation in the dependent variable than do the highly skewed component trust variables.
29. Urban residents are also likely to be more politically sophisticated than rural residents, given their access to more sources of information. Urban residence is also significantly positive.
30. See Gunther (1992, 149) for a similar argument about the ways that having a "skeptical disposition" may affect attitudes toward the press.
31. The positive significant finding for "newspaper" in Afrobarometer round 3 is consistent with the prediction of hypothesis 3, but the same variable is not significant for round 2 nor for the combined rounds 2 and 3 results. See the online supplemental material (available at <http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental/>) for the analysis using round 2 and combined rounds data.
32. We examined only the impact of the most significant variables, those significant at the 1% level or better.
33. The exposure to the newspaper news variable is significant in the analysis that uses round 3 data alone, but it is not significant when round 2 data are examined. See the online appendix.
34. Data from round 1 is not used because the trust in private media question was not asked in the original round of the Afrobarometer survey.
35. There were fifteen variables and sixteen countries, which would have produced 240 coefficient estimates, but the coefficient for the urban variable could not be estimated in Namibia due to collinearity.
36. Results not shown in Table 1 can be found in the online supplemental materials.
37. We used the inverse of the Freedom House measure and the inverse of the Reporters Sans Frontiers measure so that higher values for our indicators represent greater press freedom and lower values indicate less press freedom. Table 1 includes the results for a multilevel ordered logit using the Freedom House measure of media freedom. Results for all three measures of media freedom can be found in Table A of the online supplemental materials.
38. When the Human Development Index is included in the same specification as the Freedom House measure of press freedom, the effect of press freedom remains negative but the coefficient no longer reaches conventional levels of significance as it does with the other measures of press freedom.
39. The data presented in Table 1 are the result of estimating a multilevel ordered logit model, but we obtained similar results when estimating ordered logistical regressions with cluster-corrected standard errors and multilevel linear regressions. The estimated effect of press freedom is somewhat weaker in the linear models. The results of the

multilevel ordered logit and linear regressions for all three measures of media freedom can be found in Table A of the online supplemental materials.

40. We used the inverse of the controlling corruption measure so that for our indicator higher values indicate more corruption and lower values indicate less corruption. We use only one measure of corruption because this particular indicator is derived from twenty-five different data sources, encapsulating all the component measures used by other measures of corruption such as the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index. Results can be found in Table B of the online supplemental materials.
41. Results for the measures of development, democracy, professional journalism, media business development, the level of supporting institutions for the media, media plurality, media penetration, literacy, and percentage urban can be found in Table C of the online supplemental materials.
42. Professional journalism, media business development, and supporting media institutions were measured using corresponding variables from the 2006 Media Sustainability Index (MSI) study. Media plurality was measured both by the 2006 MSI measure of the same and by a count of the number of FM radio stations in the country from the CIA Factbook. Media penetration was represented by variables for daily newspaper circulation per 1,000 people in 2000, radios per 1,000 people in 2001, and percentage of households with televisions in 2000 (World Bank Development Indicators). The indicator percent urban is for 2005 (World Bank Development Indicators) and the indicator for percent literacy is from 2001 (United Nations Development Program). We were unable to find data concerning the level of market share controlled by private and public media outlets. The data collected by Djankov et al. (2001) covers only five of the sixteen countries in our sample and focuses on television and newspaper rather than radio, the dominant source in Africa.
43. The suggested experiments would be similar to those performed by researchers investigating the hostile media effect, such as Gunther and Liebhart (2006).
44. Tetley (2002, 35) makes a similar point when he argues that "an informed and responsible citizenry is important for the operation of free media." However, his argument is that both access to the media and literacy need to be increased in Africa, whereas we are pointing out that even where citizens have access to broadcast media they still might not trust the private media.

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