



Strategies for Building Trust in News: What the Public Say They Want Across Four Countries

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**TRUST IN NEWS
PROJECT**



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Executive Summary and Key Findings

What does the public want and expect from news media when it comes to trustworthy journalism? For the last three years, the Reuters Institute's Trust in News Project has investigated this question through a mix of survey research, in-depth qualitative interviews and focus groups, and other techniques, examining audience attitudes across the Global South (Brazil and India) and Global North (the United Kingdom and the United States). One of our most consistent findings has been the degree to which the answer to this question varies not only across countries but within these diverse and pluralistic societies. While there are facets of news that people across these markets often share in common – most, for example, say they want and expect coverage to be fair, accurate, and impartial – what is likely to increase trust for some groups in practice may only undermine it for others, since perceptions around what is fair, accurate, and impartial are often subjective and shaped by broader preconceptions many hold about what it is that journalists do. That makes adopting effective solutions particularly complex.

In this report we focus our attention squarely on the question of what news organisations could do to respond to declining trust, a growing trend in many places around the world (Newman et al. 2023), and the varying ways in which different groups in these countries think about these strategies. Through a new round of survey data collected across these four countries, we focus on what the public says is likely to work (and not work) to rebuild their trust where it has broken down, or cultivate it where it has never taken root. Although we acknowledge there is a wide gap between saying one is open to various trust-building strategies in the abstract and whether such approaches will work in practice in the real world – especially given the variety of rival concerns and interests competing for the public's attention – empirical evidence about what people say they want is an essential piece of the puzzle when it comes to formulating effective solutions. As has been a guiding principle throughout this project, we believe it is critical to take what the public says they want seriously rather than, as is often the case, for journalists and publishers to rely solely on their own intuitions when it comes to how best to move forward – however much of that intuition may be in alignment with what their audiences tell them. After all, news organisations are far more likely to hear from those at the extremes, who already trust them or likely never will, than the far larger segment of the public who are often far less interested in what it is that journalists do than in how their work can make their lives better – or at least not worse.

What we find in these data is that there are no simple solutions, even as, more encouragingly, we also find that much of the public says they are open and receptive to a variety of approaches. While many favour efforts towards more transparency, a reduction in bias, and better alignment of editorial coverage to concerns that impact people's everyday lives, there are also some differences between groups in terms of what they would prefer to see news outlets prioritise. This is especially the case with respect to newsroom diversity and concerns over one-sidedness of coverage, where audiences often hold different points of view about the nature of these problems and what should be done to address them. Likewise, although many say they are interested in news organisations taking steps to better engage with audiences, soliciting feedback, and involving them more deeply in news reporting practices, those most interested and already trusting towards news tend to be most receptive to such initiatives – another consistent theme

throughout several parts of this report. Our findings put in sharp relief the larger challenge facing news organisations when it comes to these efforts: the most cynical and distrusting segments of the public tend to view all news outlets through a similarly negative lens, minimally differentiating between sources regardless of what steps to build trust they might take. To reach these more sceptical parts of the public may require not only adopting some combination of the strategies explored here but also concerted efforts to better communicate what strategies are being employed and why. While many say they are open to trusting news organisations that take steps outlined in this report, convincing audiences that these efforts are authentic, substantial, and likely to be sustained over time is far from automatic. Individual news outlets must make that case directly in both their actions and the ways they communicate with the broad public, including those who are generally part of their audience and those who are not.

Varying approaches to building trust

Our 2023 survey questionnaire covers four different kinds of trust-building strategies that some newsrooms have embraced, drawing on our previous interviews and roundtables with practitioners (Toff et al. 2020; Toff et al. 2021a). These strategies range from editorial practices including efforts towards more ‘solutions’-focused or ‘constructive’ coverage (see Lough and McIntyre (2023) for a review of these concepts), transparency efforts (see Karlsson 2020; Koliska 2022; Masullo et al. 2022), management and staffing issues, including those around diversity, equity, and inclusion that came up in our last report (Ross Arguedas et al. 2023), to efforts to engage and communicate directly with the public – the focus of a growing area of scholarship in academic circles as well as among a variety of reform-minded news outlets (see Robinson 2023; Schmidt et al. 2022; Wenzel 2020). These four thematic areas are summarised in the figure below.

Four Approaches to Building Trust with the Public



While it would make for a more straightforward set of findings had we found a clear consensus among audiences coalescing around a preferred approach, instead the portraits of the publics in these countries that we have captured through these surveys offer a much more mixed outlook. Each of these approaches, interconnected as they are, appeals to different segments of the public, offering both glimmers of hope as well as the stark realities around the challenge of connecting with the most disengaged and distrusting audiences, for whom the value and utility of news tends to be far from top of mind. Like the societies we are studying here, the public remains divided in its own preferences around what they would like to see news organisations prioritise doing to establish relationships built on trust.

As we show over the next five chapters of this report, in which we tease out the differences in each of these areas one by one, in many cases the public's attitudes about news are intertwined with deeper social cleavages in these countries. Often these revolve around politics, especially in the US, which is of course highly polarised along partisan lines. But just as salient for many are divides around social class, race, caste and religion, and other areas, only some of which we are able to focus on in this report. News media and journalism as an institution is often seen as not only mirroring these broader divisions in society but also, in some cases, accentuating them through reporting that often fixates on these conflicts rather than helps resolve them.

Background on this report

The Reuters Institute's Trust in News Project aims to understand the contours of trust in news across places in different media and political contexts, with a focus on ways to improve trust in independent journalism where it has fallen. Following our previous reports, we focus on two countries in the Global South (Brazil and India) and two in the Global North (the UK and the US). These countries, despite their geographic, social, political, and cultural differences, share many commonalities; most importantly, they are all demographically diverse and divided democracies, all facing unique challenges to their democratic political systems, and all places in which digital platforms are increasingly shaping the ways citizens access and engage with news.

This report builds directly on previous reports from the project based on earlier surveys fielded in each of these four countries (Mont'Alverne et al., 2022; Toff et al. 2021b) as well as qualitative focus groups conducted earlier this year with historically underrepresented and underserved audiences, which formed the basis of an additional report published in Spring 2023 (Ross Arguedas et al. 2023). These past instalments have explored a range of factors contributing to declines in trust in news, including those that can be traced to digital platform use, politics, and growing indifference towards news among disengaged audiences. In this final report from the Trust in News Project, we focus here on possible solutions that newsrooms might employ in response to these factors. By doing so, we hope to provide insight into how news media could stem the tide of declining trust where it has fallen and offer empirical evidence around how audiences think about various strategies aimed at winning over their trust.¹

Following last year's endeavour, we once again worked in tandem with the research firm Ipsos to survey approximately 2,000 respondents per country using nationally representative samples

¹ See Fisher et al. 2021 for a similar effort to examine audience perspectives on trust-building strategies in Australia.

that considered age, gender, region, and other demographic factors specific to each country. In Brazil and India, surveys were conducted face to face in all major regions of the country. We placed particular importance on conducting fieldwork in person in Brazil and India to account for the racial, ethnic and geographic diversity of the population, which is typically not fully captured by online survey samples (Scherpenzeel 2018). In the UK and the US, where internet penetration is more widespread and nearly ubiquitous, online surveys were fielded using quota-based samples from panels intended to mirror the national demographics of the online populations in those countries.

Survey questionnaires were crafted by the authors of this report to measure respondents' attitudes towards various newsroom strategies that could potentially influence public trust in news. The questions focus on four types of newsroom strategies, which we have outlined in the previous section. For many of these items we drew on prior research, which we cite throughout the report where relevant. We also asked questions on political affiliation and partisan intensity, and standard demographic questions such as age, income, education levels, working status, race, ethnic identity, and so forth. The questionnaire took on average approximately 20 minutes to complete online, and slightly longer to complete face to face. The surveys in Brazil and India were conducted across major geographic regions, with the interviews taking place in Portuguese in Brazil, and in Hindi and nine other major regional languages in India. We offer further information about the methods used for sampling and fieldwork for the surveys in the technical appendix.

While we see value in asking audiences directly about how they view these matters, we also stress that self-reported attitudes like these are no guarantee of future behaviour. That is, just because audiences say they welcome certain initiatives or strategies, there is no guarantee that newsrooms that implement them will see an impact on levels of trust, use, or engagement. People are not always aware of what shapes their perceptions, attitudes, or behaviours – especially when it comes to unconscious factors. For that matter, while we mainly focus on average responses to our questions in each of the four countries, we have also sought to highlight differences where relevant among subpopulations in each country. After all, as we have argued elsewhere, a one-size-fits-all approach to building trust is unlikely to be successful in all cases. In fact, as our findings indicate, there are in some instances important trade-offs around journalistic approaches that may be very welcome by some segments of the public but viewed more negatively by others.

Summary of key findings

Below we offer a brief synopsis of the major takeaways from this year's surveys. In the five chapters that follow, we first examine the broader context around levels of trust in news in these four countries, followed by next detailing attitudes about each of the four trust-building approaches that were the focus of our inquiry this year.

- **The least trusting towards news also tend to see 'no differences' between news outlets.** While levels of trust in news overall have declined in all four countries, it is often lowest among the subset of the public who use news the least frequently, reflecting the degree to which trust is often linked to habitual use of news. Those who access news

most frequently, regardless of mode, are also most likely to see at least minor differences between news organisations in their trustworthiness. In contrast, a small but significant subset of the public in all four countries do not differentiate between most news outlets in terms of their trustworthiness. These groups also tend to be the most sceptical of trust-building initiatives, underscoring the importance of communicating distinct brand identities.

- **Minimal consensus around what trust-building strategies news organisations ought to prioritise.** When asked to choose among the approaches news outlets might embrace to gain or regain their trust, different groups in each country say they would be most receptive to different initiatives. On the one hand, this suggests all four approaches we focus on in this report hold promise for building trust with at least some of the public. On the other hand, it is less obvious how news organisations ought to proceed. These findings point to the importance of tailoring strategies to specific audience preferences and needs, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach.
- **The already trusting are generally most receptive to trust-building efforts.** While the public generally say they look favourably towards many initiatives designed to foster trusting relationships, these approaches typically appear most effective at deepening trust among those who already hold positive attitudes about journalism and tend to be most interested in news. Changing the minds of the broader public, including those who do not trust news, may require convincing people of the value and relevance of news altogether to establish a firmer foundation for trust to take root.
- **Editorial strategies for building trust appear to resonate most in the UK and the US, and somewhat less so in Brazil and India.** While audiences in all four countries say they would welcome changes in news coverage, including more attention paid to regular, everyday people, more solutions-focused coverage, and less sensationalism and inaccuracy, overall evaluations of performance in many specific coverage areas is generally fairly positive, which suggests that the link between editorial content and trust is not always straightforward. We also find meaningful variation in terms of how much emphasis certain audience subgroups place on specific concerns, such as making news more inclusive with respect to the range of diverse voices featured, or reducing emphasis on subjects that may cause social division.
- **Audiences rank transparency highly as a strategy for building trust, especially about ownership and funding but also editorial practices and ethical standards.** Despite widespread agreement about the importance of transparency, we also find somewhat divergent views about whether news organisations are committed to treating all sides fairly – and different expectations about such coverage – which suggests varying receptivity to transparency initiatives in practice. We also find some evidence of potential backfire effects, with some interpreting efforts to be transparent about, for example, correcting errors in reporting, as evidence mainly of sloppiness or carelessness.

- **Most place blame for problems in news coverage at the management and ownership level.** Individual journalists are often perceived as doing the bidding of owners and leaders who are guided by ulterior commercial or political agendas. Additionally, audiences express a preference for more inclusive funding models for news organisations that include the public as stakeholders through individual subscriptions (Brazil, the US, and the UK) or public funding through taxes (India). Some forms of funding (such as advertising or donations) tend to be viewed more suspiciously in ways that vary by media environment.
- **Diversifying newsrooms is widely viewed as important for increasing trust, but we find less consensus around what aspects of diversity ought to be prioritised.** Achieving more representative staffing amongst journalists in terms of their political views and economic class backgrounds often ranks highest, ahead of racial/ethnic or gender diversity. However, these aggregate results mask important differences within countries, with more marginalised groups typically prioritising diversity in areas seen as less critical to broader majorities. Despite these sometimes divergent perspectives, few say that news organisations focusing on diversity in any area is likely to reduce their trust.
- **Many see current efforts to engage the public as lacking and say they would be more likely to trust news outlets that do more to listen to and connect with audiences.** Engagement initiatives such as those that involve soliciting feedback and involving the public more in the production of news were viewed positively in all four countries; however, those most interested in participating in such efforts tend to be concentrated mainly among those who are already trusting of news and those with relatively more resources available in terms of time and money. Reaching the more indifferent public through these types of efforts may prove more challenging.

1. No One-Size-Fits-All Solution

We begin by presenting the larger landscape of trust in news across these countries to establish the context for the four areas we focus on in the remainder of this report. We first examine differences across the four countries in terms of how the public evaluates trust in news in general, and then more specifically what people say they want news organisations to prioritise when it comes to gaining or regaining their own trust.

What we find is evidence of continued erosion in trust in news in general in these countries, but there is also considerable variation within each country in terms of how much people differentiate between news organisations as individual brands. Those who are least trusting towards news in general tend also to be those who are least interested in news overall and consume it the least frequently regardless of mode (print, television, online, etc.). They are also the most likely to view all news outlets as largely synonymous with one another, whereas those who are most selectively trusting are significantly more likely to trust information in the news in general.

People in different countries also have somewhat different views about what they would like to see news organisations prioritise when it comes to their strategies around building trusting relationships with the public. While efforts around transparency tend to elicit the most support overall, those in Brazil are most cynical about any trust-building initiatives, and those in India are more likely to say they would prioritise engagement efforts and editorial strategies compared to the UK and the US.

Trust in news is lowest among those least interested in news

There are considerable debates about the best way to measure trust in news.² While many people, including journalists and those perhaps most likely to be reading this report, evaluate individual news outlets differently, offering up a range of considerations when they evaluate different aspects of the news media, for many others, how they feel about news is far less complicated. As we have emphasised in past reports focusing on in-depth interviews with audiences (Toff et al. 2021c) and audience surveys (Toff et al. 2021b), for large portions of the public news is rarely top of mind. Trust and distrust often comes down to an intuitive judgement rooted in a sense of familiarity and connection, or lack thereof. This variation among the public makes consistently quantifying levels of audience trust in news particularly challenging.

These caveats aside, as we have in previous reports for this project, we once again measure trust in news in general in all four countries by asking in a broad manner how respondents think about ‘information in the news media’, a form of the question advanced by a number of comparative news audience researchers (see Strömbäck et al. 2020).

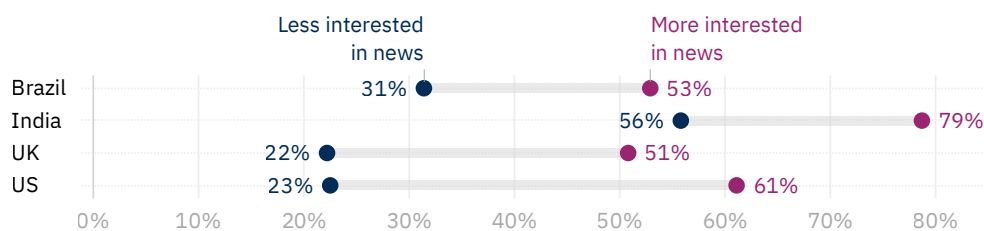
² For scholarly overviews see, for example, Schiffrin (2019) and Fawzi et al. (2021).

By this measure, compared to our previous results on this measure in 2021, we find declines in trust across all four countries, and by significant margins in Brazil and the UK, where the unique circumstances of the political environments in each of these countries may have contributed to further undermining of trust in institutions. In Brazil, just 39.8% say they trust news ‘somewhat’ or ‘completely’, a level on par with what we found in the UK this year (38.3%). By contrast, we found higher levels of trust in the US (47.1%) and India (65.6%), although both were also declines from our survey a year ago.³ India is particularly an outlier when it comes to the very limited proportion of the public (16.1%) who say they do not trust information in the news media ‘very much’ or ‘at all’. These relatively high levels of trust persist alongside an increasingly contentious environment for press freedom in India (see Ram 2023).

While declines in trust in particular countries differ to some extent from findings in the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report* (Newman et al. 2023),⁴ the overall pattern of declining trust is broadly consistent with general trends in many places around the globe. More revealing than these general results, we find large and consistent gaps in trust within countries – gaps that tend to correspond to overall levels of interest in news (Fig. 1.1). A majority of respondents who say they are more interested in news also say they ‘somewhat’ or ‘completely’ trust information, levels that far outpace the degree of trust among those less interested (22% in the UK, 23% in the US, and 31% in Brazil). The Indian public is, again, more trusting by a significant margin – even a majority of those less interested in news still say they tend to trust it.

Figure 1.1: Interest in news is highly associated with having more trust in news in general

Percentage who trust information in the news media ‘somewhat’ or ‘completely’ among those more versus less interested in news



TRUST_GEN. Generally speaking, to what extent do you trust, or not trust information from the news media in [Brazil/India/the UK/the US]. **Q4.** How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news? *Less/more interested in news:* Brazil = 837/486, India = 732/671, UK = 432/1,145, US = 432/1,024. Note: ‘More interested in news’ includes those who say they are ‘extremely’ and ‘very interested’, whereas ‘less interested in news’ includes those who say they are ‘slightly’ or ‘not at all interested’.

There are additional country-specific differences around trust in news involving key demographic subgroups, which we also find tend to mirror and reflect social cleavages specific to each of these environments. In India, for example, while there are higher levels of trust in general, Upper Castes are the most trusting of information from the news media, with relatively lower levels as we go down the social ladder, with Other Backward Classes about three percentage points lower and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes each also more than

³ For comparison, using the same survey provider in 2022 with their same approach to sampling and fieldwork, we found much higher levels of trust in news in general in Brazil (46%), India (77%), the UK (53%), and the US (49%).

⁴ There are several reasons for these discrepancies. The Trust in News Project uses a different survey provider that makes different determinations around how they achieve a representative sample. What’s more, by using face-to-face interviewing in Brazil and India, the survey population examined in this report includes respondents who may not have internet access, which is a considerable portion of the samples in both of these countries (14% in Brazil and 26% in India in our surveys). Additionally, the specific questions around trust in news employed in these surveys are different from one another, with the *Digital News Report 2023* asking to what extent audiences can trust ‘most news most of the time’.

ten percentage points less trusting. Across all countries, we also find that the wealthy have higher levels of trust in news media than those who are economically less well off.⁵

Those who access news more frequently tend to be more trusting

As we and others have previously demonstrated, there is a clear association between using news more frequently (regardless of what mode or what platform) and trust in news in general, although the correlation is not perfect (see Tsfati and Cappella 2003). Daily habitual consumers of news are more trusting of information from the news media than infrequent news users and those whose contact with news is rare or non-existent. This pattern is consistent across most forms of news in all four countries, although it is most apparent in the UK and the US and somewhat less pronounced in Brazil and India. For both of these countries, the relatively weaker levels of trust among users of print news is related to differences in the cultures around news consumption in each country. In India, for example, literacy levels have a significant impact on local newspaper readership and in Brazil newspapers tend to be clustered mainly in big cities (see Reis 2023).

⁵ The differences are 26% in the UK between those earning less than £15,000 per year compared to those earning more than £45,000 per year. In the US, the gap is 25% between those earning less than \$15,000 per year and those earning more than \$70,000 per year; and in India 15% between those earning less than 10,000 rupees per year and those whose earnings are more than 50,000 rupees annually. Although the gap is smaller and not statistically significant in Brazil, at 2.5% between the highest and lowest earners, there, too, wealthier respondents were more likely to say they trust information in the news media in general.

Figure 1.2: Trust in news tends to be higher among those who use news more often

Percentage who trust information in the news media 'somewhat' or 'completely' among those who use each type of news daily, less than daily, or never



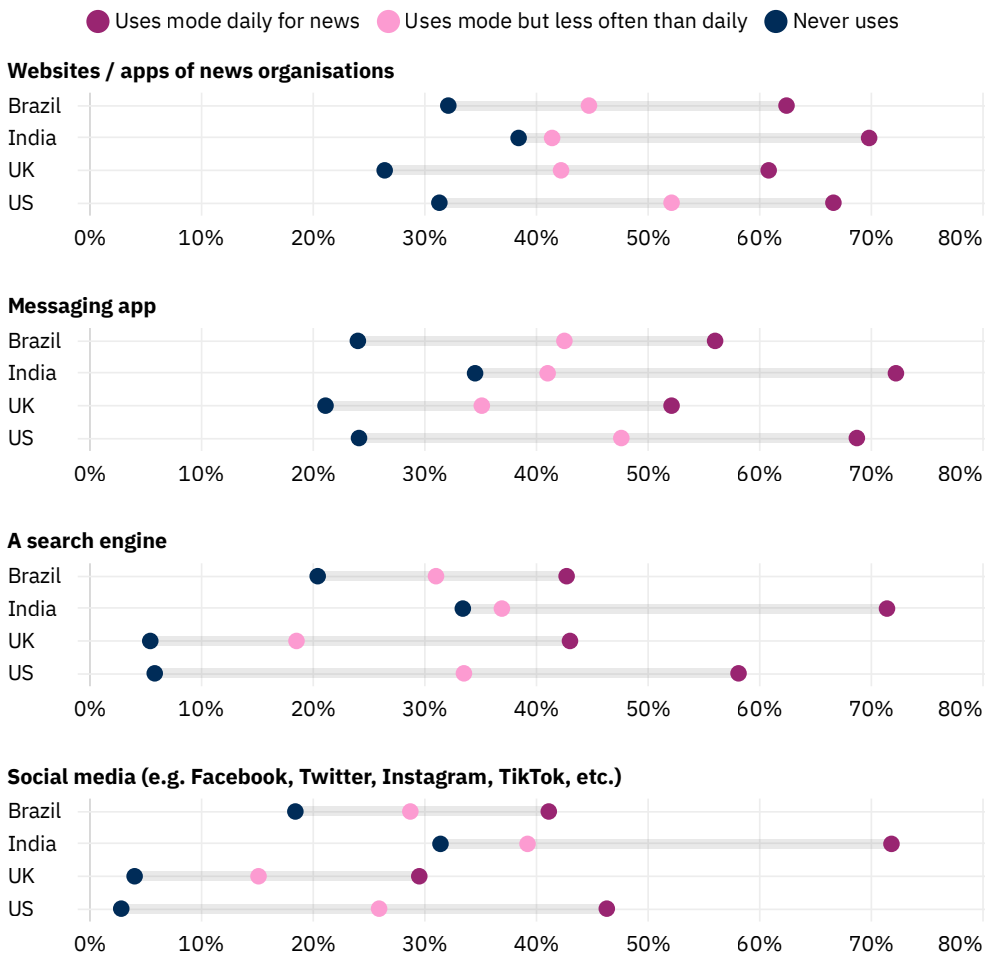
TRUST_GEN. Generally speaking, to what extent do you trust, or not trust information from the news media in [Brazil/India/the UK/the US]. **Q3a.** Many people access news in different ways. Thinking about your own news habits, how often, if at all, do you ...
Base: Varies by country as a proportion of the full sample: Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000.

In addition to asking about trust in news in general, we also asked specifically about trust in news on distinct online platforms, and here we see even larger gaps in trust related to how frequently individuals use these sources of information to get news (Fig 1.3). Wide differences are especially apparent for the most engaged news consumers when it comes to trusting news from search engines and social media platforms. In both cases India is an outlier, where 72% of daily news users trust the news they receive from both of these mediums – even higher than news websites and messaging apps. A wide gulf exists for this metric between India and the

other three countries. A plurality of daily news consumers in Brazil and the US trust news from social media platforms. Exceptionally, only 30% of daily news patrons in the UK trust the news they get from social media platforms, while only 15% of more casual news consumers share the same perception.

Figure 1.3: Large gaps in trust between frequent and non-users of online news modes

Percentage who trust information from each type of online news source ‘somewhat’ or ‘completely’ among those who use that mode daily, less than daily, or never



TRUST ONLINE. Now thinking about information online, to what extent do you trust or not trust information from the news media when it appears on ...? **Q3a.** Many people access news in different ways. Thinking about your own news habits, how often, if at all, do you ... *Base: Varies by country as a proportion of the full sample: Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000.*

People prioritise different strategies around building trust

We highlight the above differences to set the stage for what follows in this report because we want to emphasise the degree to which audiences are far from uniform in what they expect of news and what they believe will help in garnering their trust. This variation is often closely related to how disconnected or disengaged audiences may already be from news altogether. As we have written previously (Toff et al. 2021b), this indifference towards journalism and its value to their lives is often a larger obstacle to trust-building efforts in general, and we also find that to be the case in this year's survey when we drill down on specific initiatives more closely.

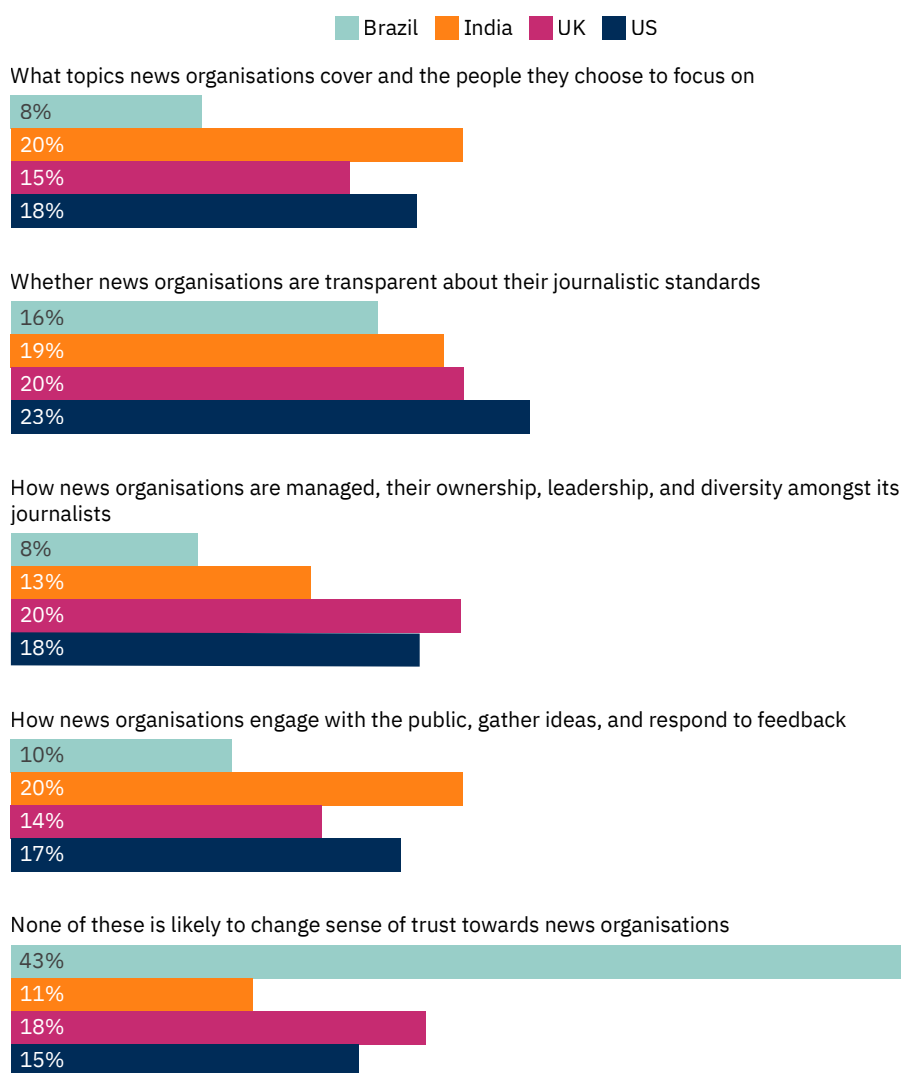
The bulk of this report focuses on four approaches identified in our previous research as initiatives that some news organisations have adopted as strategies to build and sustain trust with the public. These include: (a) editorial practices including efforts towards more solutions-focused or constructive coverage (see Lough and McIntyre (2023) for a review of these concepts); (b) transparency efforts (see Karlsson 2020; Koliska 2022; Masullo et al. 2022); (c) management and staffing issues, including those around diversity, equity, and inclusion that came up in our last report (Ross Arguedas et al. 2023); and (d) efforts to engage and communicate directly with the public – the focus of a growing area of scholarship in academic circles as well as among a variety of reform-minded news outlets (see Robinson 2023; Schmidt et al. 2022; Wenzel 2020).

While most of our questionnaire focuses on fleshing out how people think about each of these approaches, including how well news organisations are currently doing when it comes to these efforts and whether people believe each will impact their own sense of trust, we also included a question in the survey that asked respondents to state which of the four trust-building strategies they would most like to see news organisations prioritise personally. We asked the question, artificial as it may be, to force people to weigh trade-offs around each of these approaches, much as news organisations might need to do, given that newsroom resources are finite and no organisation can pursue every strategy they might like to adopt.

When asked to consider these trade-offs, however, we found no clear consensus among the publics in these four countries around which they themselves would prioritise. In other words, different people weigh these trade-offs differently. Audiences were relatively evenly divided (Fig. 1.6). While some say they think news organisations ought to attend most to editorial strategies – namely, what topics news outlets cover and the people they focus on – as well as transparency initiatives involving their standards and policies, others said they preferred initiatives related to their management, ownership, leadership, and hiring practices. Still others said they preferred engagement initiatives pertaining to how news organisations involve the public in their reporting and respond to feedback.

Figure 1.4: Audiences split on which kinds of efforts are most likely to impact their sense of trust

Percentage who say each of the following areas is most likely to impact their sense of trust in news organisations



TRUST_PRIORITY. Thinking about the four areas we have asked about, which is most likely to impact your sense of trust towards news organisations? Base. Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000. Note: Excludes those who say they 'don't know'.

TRANSPARENCY EFFORTS ATTRACT HIGHEST SUPPORT, BUT BRAZILIANS MOST PESSIMISTIC

One of the more striking differences across countries we found was with respect to the percentage of people who said that 'none of these' efforts was likely to impact their sense of trust towards news organisations. In Brazil, 43% selected this response. By comparison, and more encouragingly, the percentage who responded similarly was much lower in India (11%), the UK (18%), and the US (15%).

This high degree of pessimism in Brazil notwithstanding, efforts around transparency tended to elicit higher support relative to the other types of initiatives. This was especially the case in the US, where a quarter said they would prioritise it (23%), and in Brazil (16%), where it was the second most selected response after 'none of these'. In the UK, these efforts were even with initiatives related to management, ownership, leadership, and diversity (at 20%), although none of the differences across response categories were large. In India, audiences were relatively

more likely to say they thought the topics and people that news organisations focused on would be most likely to impact their sense of trust (20%).

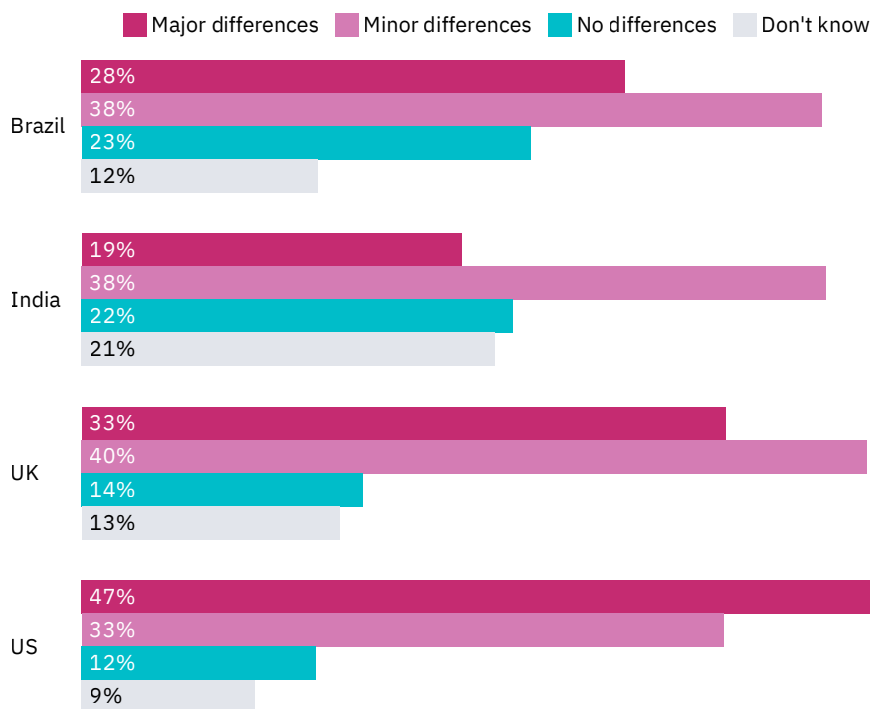
SCEPTICISM AMONG THOSE WHO SEE FEW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NEWS OUTLETS

In an echo of our findings with respect to trust in news in general, those who have already strong, trusting relationships with the news media also tend to be most receptive towards all four of these types of efforts – a kind of ‘virtuous circle’ dynamic. More worryingly, the reverse also appears true. For audiences to be open to trust-building initiatives, these results suggest that the foundation of people’s relationship to news be sufficiently intact for those efforts to have much chance of taking hold.

We see some evidence of this virtuous/vicious circle dynamic when we consider levels of what we have previously called ‘selective trust’ (Toff et al. 2021b).⁶ When we asked a question in the survey designed to measure the degree to which audiences differentiate between sources they trust or do not trust, we find a small but meaningful portion of the public says they see ‘no differences’ at all between news sources (Fig. 1.5).

Figure 1.5: Many in the US but fewer elsewhere see major differences between news outlets in their trustworthiness

Percentage in each country who see major, minor, or no differences between news organisations in how trustworthy they are



TRUST_SELECT. Thinking about organisations that report the news (e.g. via radio, TV, Newspaper, online) in [Brazil/India/the UK/the US], which of the following comes closest to your view? There are [major/minor/no] differences between news organisations in how trustworthy or untrustworthy they are. *Base: Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000.*

Those individuals who do not differentiate when it comes to selective trust in news also tend to be the least trusting towards news in general. This lack of differentiation between news outlets was highest in India, where a combined 43% of the public responded that they either didn’t

⁶ For scholarship on generalised distrust towards news, see Fletcher and Nielsen (2019) and Ternullo (2022).

know or saw ‘no differences’ between news outlets.⁷ The percentages were smaller elsewhere, but roughly 1-in-4 or 1-in-5 in Brazil, the UK, and the US said they either did not know or saw no differences between sources. Only in the US did more people see ‘major differences’ between news organisations compared to other response categories.⁸

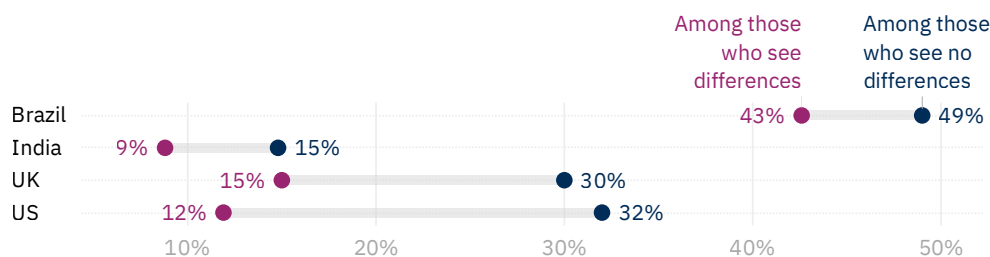
IMPLICATIONS FOR TRUST-BUILDING INITIATIVES: STARK CHALLENGES BUT GLIMMERS OF HOPE

On the one hand, these results suggest that a large majority of respondents find there are at least some differences in trustworthiness between news organisations in their country, which indicates that most people do differentiate at least to some degree between news outlets and may therefore be receptive to some efforts by news outlets to engage with them. In Brazil, the UK, and the US, the overall percentage who selected one of the four types of strategies was relatively high.

At the same time, when we examine the relationship between selective trust and which approaches to trust-building audiences say they would prioritise, the clearest pattern that emerges is also the most challenging. Those who see ‘no differences’ between news outlets were also the most likely to say they felt that none of the approaches to trust-building were likely to work with them (Fig. 1.6).

Figure 1.6: Those who see no differences between news outlets are most sceptical of trust-building strategies

Percentage who say none of the strategies provided is likely to change their sense of trust among those who do versus don't see differences between news organisations



TRUST_PRIORITY. Thinking about the four areas we have asked about, which is most likely to impact your sense of trust towards news organisations? **TRUST_SELECT.** Thinking about organisations that report the news (e.g. via radio, TV, Newspaper, online) in [Brazil/India/the UK/the US], which of the following comes closest to your view? There are [major/minor/no] differences between news organisations in how trustworthy or untrustworthy they are. *Base: Those who see differences/no differences: Brazil = 1,297/460, India = 1,201/455, UK = 1,648/292, US = 1,603/238. Note: ‘Those who see differences’ includes both those who say ‘there are major differences’ and ‘there are minor differences’.*

These results underscore the degree to which a one-size-fits-all approach to trust-building is unlikely to be successful. Building trust with the least engaged segments of the public, many of

⁷ Results on this measure correspond to some degree with trust in news in general. Those who do not trust news are significantly more likely to say they see ‘no differences’ between news outlets. This view is particularly pronounced in India, where 35% of those who do not trust news say there are no differences in trustworthiness among news outlets. Likewise, in the UK and the US, only 26% and 32%, respectively, of those who see no differences between news organisations say they trust information in the news media ‘somewhat’ or ‘completely’, compared to 43% and 51% of those who see minor or major differences.

⁸ Levels of selective trust tend to be related to a degree with how much news audiences are routinely consuming. Those who use news more frequently are more likely to see major differences between news outlets, but this pattern is more pronounced in the US and the UK and not all that clear in Brazil and India, except among those who use messaging apps to get their news. For example, 34% of Brazilians who use messaging apps daily to access news think there are major differences in trustworthiness between news outlets, while only 29% and 24% of Brazilians think likewise among those who use messaging apps less than daily or not at all, respectively. In India, similarly, 25% of those who use messaging apps to access news daily see major differences, compared to 17% of those who never use messaging apps. In the UK and the US, 46% and 64% of daily online news users, respectively, see major differences compared to 36% (UK) and 45% (US) of less than daily online news consumers.

whom do not see any difference at all between news outlets in terms of their trustworthiness, may require establishing, at the foundational level, that there is value to news and journalism even before they may begin to forge a relationship built on trust. For others, especially those who consume news daily and may already have finely tuned curated media habits, as we show in the remainder of this report, many have quite specific views about how best to serve their needs and establish a trusting relationship. Both dynamics are true, even though it means there is no single silver bullet to regain the public's trust.

2. Building Trust Through Aligning Editorial Content to What the Public Cares Most About

Having established the overall landscape around trust in news in each of these countries, in this chapter we consider the public's attitudes to the first of four approaches to increasing trust in news. This first set of approaches falls under the umbrella of what we call editorial strategies – efforts to focus on particular topics and content that best aligns with what audiences say they are looking for from trustworthy news sources.

We begin by first examining how people think about the current mix of news coverage in their countries. We find that audiences tend to see only limited efforts by most news organisations to focus on everyday, regular people, which some (although not all) say they would like to see more of compared to their current levels. This may strike some journalists as counter to their own perceptions or editorial values, but a tendency to focus on powerful elites in coverage may contribute to perceptions of news media as disconnected or even irrelevant to everyday, regular life. In fact, while large portions of the public in these countries do say they value the independent watchdog role of the press – scrutinising the actions of those in positions of power – this is mainly the case for those most interested in politics but is often relatively less of a priority compared to other functions of the news media that people value.

We also show that one kind of news that audiences generally say they want to see more of is focused around solutions to problems – as has been argued by proponents of 'solutions' or 'constructive' journalism (Lough and McIntyre 2023) – rather than simply highlighting negative events in the world. Finally, we devote the last part of this chapter to considering what audiences would prioritise changing about news content, with many expressing frustration about what they perceive as sensationalism, bias, and inaccuracy. These issues more than others, including lack of diverse voices or too many stories that cause social division, tend to elicit the most concern; however, as we also show, different segments of the public in these countries harbour different priorities when it comes to these matters, complicating efforts to win over all audiences using the same editorial strategies.

The public has mixed views about the current focus of most coverage

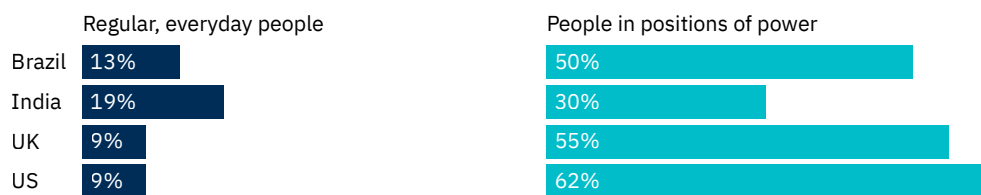
We find a nuanced portrait across these four countries in terms of how the public thinks about the current editorial focus of most news content. Many perceive that news coverage in these countries tends to be especially focused on elites in positions of power, rather than regular, everyday people. On balance, more express a preference for increasing coverage of the latter, saying they would be more likely to trust news that does so. At the same time, we also find generally positive sentiments across the board in terms of the performance of the press in their coverage of specific editorial subjects. This suggests that the link between editorial strategies for building trust is far from straightforward.

MANY SEE NEWS AS ESPECIALLY FOCUSED ON ELITES, WITH LESS CONSENSUS ON HOW IT SHOULD CHANGE

Generally, people in all four countries say they believe news outlets tend to focus more on people in positions of power compared to everyday, regular people (Fig. 2.1). Majorities say they think news media do so ‘much more’ or ‘somewhat more’ in Brazil (50%), the UK (55%), and the US (62%). In India, such perceptions are somewhat more mixed: just 30% say the news media focuses more on people in positions of power and 41% say they believe news media devote equal attention to both groups.

Figure 2.1: Larger percentages in all countries think news focuses more on people in positions of power

Percentage who think news focuses more on people in positions of power versus regular, everyday people



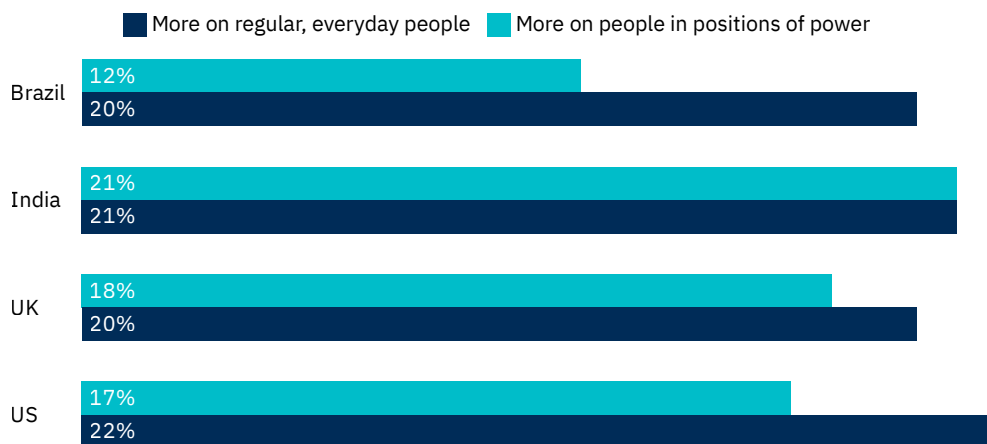
EDIT_ATTN_CUR. Thinking generally about most news today, do you think it focuses more on people in positions of power or regular, everyday people, or both equally? *Base: Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000. Note: Excludes those who say ‘both equally’ or ‘don’t know’.*

At the same time, when asked whether news media *should* focus more on everyday, regular people, the picture becomes somewhat more mixed. Slightly higher percentages do say news organisations should focus more on regular, everyday people compared to the percentage who say they want more attention paid to people in positions of power (Fig. 2.2). This pattern is consistent across all four countries, although in Brazil respondents were less likely to express a preference for more coverage paid to elites. In all four countries, however, most say they want a balance of both kinds of coverage, with roughly half of respondents stating that they thought news media should focus on *both* everyday, regular people *and* people in positions of power equally.⁹

⁹ This percentage was highest in Brazil (62%), followed by the US (55%), the UK (51%), and India (49%).

Figure 2.2: Support is slightly higher for focusing more on regular, everyday people rather than people in power

Percentage who think news should focus more on regular, everyday people versus people in positions of power



EDIT_ATTN_PREF. In your view, should the news focus more on people in positions of power or regular, everyday people, or both equally? *Base: Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000. Note: 'More on people in positions of power' includes those who say 'much' or 'somewhat more on people in positions of power', whereas 'more on regular, everyday people' includes those who say 'much' or 'somewhat more on regular, everyday people'. Excludes those who say 'don't know', 'neither', or 'both equally'.*

When we asked audiences how well they thought news organisations in their countries covered various common topics, audiences also tended to be more uniformly positive about the current performance of news media when it comes to these specific areas of coverage – even as there are still significant minorities that do not think these topics are covered well (Fig. 2.3). We asked about five topic areas including (a) arts, entertainment, and culture, (b) local news ('local' broadly defined), (c) crime and other security threats, (d) government initiatives and programmes,¹⁰ and (e) consumer tips about commercial products and services. We selected these topics based largely on the kinds of topics that came up most often as areas of either concern or personal importance to members of the public we have previously interviewed or included in focus groups (Ross Arguedas et al. 2022; Ross Arguedas et al. 2023).

Figure 2.3: Majorities evaluate news coverage of specific topics favourably

Percentage in each country who think news organisations do 'very' or 'fairly well' at covering each topic

	Brazil	India	UK	US
Arts, entertainment, and culture	53%	68%	55%	65%
Local news (about your region, city, or town)	57%	68%	64%	76%
Crime or other security threats	50%	69%	65%	72%
Government initiatives and programmes	46%	66%	57%	59%
Consumer tips about products, deals, and services	54%	63%	50%	59%

EDIT_TOPICS. Now thinking about the following topics covered in the news overall, how well, if at all, do news organisations in your country cover each of the following? *Base: Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000.*

¹⁰ In focus groups we previously convened (Ross Arguedas et al. 2023), this topic was one that Indian participants were particularly vocal about.

Roughly two-thirds of respondents in India said they felt that the news media covered each of these topics ‘fairly’ or ‘very well.’ Percentages were similarly high, or even higher, for categories like local news and ‘crime and other security threats’ in the US, a country with considerably lower trust in news overall compared to India.¹¹ Although slightly smaller proportions of the public in the UK and Brazil said the same, these generally positive results suggest that audiences can perceive news media as doing fairly well on some aspects of their coverage, even as they ultimately judge the overall product more negatively.

EDITORIAL STRATEGIES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO TRUST

Having established how audiences think about the current editorial focus of news media and their performance in covering various topics, we now more specifically examine to what extent such attitudes are linked to trust.

On the first of these questions – the tendency for news to focus more on people in positions of power and less on everyday, regular people – we find that audiences are somewhat more likely to say they would be more trusting towards news organisations that do more to focus on the latter than they currently are (Fig. 2.4). When asked one by one whether focusing more on either of these groups would likely lead respondents to be more or less trusting towards news organisations, we find in general more uniformly positive responses associated with paying greater attention to regular people, and somewhat larger percentages who say they would likely trust news organisations less that focus more on elites than they currently are. In Brazil, the UK, and the US, focusing more on people in positions of power was associated with higher percentages saying they likely would be less rather than more trusting (35% to 31% in Brazil, 24% to 17% in the UK, and 32% to 21% in the US), although this dynamic was reversed in India, where 45% said they would be more likely to trust news organisations that focus more on elites. It is worth noting, however, that the most common response in India was to say that neither editorial approach would likely affect levels of trust either way.

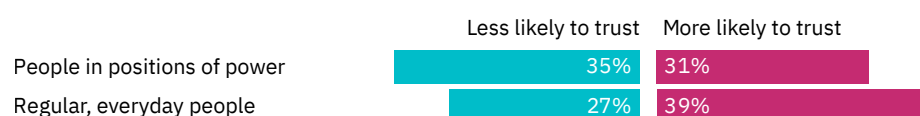
Likewise, and in contrast to this, focusing more on everyday, regular people was associated with more people saying they are likely to trust the news more. This finding is consistent across all countries. US respondents were especially likely to say they would be more trusting of news outlets that focus more on regular people (49%), with only 9% saying such an editorial focus would likely reduce their sense of trust. This divide was smallest in Brazil, with 39% saying likely to be more trusting and 27% saying the reverse.

¹¹ When we examined attitudes about crime coverage among respondents from different racial backgrounds, we found only minor differences in responses on this question. These results may be surprising in light of our previous qualitative research (Ross Arguedas et al. 2023) as well as other studies showing news coverage tends to overrepresent African Americans as perpetrators of crime (e.g. Dixon and Linz 2000a, 2000b) and underrepresent them as victims of crime (e.g. Dixon and Williams 2015). We suspect the phrasing of our survey question, which combined crime and other security threats, may be partly the reason. We also suspect the broad survey questions may not capture the nuances of people’s attitudes on this topic, including differing expectations about how the news media ought to perform.

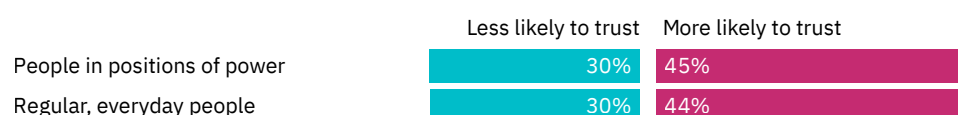
Figure 2.4: Larger percentages say they are more likely to trust organisations that focus more on regular people

Percentage who say they are more versus less likely to trust news organisations that focus more on people in positions of power versus regular, everyday people

Brazil



India



UK



US



EDIT_ATTN_TRUST. Thinking now about your trust in news organisations, to what extent are you more or less likely to trust news organisations that focus on the following? *Base: Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000. Note: 'More likely to trust' includes those who say they are 'much' or 'somewhat more likely to trust', whereas 'less likely to trust' includes those who say they are 'much' or 'somewhat less likely to trust'. Excludes those who say 'neither more nor less likely to trust' or 'don't know'.*

To some extent, these patterns are reflective of some of the differences among publics we examined in Chapter 1 of this report. Those who exhibit the most 'selective trust' are also those most receptive to efforts by news organisations to focus more on regular, everyday people, perhaps because they also tend to be the most interested in different forms of news and open to trust-building initiatives in general. In the US, for example, 53% of those who see 'major differences' between news outlets in their country say they are more likely to trust news outlets that focus more on the public, compared to 34% of those who see 'no differences' between news outlets. Similar differences are apparent in the other four countries.¹² Likewise, those who say news outlets cover each of the five topic areas well are much more likely to also say they trust information in the news media in general and vice versa. These gaps were often largest in the US and smallest in Brazil, but there was little to no variation across topics.¹³ These results suggest that many people may have a broadly positive or negative view about news across all topics that applies in a general way to their sense of trust. We cannot say on the basis of these results whether better aligning news coverage to meet the needs and preferences of these

¹² In India, 52% of those who see 'major differences' say they are more likely to trust news outlets that focus more on everyday, regular people, compared to 45% of those who say 'no differences.' In the UK, the divide between these groups is 41% to 32% and in Brazil it is 43% to 36%.

¹³ For example, in the US, 63% of those who say they thought news organisations covered 'government initiatives and programmes' very or fairly well said they could somewhat or completely trust information in the news media in general. This compared to just 25% who said the same among those who said news organisations did not cover this topic well. The gap was smaller in the UK (48% versus 26%), India (71% versus 58%), and Brazil (47% versus 35%).

audiences will cause them to increase their trust, but it is clear there is a connection between their evaluations of current coverage and overall trust.

Audiences generally see value in the importance of watchdog journalism

One reason often provided for why news organisations focus heavily on people in positions of power has to do with the role of news as an independent watchdog for democracy. In this next section we focus on better understanding how people think about this function of the news media, its relationship to trust, and how it compares to other roles that news media play in people's lives.

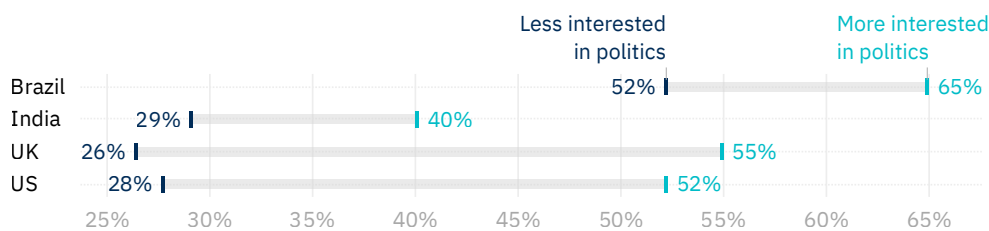
IMPORTANCE OF WATCHDOG JOURNALISM HIGHEST AMONG THOSE MOST INTERESTED IN POLITICS
Even as our survey finds some wariness about the degree to which respondents feel that news in general focuses on people in positions of power, when asked a series of questions about different functions that journalists perform, most of the public in all four of these countries also say they see the importance of news organisations taking steps to 'monitor and scrutinise people in positions of power'. This 'watchdog' function of the press has often been held up as one of the most important core roles of the institution of journalism, embraced to varying degrees in different media and political environments (Norris 2014; Waisbord 2000), but the public's attitudes about it have been somewhat less studied (for an exception, see Palmer et al. 2020).

We find that three-quarters of the public in Brazil (74%), the UK (75%), and the US (73%) view this function as 'somewhat' or 'very important', as do two-thirds of audiences in India (68%). Although the percentage who specifically see it as 'very important' is much lower (39% in the UK and the US, 32% in India, but 55% in Brazil), such views are also particularly concentrated among the parts of the public who are most politically interested (Fig. 2.5). This pattern is consistent in all four countries, although even politically interested Indian respondents were somewhat less likely to say they thought this function of the press was 'very important'.

On the one hand, these results may seem contradictory to the findings in the first part of this chapter. Many say they want more attention paid to regular, everyday people but they also value the role of the news media in monitoring people in positions of power. On the other hand, it may be that audiences want the balance of coverage that does focus on elites to be more focused on substantively important issues rather than more trivial forms of scrutiny. More research is needed to examine these nuances.

Figure 2.5: Those who most value the watchdog function tend to be most interested in politics

Percentage who say monitoring and scrutinising people in positions of power is 'very important' to them personally among those more versus less interested in politics



EDIT_FXNS_IMPT. Thinking generally about the different areas news organisations cover, how important, or not important, is it to you personally that news organisations do each of the following? Monitor and scrutinise people in positions of power. **D9.** How interested, if at all, would you say you are in politics? Base: More/less interested in politics: Brazil = 291/1,237, India = 554/907, UK = 744/686, US = 768/608. Note: 'More interested in politics' includes those who say they are 'very' and 'extremely interested', whereas 'less interested in politics' includes those who say they are 'slightly' and 'not at all interested'.

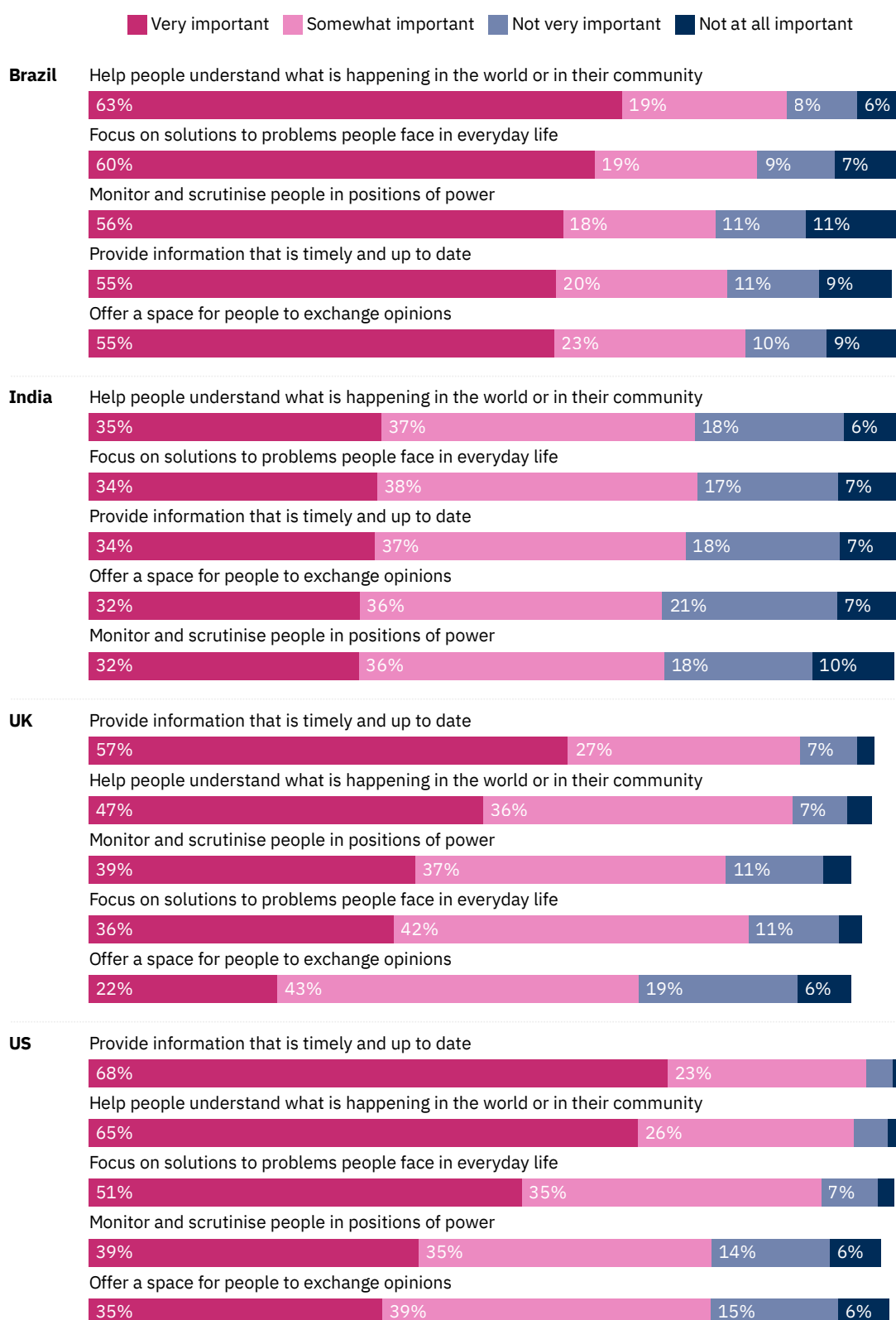
OTHER FUNCTIONS OF NEWS AT LEAST AS IF NOT MORE IMPORTANT THAN WATCHDOG JOURNALISM

We asked about the watchdog function alongside several other roles played by the news media in order to best understand not only how much people value this role specifically but how it compares in perceived importance relative to other functions the news may play in people's lives. In addition to the watchdog role, we asked about four other functions of the news media, including providing information about the world and the communities in which people live, doing so in a timely manner, creating spaces for people to exchange opinions and perspectives, and offering 'solutions to everyday problems' (an important theme among some journalism reformers).

While each of these areas is viewed as 'very' or 'somewhat important' to most respondents, we see variation across these media environments in terms of what is most valued. In the US and the UK, for example, providing up-to-date information tends to be the most widely valued role of the news media, with the watchdog role falling roughly in the middle. In India, monitoring and scrutinising people in positions of power ranked at the bottom in importance. In Brazil and India, helping people understand what is happening globally and locally edged ahead of other functions in terms of perceived importance. More consistently, in all four countries respondents were least enthusiastic about the importance of the news media offering a space for people to exchange opinions.

Figure 2.6: The most valued journalistic role varies from one country to another

Percentage who say each of the following functions of news is important versus not important



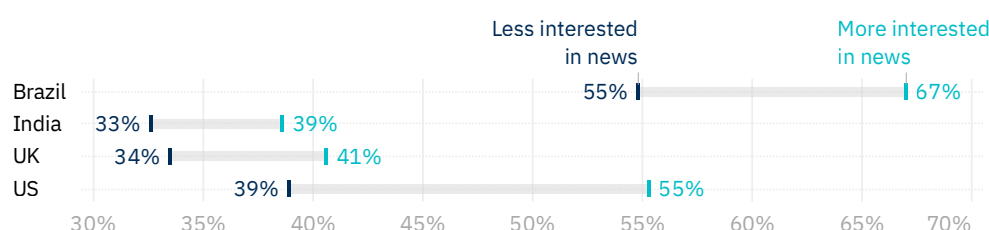
EDIT_FXNS_IMPT. Thinking generally about the different areas news organisations cover, how important, or not important, is it to you personally that news organisations do each of the following? Base: Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000. Note: Excludes those who say 'don't know'.

Attitudes about solutions-focused journalism also deserve some attention here as it has been the subject of a considerable degree of scholarship. Previous research has shown that orienting news towards solutions, rather than simply highlighting problems in the world, can prompt news users to feel less negative and report more favourable attitudes towards the news itself (McIntyre 2019). It has been argued that this kind of constructive approach to reporting news also strengthens engagement and social connections between news organisations and communities, especially among marginalised publics (Wenzel et al. 2016).

In line with these studies, we also find that audiences in all four countries say they value journalism that focuses on solutions. While majorities in Brazil (60%) and the US (51%) say they view it as ‘very important’, roughly a third of the public in India (34%) and the UK (36%) say the same. One note of caution here, however, is that enthusiasm for such efforts tends to be concentrated among those who also say they are most interested in news (Fig. 2.7). Those who say they are least interested in news are significantly less likely to value the solutions-focused coverage in all four markets.

Figure 2.7: Those most interested in news value solutions journalism more

Percentage who say news that focuses on solutions is ‘very important’ to them personally broken down by news interest



EDIT_FXNS_IMPT. Thinking generally about the different areas news organisations cover, how important, or not important, is it to you personally that news organisations do each of the following? 2. Focus on solutions to problems people face in everyday life. **Q4.** How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news? *Base: Less/more interested in news: Brazil = 837/486, India = 732/671, UK = 432/1,145, US = 432/1,024. Note: ‘Less interested in news’ includes those who say they are ‘slightly’ or ‘not at all interested’, whereas ‘more interested in news’ includes those who say they are ‘very’ or ‘extremely interested’.*

MIXED VIEWS ABOUT PERFORMANCE OF THE PRESS

For each of these functions, we also asked audiences in each country how well they thought news in general performed (Fig. 2.8). The watchdog role tended to rank somewhat lower consistently compared to these other four areas, although focusing on ‘solutions to problems people face in everyday life’ fell at the bottom in the UK and the US. A larger percentage of the public in India said they thought news organisations performed well in both roles, although in general Indian respondents were more positive across all of these areas. Comparatively, Brazilians are at the opposite end of the spectrum, with some of the most negative views about the current performance of the news media.

Figure 2.8: Lower percentages in Brazil say news organisations are doing well across all news functions

Percentage who think news organisations in their country fulfil each of the following functions ‘very’ or ‘fairly well’

	Brazil	India	UK	US
Provide information that is timely and up-to-date	53%	67%	73%	74%
Help people understand what is happening in the world or in their community	51%	67%	62%	64%
Focus on solutions to problems people face in everyday life	46%	68%	46%	48%
Offer a space for people to exchange opinions	45%	64%	49%	49%
Monitor and scrutinise people in positions of power	44%	65%	55%	57%

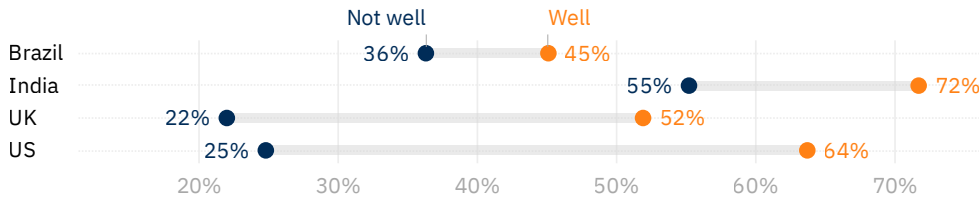
EDIT_FXNS_JOB. Regardless of how important you think each of the areas are, how well, if at all, do news organisations in your country do overall when it comes to each of the following? *Base: Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000.*

We also find, as above with respect to editorial topics, these journalistic functions are linked to the public’s overall trust in news. People who say they feel the news media in general are doing well at each of these functions also tend to be much more likely to say they trust information in the news media in their countries in general. We see this relationship clearly across all five functions (Fig. 2.9). Indians, again, are the most positive across all categories; more than two-thirds of those who say news organisations are doing a well in these roles also have a trusting relationship with news. We see the largest gaps in levels of trust in the UK and the US, however, which suggests that more so than the two Global South countries, perceptions about the editorial performance of the news media are linked to attitudes about whether news is trustworthy or not.

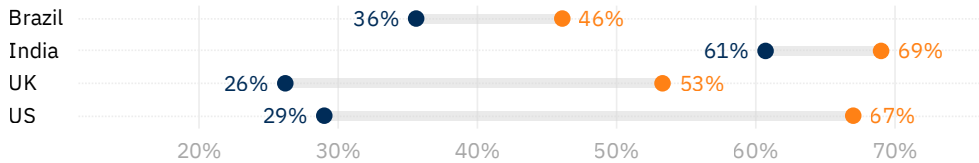
Figure 2.9: Those who trust news more often say news organisations do well across all functions

Percentage of those who 'somewhat' or 'completely' trust information from the news media who say news organisations do well or not well when it comes to each of the following things

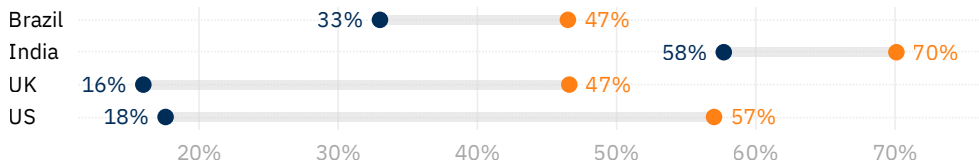
Monitor and scrutinise people in positions of power



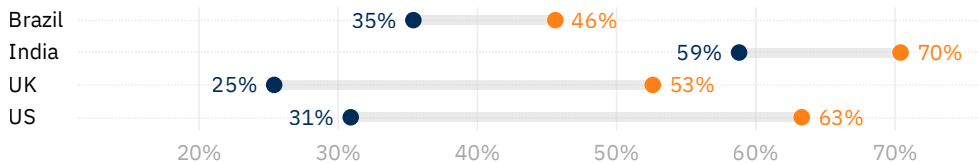
Focus on solutions to problems people face in everyday life



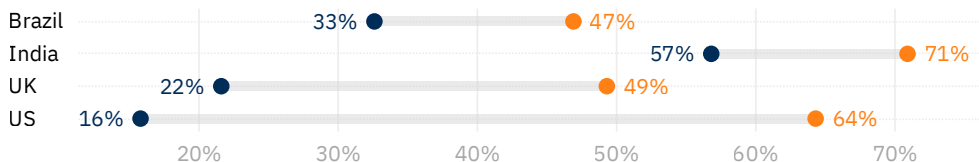
Provide information that is timely and up to date



Offer a space for people to exchange opinions



Help people understand what is happening in the world or in their community



TRUST_GEN. Generally speaking, to what extent do you trust, or not trust information from the news media in [Brazil/India/the UK/the US]. **EDIT_FXNS_JOB.** Regardless of how important you think each of the areas are, how well, if at all, do news organisations in your country do overall when it comes to each of the following? *Base: Varies by country as a proportion of the full sample: Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000. Note: 'Well' includes those who responded 'very' and 'fairly well', whereas 'not well' includes those who responded 'not very' and 'not at all well'.*

Many voice frustrations about inaccuracy, bias, and sensationalism

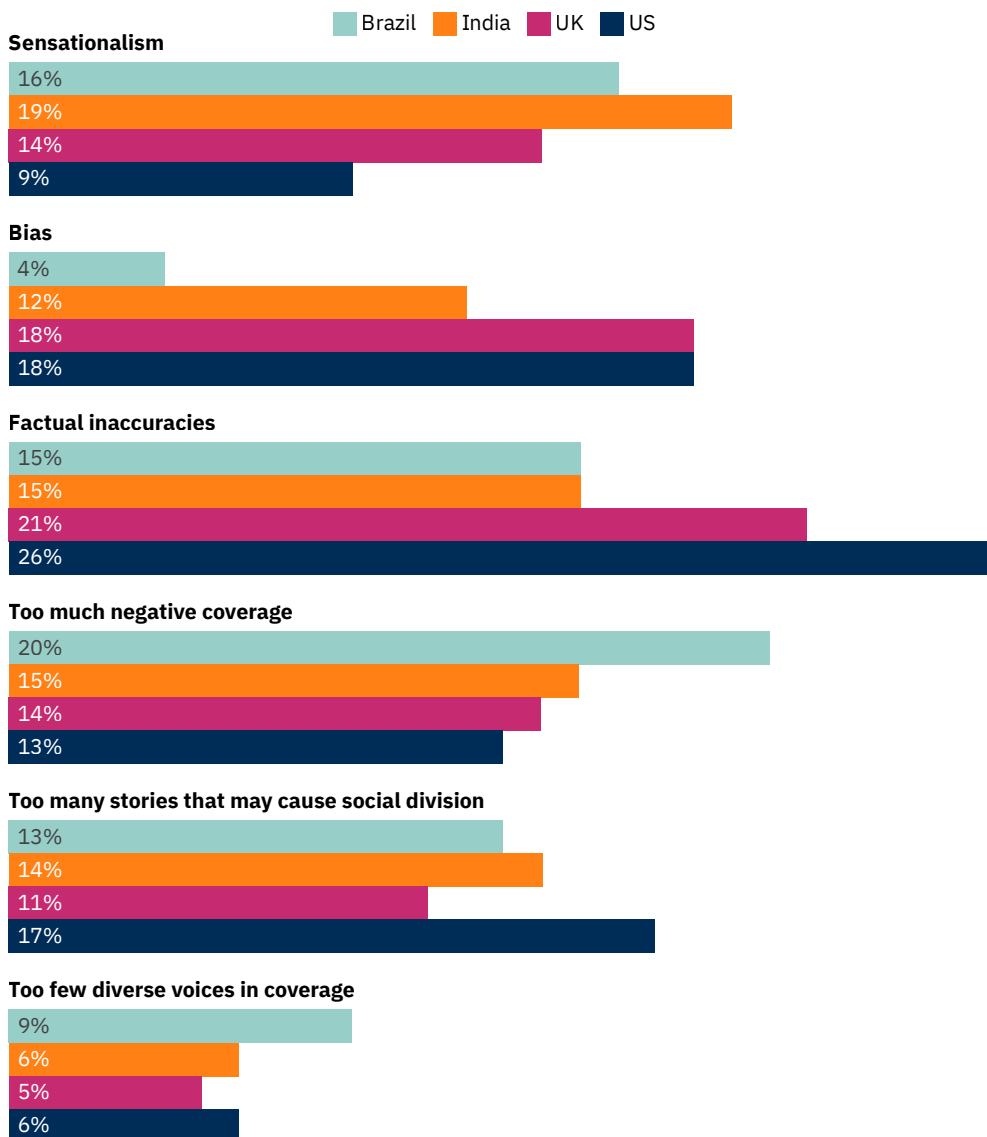
In this last part of this chapter, we turn to a different set of concerns audiences express about the editorial focus of news coverage in these countries. We asked about several broad matters involving reporting in each country. Once again we generated these categories in part based on what we heard in our most recent focus groups with historically marginalised and underserved audiences (Ross Arguedas et al. 2023) as well as our previous interviews with audiences more generally (Ross Arguedas et al. 2022). We focus on six different problems many often describe about the current editorial focus of most news coverage. These include both problems around

factual inaccuracies, bias, and sensationalism and matters explicitly linked to social problems and divisions in each country. These latter problems ranged from too much negativity in coverage to too many stories that may contribute to social division, as well as a lack of diverse voices represented in the news.

When we asked respondents which among these six problems was the most important for news organisations to prioritise improving, we found little consensus and also considerable variation across countries (Fig. 2.10). Brazilians were most concerned about negativity in coverage: 20% of the public there selected that area as most important. Similarly, one in five Indians said they most wanted news organisations to prioritise reducing the amount of sensationalism in the news – a phenomenon that is unlikely to go unnoticed for even a casual observer of Indian news media. Meanwhile, a plurality of Britons (21%) and Americans (26%) selected factual inaccuracies as the most important editorial problem they believed news organisations should prioritise above all else.

Figure 2.10: Little agreement within and across countries about what news organisations should prioritise fixing

Percentage who say each of the following is most important for news organisations to prioritise fixing

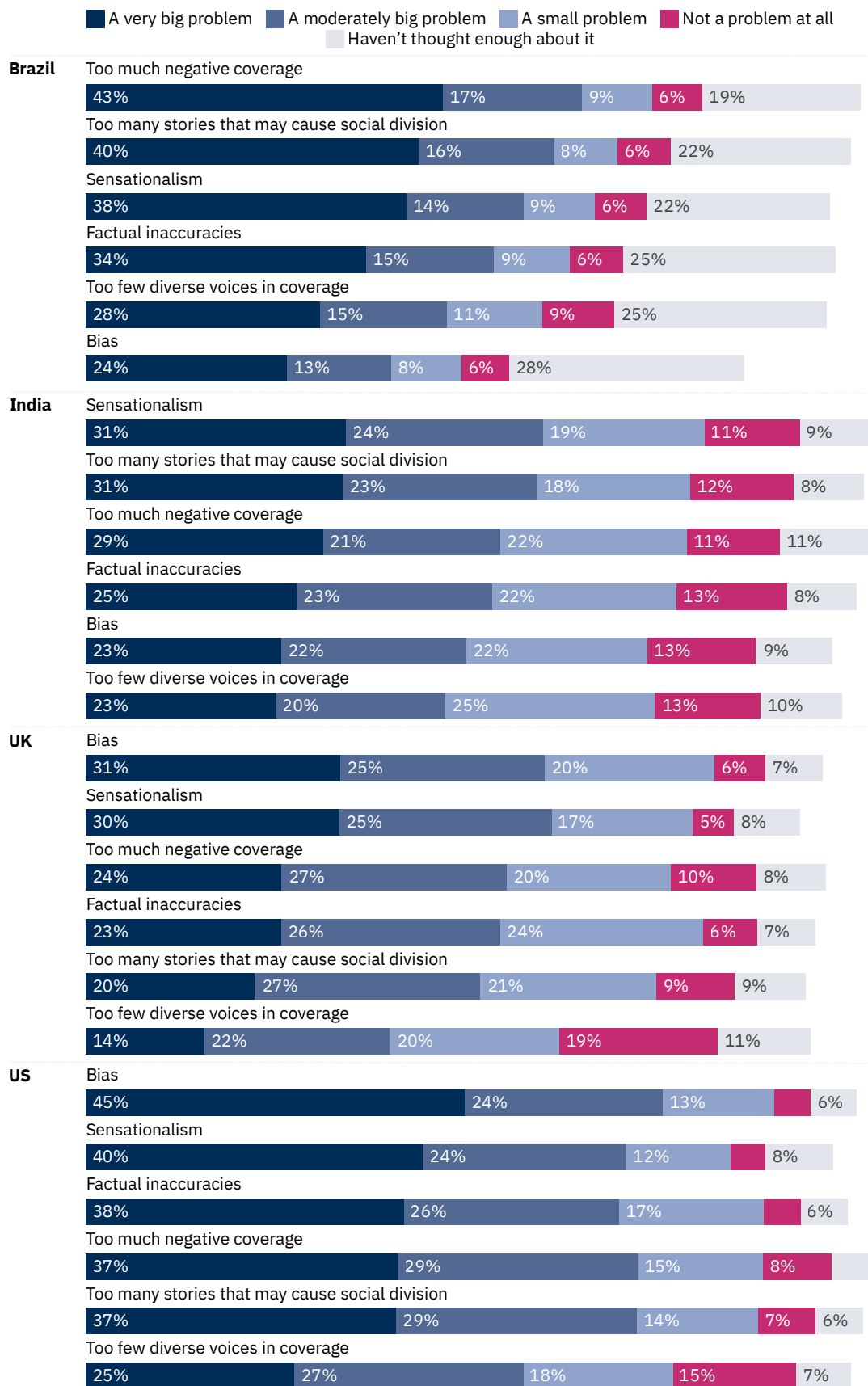


EDIT_PROB_PREF. Thinking about what news organisations should prioritise trying to fix or improve, which of these is the most important to you personally? Base: Brazil = 1,630, India = 1,844, UK = 1,976, US = 1,889. Note: Question was only asked of those who previously identified one of the following as being a problem.

This variation in responses around what to prioritise should not detract from the fact that the public also tended to see many of these issues as ‘very big’ or at least ‘moderately big’ problems in all four media environments. When we asked follow-up questions about to what degree respondents felt each of these concerns was a problem in their country, we found some notable differences across countries as well as some consistent results. Bias, for example, rose to the top of the list of concerns in both the UK and the US, where 55% and 69%, respectively, saw it as a big problem in these countries. In contrast, just one-third saw it that way in Brazil (37%), falling at the bottom of the list compared to the other areas. In India, 47% viewed bias as a big problem, where it ranked second to last behind only ‘too few diverse voices in coverage’, which consistently attracted somewhat smaller percentages who viewed it as a big problem.

Figure 2.11: Large percentages in all countries see many big problems with how news is reported

Percentage who find each of the following to be a big versus a small problem in their country



EDIT_PROB. In general, how much of a problem, if at all, do you think each of the following are when it comes to the reporting of news in your country? Base: Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000. Note: Excludes those who say they 'don't know'.

DIFFERENT VIEWS ABOUT WHAT IS MOST PROBLEMATIC IN EDITORIAL CONTENT

Aside from these country-level differences, we also see some important differences among subpopulations in terms of their degree of concern about some of these issues. For example, the percentage who say there are too few diverse voices in coverage is a ‘very big problem’ is considerably higher among Black respondents in the US (32%) compared to white respondents (23%), although differences on this question along racial lines were not significant in Brazil. On the other hand, concern over bias was particularly pronounced along political lines in the US, with Republicans much more likely to view this as a ‘very big problem’ (63%) compared to Democrats (35%).

News coverage that is seen as contributing to social divides is another area where we see important variation within countries. In India, concern over such coverage was most pronounced among Muslims (55%) and those who are economically and socially marginalised in society, although we found similar levels of concern across all caste levels.¹⁴ Such subgroup differences underscore the degree to which what is perceived as a problem in news content tends to be subjective, in the eye of the beholder. These differing perspectives on what is most problematic about news content often mirror broader socio-political cleavages, as well as the nature of the public discourse around these subjects.

CONCERN OVER ISSUES IN EDITORIAL CONTENT IS OFTEN LINKED TO TRUST

While audiences tend to perceive all six of these areas as problems in news coverage, such perceptions can be rooted not only in direct experiences encountering such news – it can also be based on preconceptions or broader social discourses about news. Therefore, it is not altogether clear that simply focusing on making news less divisive or less negative, for example, will necessarily increase the public’s trust. That said, when we look at the relationship between concern over each of these matters and trust in news in general in each country, we find some distinct and revealing patterns. Some of these areas of concern tend to be much more aligned with existing levels of trust in news in general compared to others.

In Brazil, we find practically no relationship at all between levels of concern about any of these issues and the percentage who say they trust information in the news media in general. In other words, even though audiences tend to view all of these matters as significant problems, those who are less concerned trust news overall in largely the same proportion as those who are more concerned. It is also worth noting that the percentage who said they had not thought enough about any of these issues was two or three times larger in Brazil than it was elsewhere.

At the other end of the spectrum, in the UK and the US those who view sensationalism, bias, and the other matters as a big problem were significantly less likely to say they trust news in general, ranging from a gap of 10 percentage points to as much as a 30 percentage point difference. For example, 40% of Americans who say they view factual inaccuracies as a big problem said they trust information in the news in general, compared to 70% of Americans who do not see factual inaccuracies as a big problem. The one exception to this pattern was with

¹⁴ More generally, concern over news coverage causing division in society is concentrated especially among those who are more interested in politics, particularly in Brazil and the US, where 55% and 44%, respectively, of the most politically interested respondents say they view this issue as a ‘very big problem’ compared to 34% and 32%, respectively, of those who are less interested in politics. Similar gaps are also apparent in India and the UK, although the overall level of concern is somewhat lower. In India, 35% of the most politically interested respondents say they view news stories causing social division as a ‘very big problem’ (versus 27% of the least politically interested). In the UK, the difference is 29% versus 15%.

respect to ‘too few diverse voices in coverage’, where levels of trust in news appear unrelated to levels of concern about this matter.¹⁵

In summary, in this chapter we have explored how the public thinks about various editorial strategies around building trust. Overall we find that many see news coverage as tilted heavily towards coverage of powerful elites with sometimes too little emphasis on problems – and solutions – in everyday life. At the same time, many do say they value the watchdog role of the press as it scrutinises the actions of those in positions of power and authority; they just do not always prioritise it as heavily as those most interested in politics and journalists themselves may sometimes assume. The public in these four countries also tend to evaluate the performance of the news media quite unevenly. While many view coverage of specific topics positively, they also see aspects of that coverage as highly problematic, particularly when it comes to critiques like bias and sensationalism. Overall, we find the public expressing somewhat different priorities in different countries around what kinds of editorial strategies are most likely to be effective in garnering the public’s trust: whereas some are particularly concerned about a lack of diverse voices in coverage of stories that cause social division, others are more focused on questions of accuracy and sensationalism. Effectively addressing these concerns about editorial content may also be intrinsically linked with transparency and disclosure, the focus of Chapter 3.

¹⁵ In India, we find smaller differences in trust in news according to whether audiences perceive each of these areas as a problem. Curiously, those who see each as a big problem are somewhat *more* likely to say they trust news, the inverse of the pattern we observe in the UK and US. We think this reflects a similar dynamic as the one we observe in Brazil where trust in news there tends to be somewhat less linked to specific editorial concerns than it is in the two Global North countries we examine.

3. Building Trust Through Transparency Initiatives

In this chapter, we consider how practices broadly under the banner of transparency relate to the public's views about what constitutes trustworthy journalism. As we noted in Chapter 1 of this report, transparency initiatives are among the most frequently prioritised when respondents are forced to choose among the four strategies we asked about. However, while a commitment to transparency is important to many people in the abstract, whether such efforts engender trust in practice depends on whether audiences pay attention to them and perceive information about reporting practices and policies positively.

We begin by focusing on how people evaluate the current performance of news organisations in their countries when it comes to how open and transparent they are on several dimensions. We also examine how much each is likely to build trust – at least in the abstract. Next, we assess what kinds of information audiences say they want more of (or less of) when it comes to the way news organisations operate and are structured. We conclude the chapter by focusing on perceived bias and whether people view news media as sufficiently fair in the way they treat different segments of the public. Although these responses inevitably overlap to some degree with questions of editorial practice (Chapter 2), our focus here is on what and how much information people say they want news organisations to disclose about the way they operate and conduct themselves.

What we find overall is a portrait of often divided and sometimes even jaded publics in all four countries, who often make evaluations of news media in ways that mirror and reflect existing social and political cleavages. While many are in agreement that they want more transparent news organisations, they do not necessarily interpret efforts around transparency in the same way.

Concern over a lack of transparency highest in Brazil, the UK, and the US

We focus on five separate dimensions of transparency. We have defined transparency broadly as encompassing both openness about specific editorial decisions and also the process itself – disclosure practices around both the production and dissemination of news content as well as the structures around ownership and funding that many audiences may or may not be aware of. These five dimensions include how well news organisations: (a) explain their decision-making process around how they report the news; (b) communicate their ethical standards; (c) are upfront about their mission statements; (d) separate news from advertising in their editorial content; and (e) distinguish fact from opinion in what they publish or broadcast.

In general, we find strikingly similar evaluations across all five dimensions of transparency in three of the four countries (Fig. 3.1). Indians rate news outlets in their country highest compared to the other three countries, whereas the UK comes in at the lowest levels, specifically around the three areas of transparency related to how well news organisations communicate their mission and standards or explain their decision-making. In the US

and the UK, the percentage who say news organisations do well at separating news from advertising is relatively higher (46% in the UK and 53% in the US) compared to the other areas of transparency – a dynamic we do not see in the two Global South countries.

Figure 3.1: Less than half in Brazil, the UK, and the US say news organisations are doing well when it comes to transparency

Percentage in each country who think news organisations are doing ‘very’ or ‘fairly well’ at each of the following

	Brazil	India	UK	US
Separate facts from opinion	40%	62%	39%	41%
Separate news from advertising	42%	62%	46%	53%
Explain decisions about how they report the news	43%	64%	34%	41%
Communicate their mission statements	44%	61%	32%	41%
Communicate the ethical standards they follow	42%	63%	34%	41%

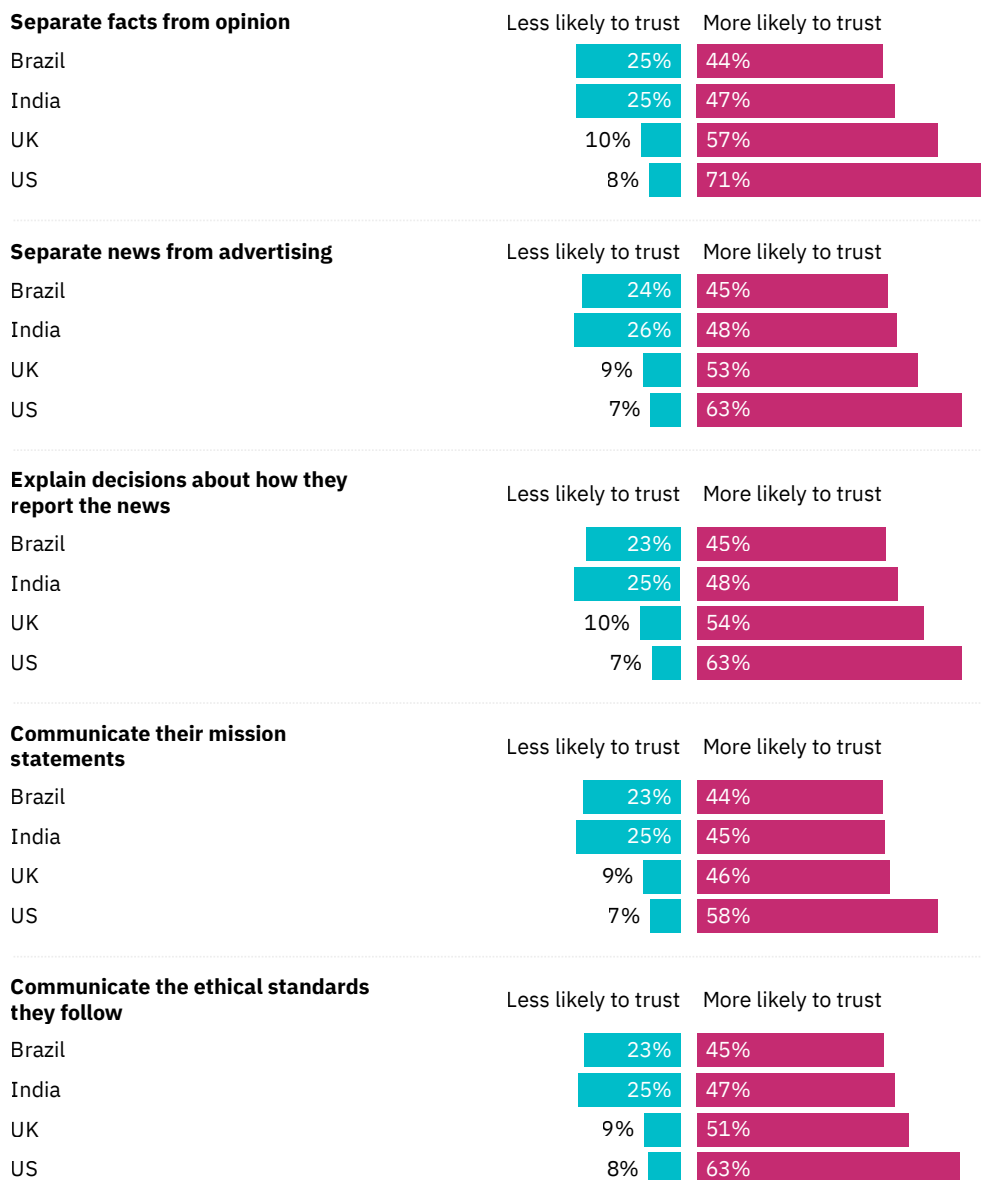
TRANS_JOB. In your opinion, how well, if at all, do you think news organisations in your country in general are doing when it comes to how they ... *Base: Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000.*

MOST SAY EFFORTS TO BE MORE TRANSPARENT ARE LIKELY TO INCREASE THEIR TRUST

When asked whether these five areas of transparency are likely to lead to higher or lower trust towards news outlets that engage in these efforts, most perceive them positively by an overwhelming margin (Fig. 3.2), even as there are also some significant country-specific differences. In the US, approximately six in ten say they are ‘somewhat’ or ‘much more likely’ to trust news organisations that engage in any of these transparency practices, with 71% saying as much with respect to efforts to separate fact from opinion. In contrast, in Brazil and India, a country with far more trust in news in general, fewer than half said efforts to be more transparent in these ways was likely to increase their trust. Even so, this was twice as high as the percentage who said each was likely to decrease their trust, which suggests that, at least in the abstract, most people respond favourably to such efforts.

Figure 3.2: Many say transparency efforts make them more likely to trust news organisations

Percentage who say they are more or less likely to trust news organisations who do each of the following



TRANS_TRUST. Are you more or less likely to trust news organisations that do each of the following? Base: Brazil = 2,000, India = 2,050, UK = 2,179, US = 2,000. Note: 'Less likely to trust' includes those who say they are 'much' or 'somewhat less likely to trust', whereas 'more likely to trust' includes those who say they are 'much' or 'somewhat more likely to trust'. Excludes those who say 'neither more nor less likely to trust' or 'don't know'.

These findings, although encouraging, can be potentially misleading if the respondents who say they are most likely to increase their trust in news organisations that engage in these practices tend to be found among the already trusting – the 'virtuous circle' dynamic we have described elsewhere in this report. Therefore, we sought to break down the percentage who say they are more likely to trust news outlets that take steps to be more transparent among those who say they generally trust information in the news media in their country versus those who do not. Doing so reveals consistent gaps in responses to this question, with those who view news organisations as performing the worst on current transparency efforts also the most resistant to increasing their trust. This gap was widest in India, by more than 40 percentage points, but

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