

Whose news do you trust?

Explaining trust in private versus public media in Africa

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Abstract:

Surveys from post-authoritarian democracies in Africa reveal that respondents trust government-owned broadcast media more than private media, despite the propagandist legacies of government sources. To explain this puzzle, the authors employ ordered logit regression analysis of Afrobarometer data for sixteen countries to examine mass trust in private versus public radio. They find that political sophistication, attitudes towards political authority, and partisan orientations are all implicated in the relative levels of trust in media. The results suggest that the media trust gap is not a product of an immature and poor quality private media sphere, and will not be alleviated by higher standard news broadcasts. Instead, the private media is more likely to engender trust by propagating democratic attitudes and encouraging critical appraisals of the incumbent performance.

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On the main thoroughfare in Kampala, there is 20 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. By emphasizing its independence and truthfulness, the Monitor hopes to win the trust of the public and steal readers from its 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. Previously characterized by strict government control, the media landscape in sub-Saharan Africa has changed so drastically over the last two decades that it is now the norm to have both public and private media organizations at least nominally in competition with each other. Out of 47 countries in the region, only Eritrea has an official monopoly over all forms of mass media. No other African country has a monopoly over print media and 7 countries even lack a government-owned daily newspaper.¹ Government ownership of radio is more widespread: all 47 countries have public radio stations, and there are no private radio stations in 8 of these.² While private media still operates under various restrictions³ and with far fewer resources, most African countries now have a diversity of news sources.

How do Africans perceive their nascent private media? This paper employs Afrobarometer Round 3 data for sixteen post-authoritarian African countries to examine mass trust in private versus public radio.⁴ Because government-owned media in Africa has a history of

¹ Government newspapers do have larger circulation figures than private newspapers. Examining a sample of 21 African countries in 1999, one study found that government-owned newspapers were responsible for 61% of the circulation figures of the top five newspapers in each country (Djankov et al. 2001).

² Figures coded by the authors from the BBC Africa country summaries on March 10, 2007.

³ In 2004, Freedom House rated the press "Free" in only 14.6% of sub-Saharan African countries.

⁴ We also show that the results of our analysis are consistent if we use data from Round 2 of the Afrobarometer survey, or pool rounds 2 and 3. For more information about the Afrobarometer project, see: www.afrobarometer.org

subservience to authoritarian governments, one might expect citizens to place considerably more trust in private media organizations than in public ones.⁵ Surprisingly, this is not the case. Even in countries which have recently conducted a transition to democracy we find that African respondents tend to trust public radio sources more than private sources, suggesting that relative independence from government may not be sufficient for the nascent private media in Africa to establish a reputation for trustworthiness. This is troubling because, if the fledgling private media in Africa are to be financially viable and to act as counterweights to the power of government, then private sources need to be more credible than the historically dominant state sources.

To explain this puzzling finding, the paper examines the individual-level traits that determine the relative levels of trust in private versus public radio organizations. We find that political sophistication, attitudes towards political authority, and partisan orientations are all implicated in the media trust gaps. Based on these findings we argue that the gap is not simply a product of an immature and poor quality private media sphere, and cannot simply be alleviated by increasing the quality of private news broadcasts. Instead, the private media is more likely to engender trust by facilitating a change in the political culture, in particular by propagating democratic attitudes and encouraging critical appraisals of the incumbent performance.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section one reviews recent changes in the African media landscape that led to an explosion of new privately-owned media sources. It also discusses the challenges that the private media face in establishing credibility,⁶ and by extension financial security and political influence. The second section examines African attitudes about the

⁵ We look specifically at new democracies because these are the countries where we would expect to see trust in private media to be highest compared to that in public media.

⁶ Although we use the term credibility interchangeably with trust in this paper, 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).

trustworthiness of radio broadcasters; section three hypothesizes about the sources of relative trust in private versus government-owned radio, and section four evaluates these hypotheses using multivariate analysis. We conclude with a discussion of ways to improve the standing of private media in Africa.

I. The Recent 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.

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 mere mouthpieces for non-democratic 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. This demonstrates the extent to which radio news lost credibility not just amongst the urban educated elites, but also amongst less educated rural audiences as well.

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 entities. 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.⁷ While in 1985 there were only 10 independent radio stations in the whole African continent, by 2005 there were 150 private stations in the impoverished country of Mali alone (Tower 2005), 118 private radio stations in Uganda (Leighley 2004; Uganda Communications Commission) and 68 private stations broadcasting freely within 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, some 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, privately-owned media outlets tend to be more critical of government and open to opposing perspectives.⁸

Expectations for the political contribution of the private media have been extremely high. Activists, policymakers, donors and scholars have heralded the dramatic explosion of private media in the last two decades as a boon for peace, democracy, and economic development in

⁷ 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 et al. (2002); Karikari (1994a); Madamombe (2005); Mwesige (2004); Nganguè (2001); Nyamnjoh (2005); Sandbrook (1996); Tettey (2002); Yankah (2004); Wanyeki (2002).

⁸ Private media were found to be less subject to capture by government officials than public media in multi-country studies spanning all regions of the world (Besley, Burgess, and Prat 2002; Djankov et al. 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 (DEMG) 2006). Regardless of these general trends, individual private media houses may be more biased in favor of government than public media houses, especially if they are owned by government officials.

Africa.⁹ However, there is no guarantee that private media in Africa will have a large impact on political and economic outcomes. In order for the private media to play its appointed role as a counterweight to government power, it needs to attract a substantial audience, and more importantly, it must be able to influence citizen knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. Private media sources are only likely to have an effect if they are viewed as trustworthy, especially compared to government sources.

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 importantly, 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 (for example Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Ladd 2004; Gussin and Baum 2004). Other recent studies 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 that citizens not only have access to independent sources of information, but that they have access to independent sources that they trust.¹⁰

⁹ The private media is 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 policymakers 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..

¹⁰ We expect that media trust is also related to persuasion, framing, agenda-setting, and priming in Africa, although this is still an unsubstantiated empirical question.

So far, the literature on the credibility of media in Africa has focused on the breadth and quality of the media supplied rather than on the effects of the media. While there is a growing literature on the production and distribution of private media, we know very little about how Africans are actually responding to the new private media. We argue that media credibility is not only a function of the media provided—which has received considerable attention—but also a function of audience attitudes, knowledge, and traits—which has received only sparse attention to date. We therefore proceed with an examination of what ordinary citizens in sixteen African states say about the trustworthiness of broadcast media in their countries.

II. Trust in Private and Government Broadcast Media

Given the dramatic changes in the African media landscape over the last few decades it is important to examine how citizens view their evolving media systems. We focus our analysis on broadcast media because of the greater familiarity with and use of broadcast media in Africa.¹¹ To what extent do people trust privately-owned and state-owned radio stations in Africa? Does the credibility of the nascent private radio exceed or lag behind that of the well-established state radio? How do opinions differ between countries?

For a variety of reasons, we expected most respondents to have greater trust in private media than public media. The state-owned media has been closely associated with past authoritarian regimes, and even now are less critical of current governments than private media. Given that democratic transitions occurred in recent memory for all the countries in this sample,

¹¹ Available data clearly shows that broadcast media is 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 everyday, 29 percent say they watch television news everyday 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, 38 televisions and one internet user (World Bank 2004) Newspapers are less popular because of high illiteracy rates and weak newspaper distribution networks. Additionally, the cost of a radio and batteries is much lower than the cumulative costs of newspapers (or the price of a television and electricity).

one might reasonably expect the stigma of association with past authoritarian governments to undermine public trust in public media.

The private media, on the other hand, are independent of the government, and therefore more able to hold it to task. In some countries, private radio helps to monitor elections by broadcasting the results of vote counts as they are completed at the precinct level, making it far harder to steal the election. Most investigative journalism and exposes of government malfeasance originate from the private press. In many countries, private radio stations have call-in radio shows where ordinary people can air their grievances, and sometimes even have them addressed. In general, the private media is more responsive to the public because they cannot rely on tax subsidy and must generate their revenue by being relevant or entertaining.

To assess how Africans view private and public media, we employ data from round 3 Afrobarometer surveys, which were conducted primarily in 2005. Respondents in eighteen different African countries were asked a battery of questions to assess trust in a range of public and private institutions.¹² Towards 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; 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), “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.¹³

¹² 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.

¹³ Respondents who did not answer or 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 didn’t know about private broadcasters was dropped from descriptive statistics for both questions and the broadcast trust gap.

Our first observation is that those Africans who responded to the surveys indicated rather high levels of trust in both private and government radio. Nearly three quarters reported that they trust each media type “a lot” or “a very great deal”: 71 percent for private broadcasters; 73 percent for government broadcasters. Of course this means that more than one quarter said that their media sources could only be trusted “a little bit” or “not at all”. Nonetheless, it seems that trust in media in Africa exceeds media trust in advanced industrial democracies, although comparisons are highly tentative given variation in question wording and time period.¹⁴ Furthermore, in Africa, media trust equals or exceeds trust in other institutions.¹⁵ So while there does not seem to be a crisis of confidence in the African media as some media analysts suggest, there does seem to be room for improvement in media credibility.

Second, our most notable and surprising finding is that trust in private broadcast media lags behind trust in government sources. 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).¹⁶ It is troubling with respect to democratic development that trust in government broadcasters exceeds trust in private 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 less trusted than government sources, they are less likely to influence public attitudes and knowledge; as a result, the independent press will be unable to act as a counterweight to the power and influence of the

¹⁴ Based on World Value Surveys in the early 1990s, Newton and Norris (2000) report that 40 percent of respondents in 17 advanced industrial democracies had “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the press (55). Ladd (2004) reports similar results for the U.S. in 2000.

¹⁵ 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)

¹⁶ $t = -6.35$, degrees of freedom = 18180, and $p < 0.000$

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.

To investigate the issue of relative trust further, we created a measure, called “broadcast trust gap”, equal to trust in private broadcast services minus trust in public broadcast services. Individuals who trust private broadcasters more than public broadcasters have a positive score while those who trust private broadcasters less than public broadcasters have a negative broadcast trust gap. The largest category of Africans surveyed (69 percent) do not distinguish between private and government sources of broadcast news. These individuals reported equal levels of trust in private and public sources (broadcast trust gap = zero). The large number of indifferent respondents does little to assuage our concerns about the consequences of the trust gap; it still 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.

Additionally, 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 ($p < 0.05$); 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. Trust in private broadcasters is significantly lower than trust in government in nine of sixteen countries. Conversely, citizens trust private more than government broadcasters in five countries: Benin, Kenya, Nigeria,

Senegal and Zambia. In the remaining two countries the difference between trust in private and government broadcasting services is not statistically significant.¹⁷

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

In sum, it seems that the newly developing private media in Africa have not, on the whole, succeeded in their efforts to establish greater credibility than their government-owned counterparts, despite (or perhaps because) of their political independence. Although not universal, the negative media trust gaps are both intriguing and troubling. To help understand the causes of gaps in trust of private media versus public media, we theorize and then model the individual-level factors that are related to the media trust gaps. This will shed light on the factors that affect private and public media credibility, and also provide insights into the sectors of the population that are likely to be most open and responsive to private media influences.

How can we understand the private media's relative lack of credibility? The qualitative literature on African media suggest that private media might have difficulty establishing trust because of their low levels of professionalism and quality. The independent media in Africa can not easily establish reputations for being knowledgeable about politics because incumbent governments often deny them access to important political information. In addition, intense market pressures in poor countries can drive down the quality of commercial media. In order 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. Owners may encourage journalists and on-air personalities to use inflammatory language, exaggerate discord and present shocking news in order to attract audiences. Finally, the private media may lack

¹⁷ Although the difference is insignificant, the broadcast trust gap is negative for Cape Verde and Ghana.

mechanisms for establishing credibility given low levels of professionalism, weak penalties for inaccurate reporting and lack of third party verification.¹⁸

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. It has been argued that African publics are more democratic than they are liberal, and in particular that they are more oriented towards social consensus and less appreciative of the partisan rancor and bickering that often accompanies opposition activities. If this is an accurate characterization, then Africans are less likely to trust the private media not because of its poor quality, but instead because of its fractious and confrontational style.

In order to gain a greater understanding about the reasons for the relative distrust of private media, we now turn to an investigation of the individual-level characteristics that are associated with trust in private relative to public broadcast media in Africa.

III. Hypotheses

It is not unusual for private and public media to be in direct competition with each other in many countries in the world. According to one study, 24% of countries have both public and private newspapers amongst the top five newspapers in the country, and 61% of countries have both public and private television broadcasters amongst the top five television stations in the country (Djankov et al. 2001). Despite this, we are unaware of prior research on the subject of confidence in private versus government media.¹⁹ The literature on media trust has tended to

¹⁸ For comparative studies on challenges faced by the African media see: Bourgault (1995); Hyden et al. (2002); Islam (2002); Madamombe (2005); Nganguè (2001); Nyamnjoh (2005); Sandbrook (1996); Tettey (2002); Wanyeki (2002). For country studies that discuss the political economy of media production see: Alhassan (2005); Hasty (2005); Karikari (1994b); Mwesige (2004); Tower (2005); Yankah (2004).

¹⁹ In fact, even empirical questions concerning private and public media are rarely asked in surveys. One exception concerns Gibson's (1992, 349) study of democratic values amongst Moscovites, where only 55% of respondents agreed that private radios, television and newspapers should exist alongside state-owned media. In a related study,

examine either questions of confidence in the media in general or 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.

As a result, we derive our hypotheses by drawing on a wider body of knowledge about trust in institutions, rather than by reference to specific works on media trust. In this section we provide three families of hypotheses related to an individual's level of trust in private media relative to public media.

Political Sophistication

Our first set of hypotheses has to do with variations in levels of political sophistication amongst respondents. African citizens come from widely different backgrounds with respect to the information and skills they bring to bear when judging the trustworthiness of the media. Given the importance of political sophistication to political opinion in the USA, it is reasonable to expect that differing levels of sophistication amongst Africans may help explain differences in relative media trust.²⁰

If trust in private media is being depressed by its poor quality, we would expect to see the largest trust gap amongst the most politically sophisticated respondents. For example, better educated citizens might be expected to be more sensitive to the sensationalism and shoddiness of the private media than those less educated. Similarly, those more knowledgeable about the

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.

²⁰ See Luskin (1987) for a useful summary of the literature on political sophistication and Luskin and Bullock (2004) for discussion on the best ways to operationalize this variable.

political system might judge the failings of the private media more harshly than those who do not understand the process of governing.

If, on the other hand, the trust gap is related to a poor understanding of the role of the media in democracies, we might expect the opposite to be true and for sophistication to be related to relatively greater trust in private media relative to state media.²¹ Individuals who are better educated and more knowledgeable about politics will probably value having independent sources of information more than those with less investment in understanding politics. Conversely, individuals who are less informed about politics and less exposed to media in general are less likely to notice and penalize government media for its pro-incumbent bias.

When we disaggregate these claims, we end up with two sets of three predictions related to political sophistication. If the trust gap is driven by the poor quality of the private media, we would expect to see support for the following claims:

- Political Sophistication Hypothesis 1A: Education is negatively related to the media trust gap (trust in private media minus trust in public media).
- Political Sophistication Hypothesis 2A: Knowledge and understanding about politics is negatively related to the media trust gap.
- Political Sophistication Hypothesis 3A: Exposure to media news is negatively related to the media trust gap.

In other words, if the public is reacting to the low quality of the private media, then we would expect respondents with higher levels of political sophistication to trust public media more relative to private media.

If, on the other hand, the trust gap is related to a poor appreciation for the role of the media, we would expect to see support these hypotheses instead:

- Political Sophistication Hypothesis 1A: Education is positively related to the media trust gap.

²¹ See Gunther (1992, 149) for a similar argument about the ways that having a “skeptical disposition” may affect attitudes towards the press.

- Political Sophistication Hypothesis 2A: Knowledge and understanding about politics is positively related to the media trust gap.
- Political Sophistication Hypothesis 3A: Exposure to media news is positively related to the media trust gap.

Attitudes about political authority

If attitudes towards political authority are relevant then individuals with more pro-democratic and liberal attitudes should, in general, be more supportive of private media than public media. Compared to their counterparts they are more likely to appreciate the private media's criticism of the government, seeing it as an essential aspect of a free polity rather than as disrespect towards authority. In addition, liberal democrats are likely to be less trusting of government media because of its historical legacy as a mouthpiece for authoritarian leaders and its current pro-incumbent bias. Individuals with less liberal values, on the other hand, are less likely to appreciate the fractious spectacle presented by the private media.²²

Individual attitudes towards state institutions and officials may also be pertinent. Individuals with high levels of trust in state institutions in general can be expected to also have high levels of trust in state media institutions. Since 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. These same individuals are also less likely to question the official line and therefore less likely to see the need for private media institutions.

Conversely, 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 towards the private media because they 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.

²² Although the measure we employ is named "democratic attitudes", its component questions reflect both liberal and democratic beliefs.

These arguments lead to the following three hypotheses:

- Political Attitude Hypothesis 1: Pro-democratic attitudes are positively related to the media trust gap (trust in private media minus trust in public media).
- Political Attitude Hypothesis 2: Trust in political institutions (electoral commission, army, police, courts) is negatively related to the media trust gap.
- Political Attitude Hypothesis 3: Belief that government officials are corrupt is positively related to the media trust gap.

Confirmation of these political attitude 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 and undermine the argument that the trust gap is a product of low quality private media.

Partisan orientation

Since government-owned media in Africa usually reports more favorably on the incumbent government than private media, we might expect confidence in the media to reflect partisan biases. Pro-government respondents should tend to view government media as more trustworthy than private media, and conversely for respondents who are critical of the government. 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. This is consistent with findings from research in the US. According to Gunther (1992, 156), “group membership predicted credibility judgments more systematically than any of the other variables measured.” The partisan orientation perspective produces the two hypotheses below:

- Partisan Orientation Hypothesis 1: Feeling close to the party in power is negatively related to the media trust gap (trust in private media minus trust in public media).
- Partisan Orientation Hypothesis 2: Satisfaction with the performance of the President is negatively related to the media trust gap.

As with the political attitude hypotheses, confirmation of the partisan orientation hypotheses will support the argument that the trust gap is due to a discomfort with the political

role played by the independent media and undermine the argument that the trust gap is a product of low quality private media.

IV. Analysis of Ordered Logit Models

We evaluate the theoretical arguments presented earlier by estimating an ordered logit model for the broadcast media trust gap. Our analysis is presented in Table 1 and a description of the variables appears in the appendix. For the sake of parsimony, this paper first focuses on interpreting the results from Round 3 and then briefly notes the consistency of results from Round 2 and the pooled data.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Political sophistication

A number of measures of political sophistication have a clear and statistically significant effect on the media gap, however all three of these are consistent with the claim that sophistication leads to more relative trust in the private media, not less. The argument that the media gap is driven by poor private media quality finds no support in this data.

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.²³ 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.

Lastly, we found only partial support for the contention that increased exposure to the news increases trust in private media and decreased trust in government media. There is no statistically significant association between exposure to radio or television news and relative trust in private electronic media. However, in Round 3 there is a strong correlation between the

²³ Round 2 did not include the political knowledge questions so frequency of political discussions serves as a proxy.

amount of newspaper news consumed by a respondent and increases in relative trust in private broadcast media, which is consistent with a political sophistication explanation. Of the three different news media, newspapers provide the most detailed and in-depth account of the news and therefore consumption of print news is the news exposure proxy we would expect to find most closely associated with political sophistication. Furthermore, given the relatively small print runs of most African newspapers, a respondent who often consumes print media news is one who is motivated to read the paper because quality of news is important to him. For these reasons, we feel that an association between exposure to print news sources and increased trust in private news media provides some support for a political sophistication hypothesis.

Attitudes about political authority

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. Individuals who believe that there are high levels of corruption in the government also have higher levels of relative trust in the private media, while individuals who have high levels of trust in political institutions have lower levels of relative trust in the private media.

These results suggest that the media is seen by citizens through the frame of broader beliefs about the state and the proper relationship between state and society. Our results are consistent with the notion that respondents judge the private media's relatively more confrontational stance towards the state in light of their beliefs concerning the trustworthiness of the state and appropriate discourse within the polity. Furthermore, the fact that relative levels of trust in the private media covary with beliefs about state corruption argues that the trust gap is not driven solely by attributes of the private media, such as its poor quality.

Partisan orientation

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, i.e. to have higher levels of relative 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.

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 towards private and government broadcast media.

If our model is correct then 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.²⁴

[Insert Table 2 about here]

We begin by evaluating the impact of the two most significant political sophistication variables. Increasing our respondent's education from no formal education to at least some

²⁴ We examined only the impact of the most significant variables, those significant at the 1% level or better.

college education increases the probability that he trusts private broadcast media more than government broadcast media by 3.9 percent while decreasing the probability that he trusts government broadcast media more than private broadcast media by 4.3 percent. There is also a 0.3 percent increase in the probability of trusting both kinds of media equally. Similarly, increasing a respondent's level of political knowledge from the minimum to the maximum level increases relative trust in private media by 2.4 percent and decreases relative trust in government media by 2.8 percent.

Variables associated with attitudes about political culture have a considerably greater impact, with democratic attitudes having the strongest effect on relative trust levels of all variables simulated. Increasing democratic attitudes from the bottom to the top of our scale increases the probability that our respondent trusts private media relatively more by 10.2 percent and decreases the probability that he trusts government media relatively more by 5.9 percent. 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.

Conversely, relative trust in private media has a strong negative relationship with institutional trust. If a respondent's trust in the state increases from the bottom to the top of its range, then he is 8.2 percent less likely to trust private media more than public media and 4 percent more likely to trust government media more than private media. The more a respondent trusts the basic institutions of the state, the less he trusts the private media that is constantly questioning the performance of those institutions.

The negative effect of pro-status quo attitudes on the trust gap is also apparent from the impact of the partisanship variables. Approval of presidential performance has almost as strong a negative impact on relative trust in private media as democratic attitudes have a positive impact. If a respondent changes his opinion of presidential performance from “strongly disapprove” to “strongly approve”, he is 9.8 percent less likely to trust private media more than public media and 4.6 percent more likely to trust government media more than private media. The impact of supporting the party in power is similar in direction, but not as strong in magnitude.

Country specific effects on media trust

In order to account for country specific effects, our analysis includes controls for each respondent’s country. We used country dummies rather than a multilevel analysis to account for country level heterogeneity because the sample includes only sixteen countries, too few to properly utilize multilevel logistical regression techniques. 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. Table 3 illustrates the substantive effect on relative trust in broadcast media for an individual moving to each country from Ghana.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

For example, moving our modal respondent from Ghana to Senegal should result in a 14 percent increase in the probability that he trusts private broadcast media more than public broadcast media and an associated 4.5 percent decrease in the probability that he trusts government broadcast media more than private government media. (The probability that he is indifferent between the two also decreases by 9.5 percent). The difference between Ghana and Senegal is the strongest of the country effects, but we also find significant positive impacts by moving our respondent from Ghana to Zambia and Kenya as well.

We admit we are somewhat puzzled by these results and have failed to arrive at systematic conjectures to explain inter-country variance. The only pattern we have noted is that the press is less free in the three countries with a positive impact on the trust gap, while it is more free in the four countries with a negative impact on the trust gap (Freedom House 2005). One explanation is that press freedom affects the quality and independence of government media more than private media. If this were so, then tightly controlled government media would be less trusted than private media, which might maintain some independence even in the face of a difficult environment. When the government eases its restrictions on the media, the quality of the government media improves faster than the quality of independent media and the media trust gap declines. Regardless of the explanation, the pattern is hard to substantiate with only seven countries.

Consistency and summary of results

While this paper 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 the virtually same results, with all but one of the variables that were significant for round 3 retaining its sign and significance for the alternate specifications.²⁵ The same variables retain their sign 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. The consistency of the relationship between the media trust gap and its causes, no matter how measured, is striking.

²⁵ The exposure to newspaper news variable is highly significant in the analysis that uses Round 3 data alone but it is not significant when Round 2 data is examined.

In sum, several inferences can be drawn from the results presented in this section. First, there is no evidence that the trust gap is related to the perceived lower quality of the print media. Second, it is clear that the private media is perceived as a gadfly, which is why evaluations of its trustworthiness are so strongly influenced by beliefs about how contentious 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 towards the state and regime are controlled for, partisanship still has a powerful effect on trust, and vice versa. Respondents do not seem to be conflating factors to do with democracy in the abstract with those relating to the performance of a particular administration.

V. Conclusion

In this paper we have examined why, on balance, African respondents have greater levels of trust in public than private media. The data supported all three theoretical arguments advanced: political sophistication, attitudes towards political authority and partisan orientation were all implicated in the media trust gap. Education and democratic attitudes had the strongest pro-private media effect on the broadcast media gap while trust in state institutions and approval of presidential performance had the strongest effect in the opposite direction. The statistical results suggest that this problem is best analyzed using a pluralistic approach.

The one consistent theme throughout all of our findings was that trust in media was relational, it was strongly affected by factors associated with framing or interpreting media behavior. The trust gap is not a product of an immature and poor quality private media sphere, and cannot simply be alleviated by increasing the quality of the private press. Nor will it go away if governance improves in a country. To the contrary our findings indicate that this will decrease trust in private media relative to that of the government.

These findings have consequences for policies of democracy promotion in Africa. If donors believe it is important to have a varied and effective set of voices in the media, then they need to do more than simply fund the continuing education of journalists and editors. Without the right political culture, a diverse media ecosystem will not develop.

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 they need to help change the political culture in these consolidating democracies. It seems the gap yokes the private press to the public good, linking its self-interest to the broader needs of the polity.

Figure 1: Comparison of Mean Trust in Private and Government Broadcast Media

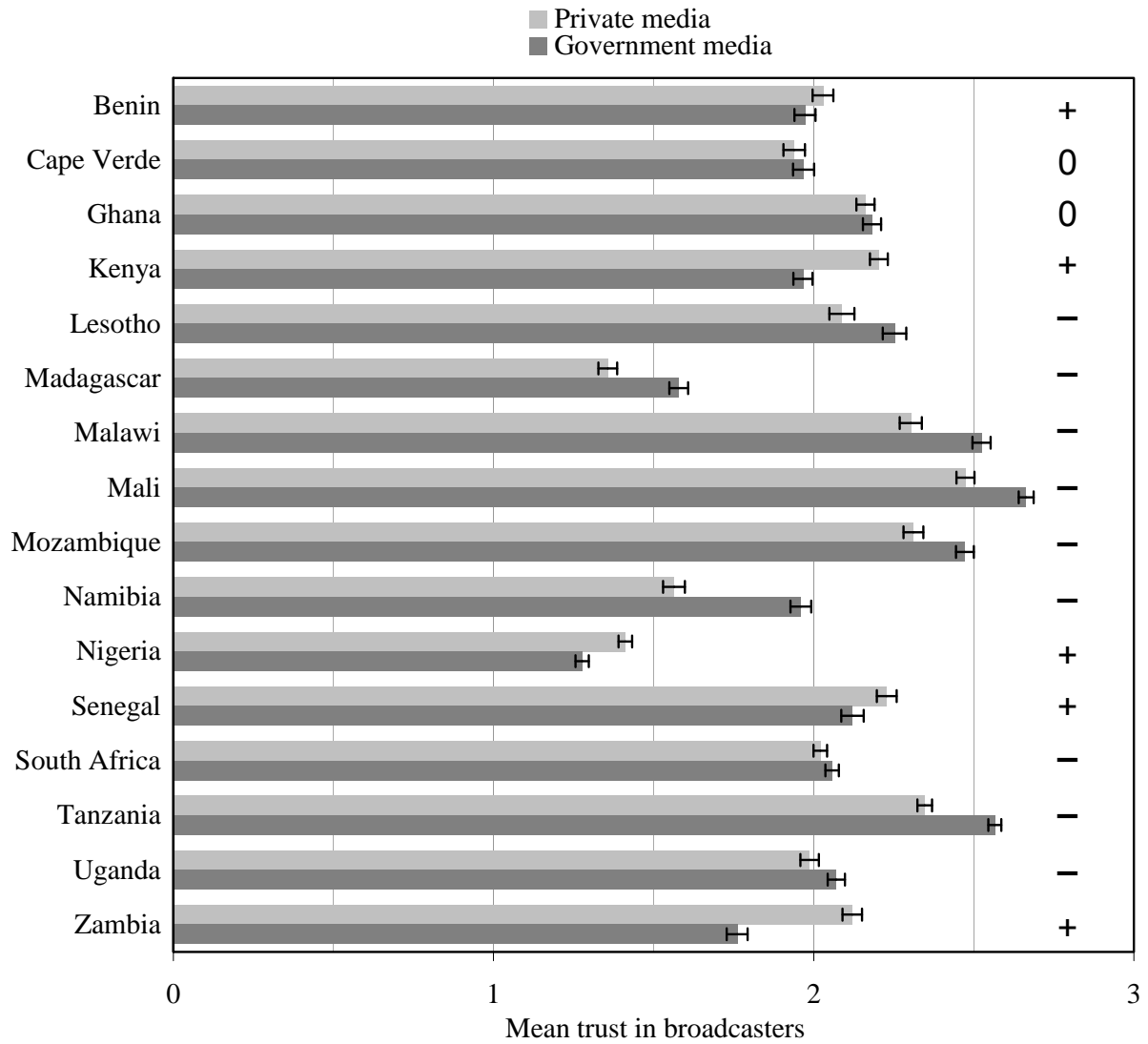


Table 1: Ordered logit regressions of broadcast trust gap

	Round 3	Round 2	Rounds 2 & 3
Political Sophistication			
Education	0.111 (0.024) ***	0.154 (0.021) ***	0.144 (0.016) ***
Knowledge	0.036 (0.014) **	—	—
Discuss politics	—	0.113 (0.025) ***	0.074 (0.018) ***
Exposure to radio news	-0.012 (0.018)	-0.008 (0.017)	-0.008 (0.012)
Exposure to television news	0.014 (0.015)	0.082 (0.014) ***	0.051 (0.010) ***
Exposure to newspaper news	0.042 (0.016) **	0.001 (0.015)	0.020 (0.011)
Attitudes about political authority			
Democratic attitudes	0.178 (0.033) ***	0.280 (0.032) ***	0.240 (0.023) ***
Institutional trust	-0.160 (0.028) ***	-0.154 (0.028) ***	-0.159 (0.018) ***
Corrupt officials	0.059 (0.030) *	0.131 (0.029) ***	0.075 (0.021) ***
Partisan orientation			
Winner status	-0.201 (0.027) ***	-0.108 (0.024) ***	-0.148 (0.018) ***
Presidential performance	-0.189 (0.023) ***	-0.133 (0.023) ***	-0.178 (0.016) ***
Control variables			
Age	0.000 (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Gender (female)	0.013 (0.038)	-0.026 (0.035)	0.001 (0.025)
Urban residence	0.292 (0.044) ***	0.191 (0.041) ***	0.215 (0.029) ***
Basic needs	-0.024 (0.021)	0.030 (0.021)	0.011 (0.014)
Country variables			
Benin	0.084 (0.113)		0.029 (0.094)
Cape Verde	-0.109 (0.145)	-0.125 (0.105)	-0.151 (0.082)
Kenya	0.678 (0.105) ***	0.554 (0.093) ***	0.611 (0.069) ***
Lesotho	-0.062 (0.129)	0.051 (0.122)	-0.014 (0.088)
Madagascar	-0.440 (0.112) ***	-0.380 (0.110) ***	-0.435 (0.095) ***
Malawi	-0.105 (0.120)		-0.249 (0.080) **
Mali	-0.318 (0.111) **	-0.338 (0.104) ***	-0.317 (0.075) ***
Mozambique	-0.037 (0.126)	-0.497 (0.116) ***	-0.289 (0.082) ***
Namibia	-0.988 (0.142) ***	-0.476 (0.099) ***	-0.627 (0.073) ***
Nigeria	-0.079 (0.096)	0.090 (0.093)	-0.014 (0.066)
Senegal	0.701 (0.117) ***	0.187 (0.109)	0.388 (0.079) ***
South Africa	-0.185 (0.094) *	-0.221 (0.092) *	-0.233 (0.064) ***
Tanzania	-0.046 (0.112)	0.127 (0.101)	0.046 (0.074)
Uganda	0.038 (0.102)	0.234 (0.091) **	0.161 (0.067) *
Zambia	0.567 (0.109) ***	-0.488 (0.103) ***	0.013 (0.076)
Intercepts			
1	-3.964 (0.176)	-3.640 (0.167)	-3.806 (0.119)
2	-2.833 (0.169)	-2.180 (0.156)	-2.522 (0.112)
3	-1.700 (0.167)	-0.915 (0.153)	-1.326 (0.110)
4	1.885 (0.167)	2.648 (0.155)	2.215 (0.111)
5	3.079 (0.170)	4.040 (0.159)	3.506 (0.113)
6	4.312 (0.178)	5.904 (0.179)	4.990 (0.122)
Observations	13468	15867	29815

Notes: Dependent variable is broadcast trust gap. Entries are ordered logit regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05. Source: Afrobarometer Rounds 2 and 3.

Table 2: Substantive effects of varying selected variables over their range.

		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%

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

Table 3: Country specific effects on level of relative trust in private and public broadcast media.

	Trust private media more	Indifferent	Trust government media more
Kenya	+13.5%	-9.1%	-4.4%
Madagascar	-6.5%	+2.0%	+4.5%
Mali	-4.9%	+1.8%	+3.1%
Namibia	-12.1%	-0.2%	+12.3%
Senegal	+14.0%	-9.5%	-4.5%
South Africa	-3.0%	+1.3%	+1.7%
Zambia	+11.0%	-7.2%	-3.8%

Appendix A

Question Wording for Round 3:²⁶

Broadcast trust gap: “How much do you trust the following institutions [to do what is right]: government broadcasting service [name of TV and radio stations]; independent or privately-owned broadcasting services [names of examples]?” The broadcast trust gap is equal to trust in independent broadcast services minus trust in government broadcasting services.

Education: “What is the highest level of education you have completed?”

Political knowledge index: “Can you tell me the name of:” **1.** “Your Member of Parliament?” **2.** “Your Local Government Councillor?” **3.** “The Vice President?” “Do you happen to know:” **4.** “Which political party has the most seats in parliament?” **5.** “How many times someone can legally be elected President?” **6.** “Whose responsibility is it to determine whether or not a law is constitutional?”

Discuss politics: “When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters: frequently; occasionally; or never?”

Exposure to radio news: “How often do you get news from the following sources: radio?”

Exposure to television news: “How often do you get news from the following sources: television?”

Exposure to newspaper news: “How often do you get news from the following sources: newspapers?”

Democratic attitudes index: “Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement A or Statement B:” **1.** “A. As citizens, we should be more active in questioning the actions of our leaders; B. In our country these days, we should show more respect for authority.” **2.** “A. Since leaders represent everyone, they should not favour their own family or group; B. Once in office, leaders are obliged to help their home community.” **3.** “A. All people should be permitted to vote, even if they do not fully understand all the issues in an election; B. Only those who are sufficiently well educated should be allowed to choose our leaders.” **4.** “A. Government should be able to ban any organization that goes against its policies; B. We should be able to join any organization, whether or not the government approves of it.” **5.** “A. Government should close newspapers that print false stories or misinformation; B. The news media should be free to publish any story that they see fit without fear of being shut down.” **6.** “A. Government should not allow the expression of political views that are fundamentally different from the views of the majority. B. People should be able to speak their minds about politics free of government influence, no matter how unpopular their views may be.” **7.** “A: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections; B: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country’s leaders.” **8.** “A: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore

²⁶ The questionnaires are standardized across countries, however there are a few minor variations in question wording. For exact question wording, see <http://www.afrobarometer.org/questionnaires.html>. All missing data and non-responses were dropped from the analysis using list-wise deletion. Don’t know responses were coded to a defensible position for the index variables.

unnecessary to have many political parties in [country]; B: Many political parties are needed to make sure that [nationality] have real choices in who governs them.” **9.** “A: The members of the Parliament represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the President does not agree; B: Since the President represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what the Parliament thinks.” **10.** “A: Since the President was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong; B: The President must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.”

Institutional trust index: “How much do you trust the following institutions [to do what is right]: the police, courts of law, the army, the electoral commission?”

Corrupt officials: “How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven’t you heard enough about them to say: Members of Parliament; Elected Local Government Councillors; National Government Officials; Local Government Officials; Police; Tax Officials; Judges and Magistrates; Health Workers; Teachers and school administrators?”

Winner status: “Do you feel close to any political party? If yes, which one?” .

Presidential performance: “Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past twelve months, or haven’t you heard enough about them to say: President [name].”

Age: “How old were you at your last birthday?”.

Gender: (male=0; female=1)

Urban residence: “Do you come from a rural or urban area?” (rural=0; urban=1)

Basic needs index: “Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or your family gone without: enough food to eat; enough clean water for home use; medicines or medical treatment; electricity in your home; enough fuel to cook your food; a cash income?”

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables, Round 3.

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max
Broadcast trust gap	-0.027	0.919	-3	3
Education	0.932	0.970	0	3
Political Knowledge	2.636	1.634	0	6
Exposure to radio news	3.169	1.268	0	4
Exposure to television news	1.754	1.746	0	4
Exposure to newspaper news	1.144	1.465	0	4
Democratic attitudes	2.678	0.573	0	4
Institutional trust	1.790	0.839	0	3
Corrupt officials	1.306	0.690	0	3
Winner status	1.192	0.744	0	2
Presidential performance	1.890	0.962	0	3
Age	36.537	14.726	18	100
Gender	0.500	0.500	0	1
Urban residence	0.382	0.486	0	1
Basic needs	1.356	0.992	0	4

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