



# (DIS)TRUST OF SPANISH JOURNALISTS IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS BASED ON THE STUDY OF ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The scientific community has shown an increasing interest in exploring the practices and routines of journalists in different contexts (Hanitzsch *et al.*, 2011). The trust journalists place in public institutions is a key variable to understand their professional culture (Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2012; Brants, de Vreese, Möller & van Praag, 2010; van Dalen, Albæk & de Vreese, 2011), as well as citizens' interest and trust in politics (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). The goal of this paper is to identify the level of trust of Spanish journalists in public institutions and to verify whether media type, regional scope and ownership influence these trust levels. As part of the “Worlds of Journalism Study”, an international research project, we surveyed a probabilistic sample (n=390) of Spanish journalists, stratified by media type and region, from March 2014 to May 2015. In comparison to the results of the last survey carried out by Hanitzsch & Berganza (2014), the findings of this study show a significant decrease in trust levels (specially towards politicians), probably as a consequence of the economic crisis. The analysis also revealed partial differences in journalists' trust levels according to media type (TV, radio, printed press, online press, etc.), but showed homogeneous trust levels among journalists working for media with different geographical reach (regional, national) and ownership (public, private, etc.). It is necessary to further develop this line of research with explanatory models that allow delving into the origins of the distrust of Spanish journalists.

**Keywords:** Trust, public institutions, journalists, media, politics.

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1 This paper is a translation. The original text, peer-reviewed and edited is published in Spanish in the same volume and issue.



## The role of the media in citizens' distrust in public institutions

The difficult economic situation that affects the whole of Spain since 2008, as a result of the international financial crisis, has been exacerbated by the weakness of the production model in which the country had based its growth in the years prior to the crisis, and by the continuous succession of political scandals - mostly related to corruption crimes - surrounding the different political parties and striking all levels of government. This scenario clearly influences citizens' perception of public institutions, as documented by the most recent surveys of public opinion. According to a survey carried out in 2015 by the Spanish Sociological Research Centre (CIS), the public perceives the current political situation as problematic, largely due to political corruption. The situation is not exclusive to Spain, since, according to the Eurobarometer survey, which collects data from 2003-2013, the distrust of citizens towards political parties grew significantly from 2008 in southern European countries where political and economic problems have also worsened (like in Spain), especially Portugal and Greece. Unlike what happens with northern European countries, in the southern European countries the levels of distrust towards political parties, the government and the parliament are the highest since 2003. Citizens' dissatisfaction with democracy is very similar; as Mair (2006, p. 6) points out, "never before in the history of post-war Europe have governments and their political leaders [...] been held in such low regard".

The decline in the trust placed by citizens in the institutions that govern and manage the co-existence of societies (the parliament, the government, political parties, judiciary, police, politicians) clearly indicates that people do not believe in the capacity of action of these agents. Trust, as Misztal (1996) points out, involves projecting hope in the future, and believing that the performance of a particular person or institution will respond to our wishes. Institutional trust, therefore, involves having a high expectation that an institution will act satisfactorily in the future (Hudson, 2006). When this belief fails, mistrust dominates citizens' perception of public authorities, affecting the welfare of societies. As a result, citizens develop a cynical attitude that will dominate their perception of reality even if there is no supporting evidence, which is a disposition characterised by the understanding that the political system is corrupt and that its representatives are partisan and Machiavellian agents who do not care for the common good nor good governance, and only want to get out victorious of every process and activity in which they are involved (Capella & Jamieson, 1977).

The media have been identified as potential explanatory factors of why citizens do not trust in their representatives. In other words, the negative media coverage of public institutions and political actors would contribute to a growing detachment of citizens from these agents. This is one of the arguments of the so-called *media malaise* theory (Robinson, 1976), which points out that a predominantly adverse and anti-institutional news framing has clear effects in the receiver: "a negative and highly critical media treatment of the political institutions and politicians has resulted in an increase in the negative opinions and perceptions about political objects" (Uriarte, 2002, p. 364).

The spiral of cynicism theory points out in the same direction. According to this theory, the style and content of political journalism can encourage increased cynicism and distrust towards public institutions in the audience if, for example, the news persistently respond to a pattern of negativity. In addition, as Capella and Jamieson (1997) point out, the influence of the media is greater in those topics in which our direct experience is scarce. Therefore, since citizens usually do not have close contact with their leaders nor their political campaigns and performances,



the press is responsible for assuming that mediation. These authors affirm that the strategic approach that is typical of contemporary journalism is precisely what encourages a reading of the political reality in which those who manage the public affairs are represented as actors who are only interested in their own benefits, and eager to win as much as they can and at any cost. This framing would be responsible for the low trust levels citizens place in their political leaders - and, by extension, in the institutions they govern-

However, the extent of this influence might be limited by the scepticism of citizens towards the media players. Along this line, research has revealed that the distrust of individuals towards the media moderates the effects of the agenda-setting (Tsfati, 2003), and that the same attitude could modulate the media's influence on the cynicism of the audience towards the institutions.

In any case, research studies in this area do not corroborate a schematic and linear model of influence in which media content fully determines the public's trust in institutions. The impact of news in trust levels seems to depend on a more complex set of variables, beyond the critical level of the news, which makes it necessary to take into consideration the media type, the content of the message and previous trust levels (Van Dalen, Albaek & De Vreese, 2011). Revisions carried out after the formulation of this model have emphasised that cynicism, which is increasingly detected among citizens, is not triggered by the media's representation of the political reality. In the study of this phenomenon it is necessary to observe carefully what perceptions of the political system dominate among those who are in charge of making that message, and therefore to draw the attention to the kind of relationship that those who practice journalism maintain with the political actors and the values that characterise that interaction (Van Dalen, Albaek & De Vreese 2011; Brants *et al.*, 2010).

Given the possible connections between the attitude of those who exercise journalism and the way they carry out their work, it is reasonable to consider that the predominantly negative coverage of the political reality is related to journalists' perception of the political actors and the institutions they govern. For this reason, the two research questions this study aims to answer are the following:

**RQ1.** What is the level of trust that Spanish journalists place in the main political institutions (government, parliament, political parties and politicians in general)?

**RQ2.** Does this level of trust vary according to the characteristics of the medium in which journalists work?

### Media organisation as a factor of influence in journalists' trust levels

The academia has identified multiple factors as key to understand trust levels. Some of these factors have been grouped in what certain authors (Mishler & Rose, 2001) have identified as the institutional theories of political trust, which argue that trust is politically endogenous, and therefore, is a consequence of the performance of political actors and institutions themselves, for example in the field of economy, the quality of democracy or the freedom of the press. In contrast, cultural theories hypothesise that political trust is exogenous and an extension of interpersonal trust. However, some factors are not mutually exclusive. In fact, previous research studies (Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2012) indicate that the factors that influence the trust of journalists in public institutions



are very diverse: the mode in which such entities act, interpersonal trust, journalistic culture and the type of media ownership.

In relation to the latter factor, which would correspond with the organisational level, it has been demonstrated that, for example, journalists working in state-owned media place higher trust levels in the institutions. The finding proves that the study of the factors related to the media organisation is instrumental in communication research, as it has been pointed out by other works that confirm that the characteristics of the medium are crucial to understand news production (Cook, 1996; Gans, 2003; Weaver & Löffelholz, 2008) and published content (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), as well as to interpret the functions and roles that journalists believe the media should perform in society (Zhu *et al.*, 1997). Likewise, the variables related to the media organisation (for example, the fact that a medium can be considered to be popular or a quality news outlet) have proved to be important in the study of the imbalances between the ideal role journalists identify themselves with and the role they actually perform in their work (Mellado & van Dalen, 2014).

The meso or organisational level includes the environment of the newsroom, and the managerial and economic context of news production (Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013), where media ownership, size, regional scope and type also come into play. Thus, as we have seen, while the institutional and cultural theories point out other variables that affect the trust of information professionals, the organisational level is maintained as an interesting object of study because, as Hanitzsch and Berganza (2012) indicate, this level accounts for 7.5% of the variance in journalists' trust in institutions.

This figure, which was extracted from an international comparative study and has to be taken into account, leads us to broaden our knowledge about the influence of the organisational aspect of the trust that Spanish journalists place in public institutions, taking into consideration the type, scope and ownership of the media in which they work.

### Approach of the study

With regard to the types of media companies, the Spanish media landscape has been transformed since the start of the economic crisis. Proof of this is that it is estimated that between 2008 and 2013 in Spain there were 9,471 job losses in the media sector and 284 media companies disappeared. These figures shared by the Press Association of Madrid (APM, 2013) refer to all kinds of media workers, not only journalists. The breakdown is impossible to carry out given that Spain does not have a registry of active journalists. However, perhaps the most interesting aspect of the media crisis has been the emergence of the new born-digital media created by journalists, many of which lost their jobs during the crisis (APM, 2013, p. 85). Due to the lighter structure of online media and the professional experiences of journalists working in such organisations, it is possible that their trust in public institutions varies. In fact, a study based on a survey to a sample of journalists from Europe and the United States found out higher levels of negativity in online media in comparison to printed media (Quandt, 2008), which could be related, among other factors, with the trust journalists place in their institutions.

It is also evident that the crisis has not affected the different media organisations in Spain in the same way. While turnover has declined in all of them since 2008, the reduction of aggregate income between 2008 and 2012 varied across media organisations. For example, the losses amount to 21% in the radio industry, 31% in television and



30% in the print press (APM, 2013). The differences that exist in terms of professional environments across different media organisations lead us to formulate the following hypotheses:

**H1.** There are significant differences in the trust levels journalists place in political institutions (the government, the parliament, political parties and politicians in general) depending on the medium in which they work (television, radio, printed press, online press, etc.).

Concerning the scope of the media, Hanitzsch and Berganza (2012) suggest that the freedom of the press, and therefore the degree of autonomy guaranteed by public institutions to the media, can shape journalists' perceptions of these institutions. In this way, political institutions, organised according to the different levels of government that exist across the Spanish territory, can exert different intensities of pressure on the media that report on their activities. In this regard, it is worth examining whether there are differences in the level of trust of journalists depending on the regional scope of the medium in which they work, since it is precisely this variable what largely determines the institutions they cover, that is to say, the level of government (municipal, regional, or national) on which the medium reports.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the media with smaller territorial scope (municipal and regional) tend to depend more directly on the advertising investment of public institutions, which can exert a direct influence on their journalists' perception of autonomy (Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013) and, as a result, could alter their trust in the institutions. Likewise, the regional scope of the medium is often related to its size. Thus, a medium that covers local news usually is smaller than a medium that produces national news, which results in variations in the organisational environment that could affect the trust of journalists. Based on the previous arguments, we have formulated this second hypothesis:

**H2.** There are significant differences in the trust levels that journalists place in public institutions depending on the regional scope of the media they work for (local, regional, national).

Moreover, as far as the ownership of the media is concerned, earlier studies present it as one of the main factors that determine the production of news at the organisational level (Donohue, Olien & Tichenor, 1985; Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013; Weaver *et al.*, 2007; Zhu *et al.*, 1997). However, there is no consensus in the academic literature on whether journalists from private media place a lower level of trust in institutions (McManus, 1994) or not (Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2012) than journalists from public media. Reich and Hanitzsch (2013, p. 147) indicate, in their study on the influences perceived by journalists from 18 countries, that journalists from public media show less autonomy than their peers in the private media, which could be related to the levels of distrust in political institutions.

In Western Europe, the ownership of the media is usually divided in public, state and private media<sup>2</sup> (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011), although in Spain the number of media directly managed by public institutions (i.e. state media) is very small, according to the directory of active media created for this study based on the in-depth review of the

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2 The difference between state and public media is often unclear. When the medium is directly owned by the government (whether national, regional or municipal) it is considered to be a state medium, and when it is run by a legally independent entity that receives government subsidies, obtained from taxes or compulsory subscriptions, it is considered to be public.



data provided by the Press Association of Madrid (APM) and the “Communication Agenda” created by the Spanish government. In any case, as Hanitzsch and Berganza (2012) point out, within the organisational level, the ownership of the media explains about two thirds of the variations in the trust of journalists in public institutions. This has lead us to suggest a third hypothesis:

**H3.** There are significant differences in the trust levels that journalists place in public institutions according to the ownership of the media they work for (public, private, mixed, state).

## Method of analysis

### Sample and procedure

The present study was carried out within the framework of the international project *Worlds of Journalism Study* (WJS, [www.worldsofjournalism.org](http://www.worldsofjournalism.org)), funded by the University of Munich (Germany) and supplemented by funds from the project CSO2013-44874-R of the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness. The study is based on a national survey among a cross-section of Spanish journalists, and carried out following a method designed and validated by the researchers participating in the WJS project. Data collection took place between March 2014 and May 2015. The survey was done by telephone by pollsters previously trained by the Spanish research team. To be precise, sampling was carried out in several stages, which included clustering and stratification by media size (large/small), media type (newspaper / news agency / radio / television / magazine / online media) and autonomous region. In view of the impossibility to obtain a national list of active journalists in Spain, we calculated the size of the population by subtracting the 20% of dismissals estimated by the Press Association of Madrid (APM, 2013) from the average point of the range proposed by Díaz-Nosty for the year 2010 ( $n_1 = 22,550$ ). Based on this operation we calculated our study population ( $n_2 = 18,000$ ) and the sample for the survey ( $n = 390$ ), to obtain a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%.

The sample selection firstly involved the selection of clusters, taking as reference the media organisations as aggregate sample units. We created a list ( $n_3 = 382$ ) that includes the media organisations mentioned in the report of the Press Association of Madrid (APM, 2013) and the Communication Agenda of the Spanish government. After the stratification process (table 1), a total of 117 media organisations were randomly selected (an effective response rate of 62.9% from a total of 186 consulted media). Only 3 people were surveyed in media organisations that were considered to be “small” and 5 people in “large media”<sup>3</sup>. The final valid sample consisted of 390 journalists (an effective response rate of 82.28% from a total of 474 surveyed journalists).

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3 In each medium we chose at least one journalist from the lowest level of the newsroom hierarchy (reporters), one from the middle management level (e.g. desk heads, junior editors) and one from the upper echelon of the editorial hierarchy (chief editors and their deputies).



Table 1. Distribution of selected media companies according to size and autonomous community

Autonomous Community	Media type											
	Newspaper		News agency		Radio		Television		Magazines		Digital media	
	Large	Small	Large	Small	Large	Small	Large	Small	Large	Small	Large	Small
Andalusia		6						3				5
Aragon		2		1		1	1					
Asturias						1		1				
Balearic Islands		2				1						
Canary Islands								1				1
Cantabria		1										
Castilla La Mancha		2					1	2				
Castilla y León		2										3
Catalonia		10				1		3	1			4
Valencian Community	1	7				1						2
Extremadura												
Galicia	1	3				1		1				1
Madrid	2	4	1		2	3	2	1		3	7	2
Murcia												
Navarra	1	1				1	1	1				
Basque Country		3		1		1		2				1
La Rioja		1				1						
Ceuta and Melilla		1										
Total number of media	5	45	1	2	2	12	5	15	1	3	7	19

Source: Authors' own creation.

## Measures

In order to measure the trust placed by journalists in the Spanish political institutions, we created a political trust index (1-5), where 1 represents “no trust” and 5 “total trust”. The trust index was constructed based on the average mean scores of 4 institutions: a) the parliament, b) the government, c) political parties and d) politicians in general. The validity of this trust index was confirmed by means of exploratory factor analysis (EFA), which revealed



its one-dimensionality. This analysis allows for the identification of underlying factors in a number of variables (Pérez-Gil, Chacón & Moreno, 2000; Macía, 2010; Igartua, 2006). Specifically, the EFA suggested a latent structure of a single component, explaining 61.57% of the variance for the set of 4 indicators. The Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of sampling suggested that the sample was appropriate for factor analysis ( $KMO=0.688$ ). Concerning internal consistency, our trust index also obtained an appropriate level of reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.787$ ), according to the ideal minimum value ( $> 0.70$ ) suggested by Cronbach (1951) and Hayes (2005).

## Analysis

The survey questionnaire was reviewed by the research team and subsequently coded with SPSS (version 21). This was followed by a preliminary and exploratory analysis of data to detect missing information and determine the reliability of the measures. To verify the research hypotheses, we conducted a descriptive analysis to calculate the measures of central tendency and dispersion and, subsequently, an inferential analysis with the mean difference tests *Student's t* and (one-way) *Anova*. This last analysis was performed with a *bootstrap* of 1000 samples (with a 95% confidence level and fixed bias).

## Results

The sample of surveyed journalists ( $n = 390$ ) belongs primarily to print media and news agencies (47.4%) and, to a lesser extent, to radio and television companies (29.7%) and online media (22.9%). The vast majority works for local and regional media (75.9%), while the rest works for national media (24.1%). With respect to the ownership of the media, only 14.9% of the respondents work for public or state media, while 85.1% work for private media. Most of them are men (59%) with an average age of 39.5 years. Almost all of them possess a bachelor's degree (72.3%), while only 22.6% have a master's degree and 1.8% a Ph.D. degree. A small share only had secondary education (3.3%). In terms of the position they occupy in the media they work for, 65.1% were listed as reporters, 22.8% as junior editors and 12.1% as senior managers or directives. Most journalists work full time for a media company (85.6%), except in some cases in which journalists were freelancers (9.2%) or worked part-time (5.1%). Only 32.8% mentioned working for a single specialised journalistic field and just 26% admitted to practice a religion.

The level of trust that journalists place in political institutions in Spain (the parliament, the government, political parties and politicians in general) obtained an average mean score ( $M=2.29$ ,  $SD= 0.70$ ) in the 5-point rating scale (where 5 is the highest level of trust). This score increases ( $M=2.60$ ,  $SD= 0.60$ ) when other institutions are included in the variable (the judiciary, the police, the military, unions, religious leaders and news media). Therefore, in general terms, journalists distrust political institutions more than the rest of the institutions in the country (with the exception of religious leaders and unions).

This general trust level towards the institutions is significantly lower,  $t(482)=-5.740$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $BootCI_{95}=-0.61$  to  $-0.31$ ,  $d=0.67$ , than the one obtained in the previous survey carried out as part of the WJS ( $M=2.75$ ,  $SD=0.67$ ) and completed in 2011. This



survey included the same measures (Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2014)<sup>4</sup>. Table 2 shows the specific trust levels obtained for each institution.

**Table 2. Trust levels (1-5 scale) of journalists towards institutions in Spain**

Institution	M	SD
Parliament	2.81	1.00
Government	2.24	0.97
Political parties	1.98	0.80
Politicians in general	2.11	0.80
<b>Political trust index (4 indicators)</b>	<b>2.29</b>	<b>0.70</b>
Judiciary	2.96	0.93
Police	3.31	1.02
The military	3.03	1.17
Trade unions	2.32	0.94
Religious leaders	2.02	0.98
News media	3.32	0.76
<b>Political trust index (10 indicators)</b>	<b>2.60</b>	<b>0.60</b>

**Source:** Authors' own creation.

The least trusted political institutions were political parties ( $M=1.98$ ,  $SD=0.80$ ) and politicians in general ( $M=2.11$ ,  $SD=0.80$ ). This suggests that the main source of distrust towards politics seems to be generated by the distrust towards politicians and that the economic crisis has revealed that these institutional actors have failed to perform their tasks.

With regards to the rest of the institutions examined in the study, the least trusted were religious leaders, followed by trade unions. The most trusted institutions were the news media, the police and the military.

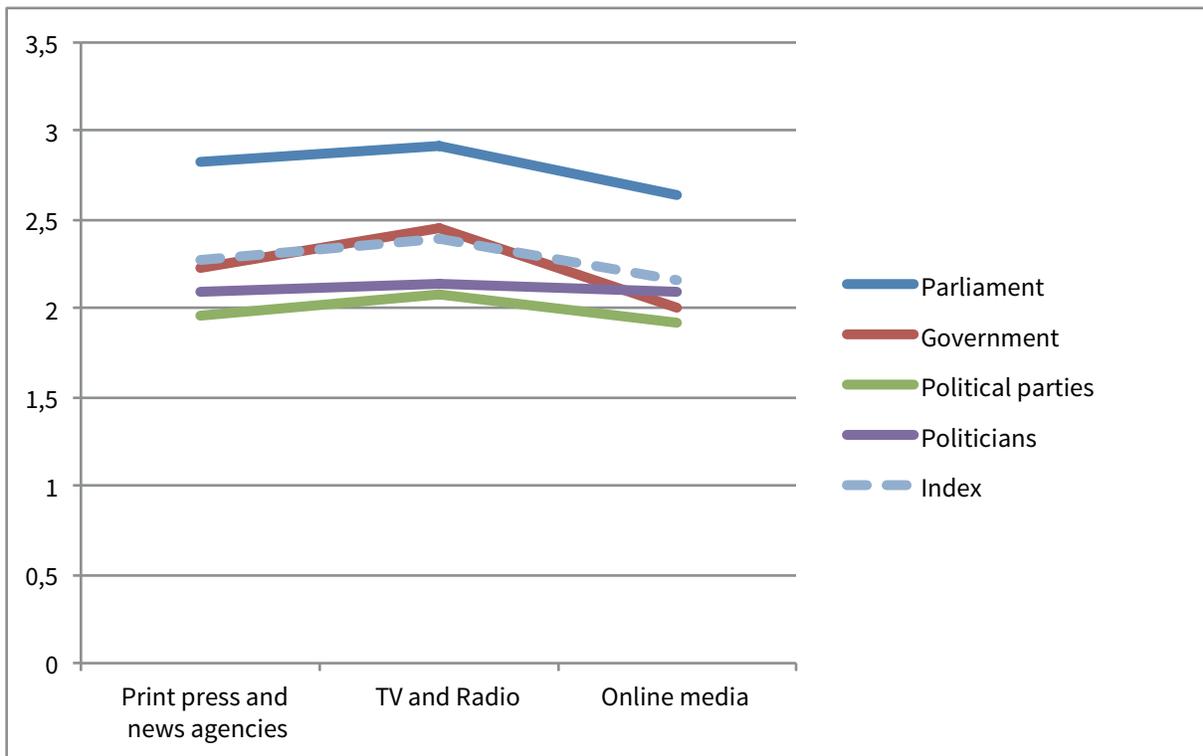
The tests reveal that, taken generally as the aggregate trust index of the four political institutions (the government, the parliament, political parties and politicians in general), the differences between the trust levels of journalists working in different types of media are not statistically significant  $F(2,386) = 2.613$   $p = 0.07$ . However, it is interesting to observe the trend: the highest trust indexes are held by journalists working in audiovisual media (radio and television), followed by journalists working in print media. The most distrustful journalists work for online media. A detailed examination of the scores obtained for each indicator (table 3) showed that the differences in trust towards the government were statistically significant and indicate once again greater distrust from online jour-

<sup>4</sup> Hanitzsch and Berganza (2012) examine the public trust of journalists towards six institutions: the parliament, political parties, the government, the judiciary, the police and politicians in general. However, these authors did not use the same system nor the same rating scale.



nalists towards political institutions<sup>5</sup>, *Welch's F* (2, 211.324) = 5.500  $p < 0.01$ , (see Figure 1). Post-hoc tests showed that trust in the government is greater among journalists working in TV and radio ( $M=2.45$ ,  $SD= 1.04$ ) than among journalists from online media ( $M=2.00$ ,  $SD=0.88$ ;  $BootCI_{95} = 0.19$  to  $0.79$ ;  $d=0.47$ ). The size of this difference could be considered to be medium (Cohen, 1977). Thus, it can be argued that the journalists working in online media are the most sceptical towards political institutions in general, and towards the government in particular.

Figure 1. Variation in trust levels according to type of medium



Source: Authors' own creation.

5 In addition, we found out that the differences in trust levels towards the judiciary (not included in the trust index of political institutions), were also significant ( $F(2.383) = 5.557$   $p < 0.01$ ). We also found that journalists working for print media and news agencies ( $M=3.11$ ,  $SD=0.94$ ) scored significantly higher than the journalists from online media  $M=2.72$ ,  $SD=0.95$ ),  $BootCI_{95} = 0.10$  to  $0.67$ ;  $d=0.41$ . The size of this difference can be classified as medium.

**Table 3. Trust levels according to type of medium**

Trust level	Print media and news agencies		TV and radio		Online media	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Parliament	2.83	1.01	2.91	1.04	2.64	0.94
Government	2.23	0.93	2.45	1.04	2.00	0.88
Political parties	1.96	0.76	2.08	0.86	1.92	0.82
Politicians in general	2.09	0.78	2.14	0.82	2.10	0.83
Political trust index	2.28	0.69	2.39	0.76	2.16	0.70

**Source:** Authors' own creation.

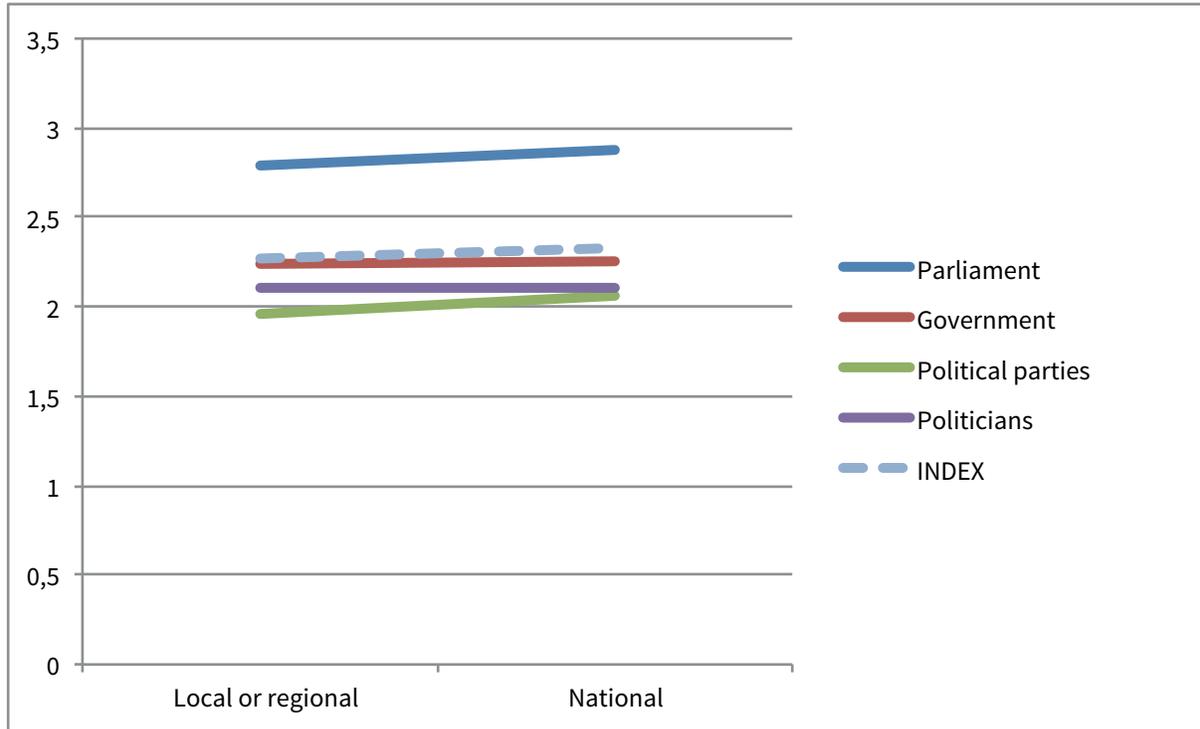
The analysis also showed significant differences trust levels, although low, between journalists from online media and journalists from print media and news agencies ( $M=2.23$ ,  $SD=0.99$ ),  $BootCI_{95} = 0.01$  to  $0.46$ ;  $d=0.25$ . The previous data allow us to partially confirm hypothesis 1, which indicates that the type of medium journalists work for would imply differences in their trust levels towards political institutions.

When we compare the trust levels placed in institutions by journalists (Figure 2) from local and regional media ( $M=2.27$ ,  $D=0.70$ ) and journalists from national media ( $M=2.33$ ,  $SD=0.72$ ), we can see that the differences are not significant,  $t(386)=-0.638$ ,  $p=0.52$ ,  $BootCI_{95} = -0.22$  to  $0.11$ , which does not provide empirical evidence for hypothesis 2. The same thing happens when we make this comparison in each of the 4 specific indicators (table 4)<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> When we extend the analysis to other indicators, we find that trust in the police is significantly greater,  $t(382)=-2.688$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $BootCI_{95} = -0.56$  to  $-0.09$ ,  $d=0.31$ , among journalists working for national media ( $M=3.55$ ,  $SD=0.98$ ), than among journalists working for local media ( $M=3.24$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ). However, the size of the effect of this difference is low.



Figure 2. Variation of trust levels according to the regional scope of the media



Source: Authors' own creation.

Table 4. Trust levels according to the regional scope of the media

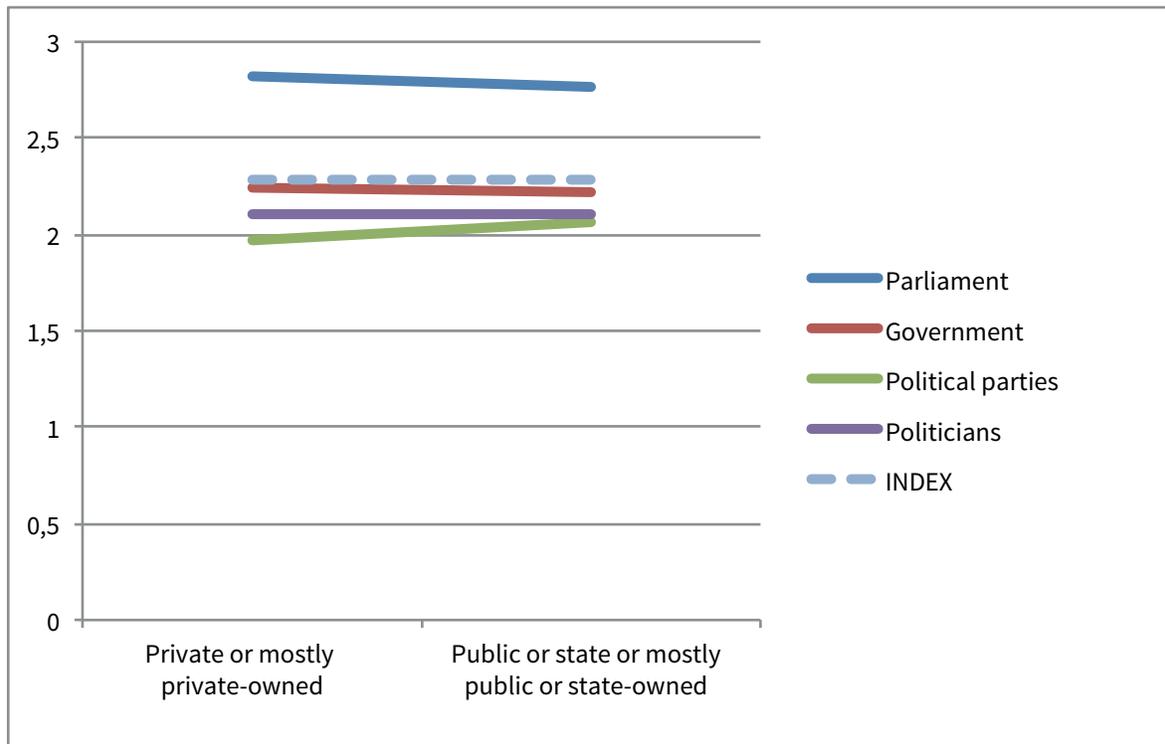
Trust level	Local and regional		National	
	M	SD	M	SD
Parliament	2.79	1.03	2.88	0.92
Government	2.24	0.95	2.26	1.02
Political parties	1.96	0.79	2.06	0.83
Politicians in general	2.11	0.79	2.10	0.84
Political trust index	2.27	0.70	2.33	0.72

Source: Authors' own creation.



Our results also showed significant differences in the trust levels placed in institutions (Figure 3),  $t(386) = -0.047$ ,  $p = 0.963$ ,  $BootCI_{95} = -0.22$  to  $0.21$ , by journalists from mostly public or state media ( $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ) and journalists from mostly private media ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ). This test does not provide empirical evidence to support hypothesis 3. A detailed examination of each of the indicators that make up the central construct (table 5) showed that there are no significant differences across the indicators<sup>7</sup>.

Figure 3. Variation of trust levels according to the ownership of the media



Source: Authors' own creation.

7 Only in the case of the judiciary (included in the general trust index made up of ten indicators), the trust level is significantly higher,  $t(382) = 2.309$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $BootCI_{95} = -0.03$  to  $0.57$ ,  $d = 0.33$ , among journalists from private media ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ) than among journalists from public media ( $M = 2.69$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ). The size of these differences remains *low*.



Table 5. Trust levels according to the ownership of the media

Trust level	Private and mostly private		Public, state, and mainly public or state	
	M	SD	M	SD
Parliament	2.82	1.01	2.76	1.01
Government	2.24	0.96	2.22	1.01
Political parties	1.97	0.78	2.07	0.90
Politicians in general	2.11	0.79	2.10	0.89
Political trust index	2.28	0.68	2.29	0.80

Source: Authors' own creation.

### Discussion and conclusions

The level of trust placed by Spanish journalists in political institutions (the parliament, the government, political parties and politicians in general) is low ( $M=2.29$  on the 5-point scale, where 5 means very high trust). However, there are noticeable differences in the valuation of the different institutions: the most trusted is the parliament, followed by the government; while the least trusted are political parties and politicians in general. The fact that the last two are the least trusted institutions suggests that the main source of journalistic distrust towards politics seems to be generated by the distrust towards political parties and politicians and that the economic crisis has made even more evident the failure of these institutional actors. Therefore, it is evident that Spanish journalists trust more in the political institutions that form the backbone of the constitutional democratic system than in individuals who have taken on the responsibility of directing and managing such institutions.

As Hanitzsch and Berganza (2012; 2014) point out, journalists place a higher level of trust in public institutions in countries with low levels of corruption (2012, p. 806; 2014, p. 146), which also makes sense in the Spanish case. Thus, this loss of trust of journalists, which we have observed since 2011, may be due to the increased perception of corruption in recent years in Spain. As mentioned, according to the report published by the Spanish Sociological Research Centre (CIS) in May 2015, the current political situation is perceived as problematic by citizens, mainly due to the prevalence of political corruption. 42.1% of the surveyed people evaluates the political situation in Spain as very bad, 34.4% as bad, and 17.7% as regular. Only 2.7% of the respondents consider it to be good and only 0.2% saw it as very good. 50.8% of respondents place corruption and fraud among the three most serious problems that currently exist in Spain. Corruption is considered to be the most serious problem by 20.9% and the second most serious problem by 22.5%. Moreover, the diachronic examination of the data based on the evolution of the index of corruption perception, developed by Transparency International, indicates that this perception has risen by 7.69% from 2012 to 2014.



The comparison of these data with the ones collected in Spain in 2011, also as part of the *Worlds of Journalism Study* (Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2014), indicates that there is a significant decrease in the trust placed on these four political institutions and confirms the same trend in the assessment of the different institutions: the parliament continues to be the most trusted institution, although with a significant decline of 0.6 points (going from 3.41 to 2.81 on the 5-point scale). In addition, political parties are still the least trusted institutions (M= 1.98), although the decline is hardly perceptible (in 2011: M= 2.04). The real decline in trust with respect to 2011 is towards the government, going from M=3.24 (3= fairly trusted) in 2011 to 2.24 (2=little trusted) in 2015. Thus, while in 2011 journalists showed a lower level of scepticism towards the parliament and the government in comparison with politicians in general, in 2015 the government no longer enjoys that position of greater comparative trust and is approaching the trust levels that journalists place on politicians in general and political parties.

On the other hand, it is interesting to observe the trend: the most trustful journalists work in audiovisual media (radio and television) and, to a lesser extent, in print media. The most distrustful journalists, especially towards the government, work in online media. Therefore, it can be argued that journalists working in online media are the most skeptical towards political institutions in general, and in particular towards the government. As mentioned, previous studies have addressed the specificity of online journalism, which has also been underlined in this study, since the sample of online media only included born-digital media and media that emerged as the online branch of conventional media but now only exist in the Internet. There is no doubt that the professional journey of online journalists can affect their trust in political institutions: many of them saw the media they worked for disappear as a result of the crisis and had to set up their own media or were forced to change jobs as a consequence of the layoffs and cuts carried out in conventional media. Given that the characteristics of online journalism are also specific (see, for example, Quandt, 2008), we consider that this issue should be subject to more in-depth research. Moreover, it is necessary to delve into these results by means of multivariate analysis, given that the statistical study presented here does not allow us to determine whether certain individual variables (like the age of journalists) can also have an impact, and to what extent, in the greater levels of distrust among journalists working in online media.

In general, we have not found significant differences between journalists according to the regional scope and ownership of the media they work for. The level of mistrust is similar (high) in all of them, just like in the study of Hanitzsch and Berganza (2012), which pointed out that “there was in fact little variance in the trust levels of journalists at the organisational level” (p. 807) and that it was not possible to demonstrate a significant relationship between trust and the private ownership of the media. However, the fact that Spain does not have a relevant number of purely-state media<sup>8</sup> and that, therefore, our analysis merged the data on public and state media to determine the trust of journalists in institutions, may also explain the difference of our findings with respect to other comparative studies of international scope which confirmed that the trust levels of journalists working in state media are higher than the trust levels of journalists working in public and private media (Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2012).

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8 Purely-state media represent 1.5% of our sample. As mentioned, when we add state and public media together, this percentage increases to 14.9%.



Our study is limited to a descriptive and correlational approach to the trust of journalists towards public institutions. Future research in the field can move towards more explanatory models that allow us to identify the origin of mistrust, by means, for example, of in-depth interviews and focus groups. In addition, given the vast knowledge that is being generated in the identification of factors that can alter the trust levels, it also becomes necessary to carry out studies that summarise the advances made in the field, for example, by means of meta-analysis. In addition, theoretical development in the area will also involve the application of experimental techniques that allow us to confirm the causal relationships of the variables included in this study.

In any case, this work, which is part of a global project, highlights the importance of the standardisation of constructs to measure distrust in institutions. On the one hand, because the levels of validity and reliability reflect a construct robust enough to be able to be used in different geographical and cultural contexts; and on the other, because these common measures will enable projects like WJS to generate comparative results of great value to the scientific community. In fact, these comparative studies can determine whether the results tend to be similar when compared with other culturally cohesive geographic areas, like countries with similar characteristics to Spain, such as the countries that follow the Mediterranean model (Hallin & Mancini, 2001).

Moreover, given that a media system free from government interference has been identified in other studies as the main condition to achieve higher trust indices (Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2012, p. 806), it seems interesting to continue with the study of macro-external variables, and to pose questions such as: Do a higher level of pressure from political institutions and individuals over journalists generates greater cynicism? Are national economic factors key to explain the distrust of journalists? Are there greater trust levels in a better economic context? In this way, it is necessary to advance in the study of the phenomenon with approaches that correlate the trust of journalists with specific aspects of their individual situation, their professional culture and the political and social system that frames their work. On the other hand, it is necessary to determine (with equivalent constructs) whether journalists' trust in institutions is higher, similar or lower than the trust levels of the public in general. These issues will be better answered with longitudinal studies.

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