Today's Presenters

Rachel Moran

Senior Research Scientist, University of Washington Center for an Informed Public

Kristen Calvert

Programs and Events Administrator, Dallas Public Library (TX)

OCLC

Understanding trust/distrust in information sources

CENTER FOR AN INFORMED PUBLIC
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

What is "trust"?

Academic researchers across disciplines agree that trust is vital to social structure BUT there is a lack of consensus over how trust is properly defined

... dependent on sociodemographic factors

...a psychological predisposition

...a mechanism for reducing risk

...situationally specific

Today's conversation

1. Why do we have a crisis of (dis)trust in authoritative information sources?
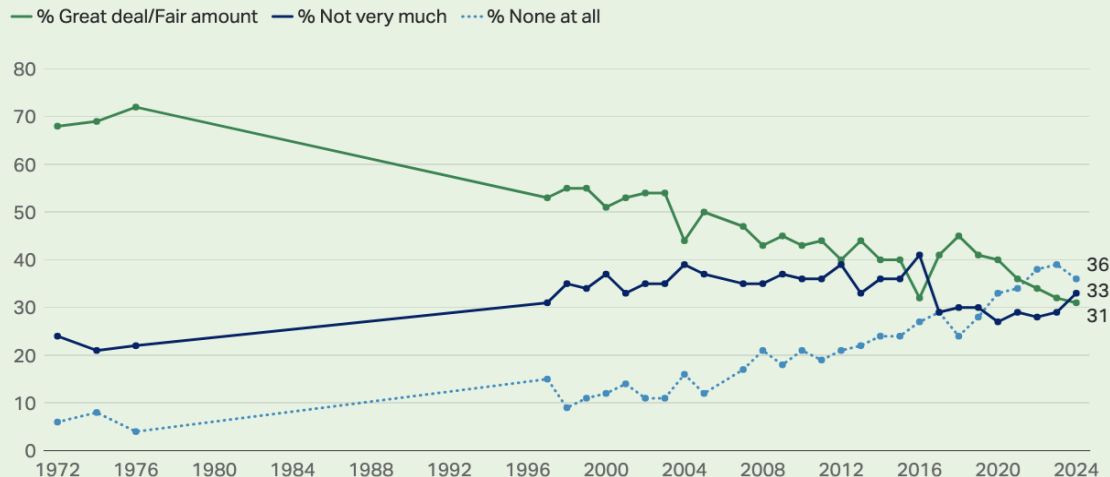2. Where are people going / what are they putting their trust into

….and what can we do about it!

Gallup: "Americans' Trust in Media Remains at Trend Low"

Americans' Trust in Mass Media, 1972-2024

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

— % Great deal/Fair amount — % Not very much ···· % None at all

36
33
31

Get the data • Download image

https://news.gallup.com/poll/651977/americans-trust-media-remains-trend-low.aspx
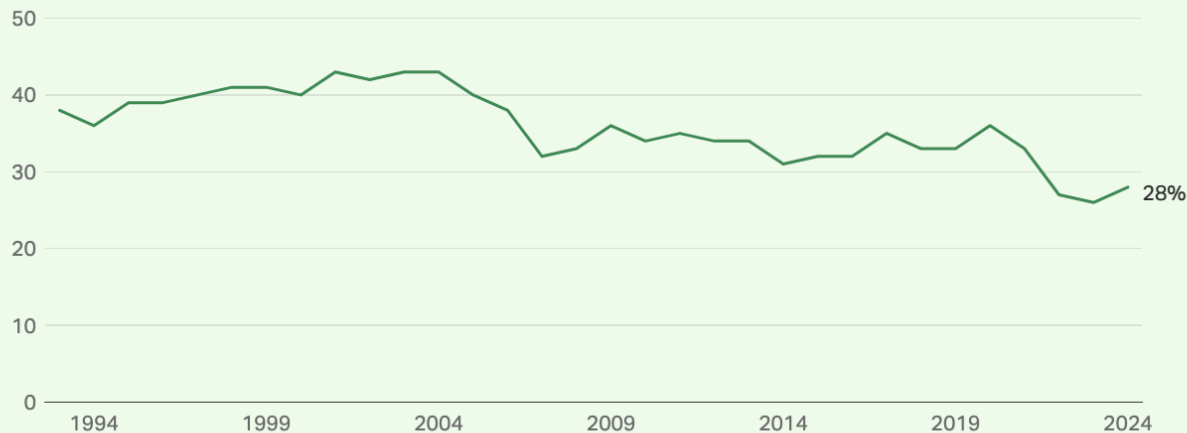
GALLUP

CENTER FOR AN INFORMED PUBLIC
UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

Distrust extends beyond news media

Average Confidence in Major U.S. Institutions, 1993-2024

Figures are the average percentage of U.S. adults who have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence.

28%

The average includes the 14 institutions rated consistently by Gallup since 1993 -- the church or organized religion, the military, the U.S. Supreme Court, banks, the public schools, newspapers, Congress, television news, organized labor, the presidency, the police, the medical system, the criminal justice system and big business.

Get the data • Download image

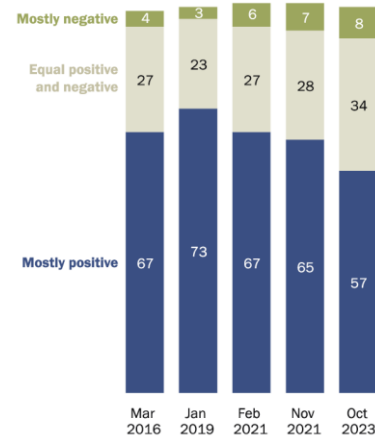https://news.gallup.com/poll/647303/confidence-institutions-mostly-flat-police.aspx

GALLUP

Distrust extends beyond news media

Fewer Americans now say science has had a mostly positive effect on society

% of U.S. adults who say science has had a(n) ___ effect on society

	Mar 2016	Jan 2019	Feb 2021	Nov 2021	Oct 2023
Mostly negative	4	3	6	7	8
Equal positive and negative	27	23	27	28	34
Mostly positive	67	73	67	65	57

Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 1, 2023.
"Americans' Trust in Scientists, Positive Views of Science Continue to Decline"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

EveryLibrary Institute and Book Riot researchers surveyed 1,527 parents and guardians with children under 18 in two surveys during October and November 2023.

Here's a by-the-numbers look at what parents and guardians told researchers about public libraries:

92 – Percentage of parents, grandparents and guardians who said they trust librarians to curate appropriate books and materials

90 – Percentage who report being comfortable allowing their child to select their own materials

96 – Percentage who said they feel their children are safe within the library

83 – Percentage who agree librarians know what books children love

35 – Percentage who think public librarians have a political agenda, and believe they should

9 – Percentage who do not believe librarians have a political agenda, but think they should

44 – Percentage who don't think librarians have a political agenda, and should not

85 – Percentage who report being satisfied or very satisfied with librarians.

https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/parent_perceptions_survey_2023

https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2023/11/14/americans-trust-in-scientists-positive-views-of-science-continue-to-decline/

CENTER FOR AN INFORMED PUBLIC
UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

What is driving distrust?

> The role of credible critique + "healthy skepticism"
> Polarization and partisan identity
> Mis- and disinformation campaigns
> Expanded (albeit lower quality) alternative options
> Information overwhelm + reduced resources to engage actively with information
> Lack of relationship building at the individual + community levels

Where do people go when they don't trust traditional sources of information?

The consequences of distrust – a lack of informational gatekeeping

> Internet access can (ideally) "democratize" information-seeking, yet this is increasingly not the case!

> When there is some gatekeeping e.g. Google elevating authoritative answers, this still requires skills to recognize (and trust) this information above the rest of search results

> Lack of desire for gatekeeping + a demonization of informational quality control (as "censorship" or "elitism")

Jun 6, 2023 - Technology

Big Tech rolls back misinformation measures ahead of 2024

Sara Fischer

Illustration: Sarah Grillo/Axios

What can we do about it?

Key takeaways:
- Opportunities for local information providers to support one another in trust-building
    - Identifying and sharing potential causes for concern (e.g. misinformation spreading in local online groups)
- Transparency around role definitions - increasingly the public are unaware of what a librarian/journalist/teacher can and can't do.
- Engaging in online community spaces as professionals - being active in local Facebook and Next Door community groups
- Identifying the "moveable middle" and tailoring resources to their needs and concerns

CENTER FOR AN INFORMED PUBLIC
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

HOW TRUST IS BEING ERODED

Libraries viewed as partisan

Attack on libraries

Professional exhaustion

Lack of media literacy education

'We've moved a few things around. Travel books are in the Fantasy section, Politics is in Sci-Fi, and Epidemiology is in Self-Help. Good luck.'
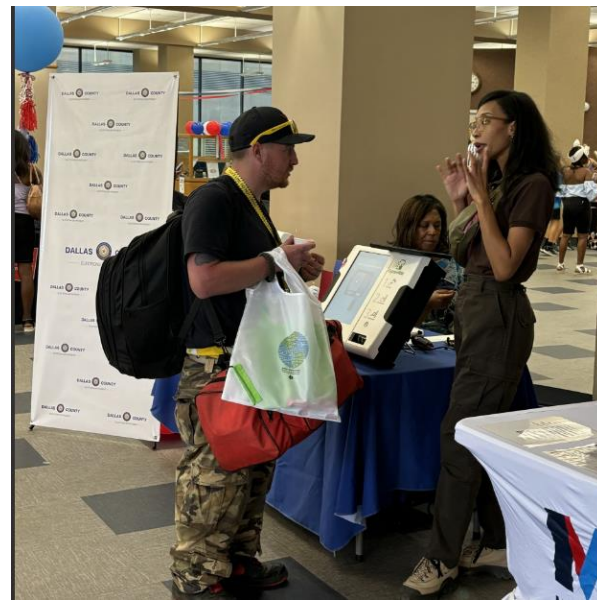
Cartoon by Megan J. Herbert: @Meganjherbert

BUILDING TRUST

- Community effort

- Can't do it solo

- Think creatively

  - Programs

  - Partnerships

  - Exhibits/Displays

Image provided with permission from Dallas Public Library

Images provided with permission from Dallas Public Library

NONPARTISAN PARTNERSHIPS

Images provided with permission from Dallas Public Library

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

LOCAL JOURNALISTS

Images provided with permission from Dallas Public Library

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

OTHER IDEAS
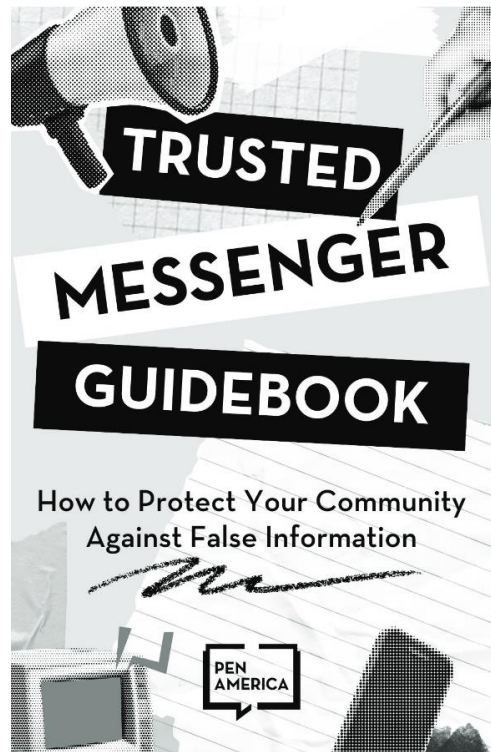

Image provided with permission from Dallas Public Library

Images provided with permission from Dallas Public Library
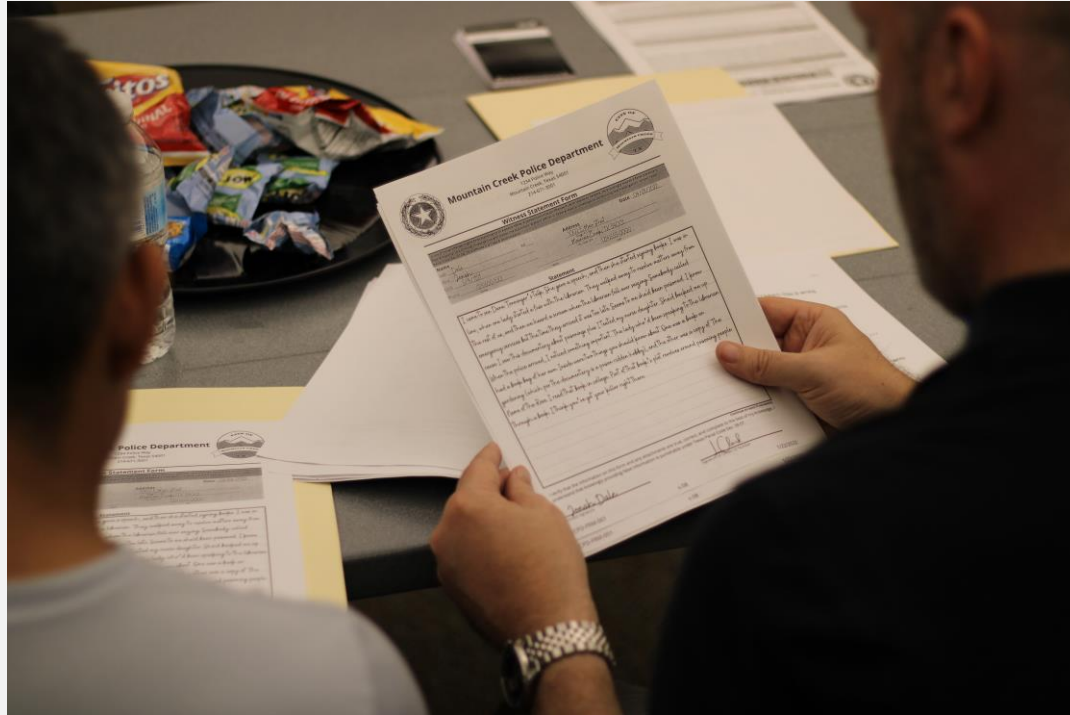
MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

TRUSTED MESSENGER GUIDEBOOK

How to Protect Your Community Against False Information

PEN AMERICA

PEN AMERICA & TRUSTED MESSENGERS

DISINFORMATION CRIME SCENE

Images provided with permission from Dallas Public Library.

Q&A

Rachel Moran
remoran@uw.edu

Kristen Calvert
kristen.calvert@dallas.gov

OCLC