

Opinion The hard truth: Americans don't trust the news media

A note from our owner.

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Jeff Bezos is the owner of The Washington Post.

In the annual public surveys about trust and reputation, journalists and the media have regularly fallen near the very bottom, often just above Congress. But in [this year's Gallup poll](#), we have managed to fall below Congress. Our profession is now the least trusted of all. Something we are doing is clearly not working.

Let me give an analogy. Voting machines must meet two requirements. They must count the vote accurately, and people must *believe* they count the vote accurately. The second requirement is distinct from and just as important as the first.

Likewise with newspapers. We must be accurate, and we must be believed to be accurate. It's a bitter pill to swallow, but we are failing on the second requirement. Most people believe the media is biased. Anyone who doesn't see this is paying scant attention to reality, and those who fight reality lose. Reality is an undefeated champion. It would be easy to blame others for our long and continuing fall in credibility (and, therefore, decline in impact), but a victim mentality will not help. Complaining is not a strategy. We must work harder to control what we can control to increase our credibility.

Presidential endorsements do nothing to tip the scales of an election. No undecided voters in Pennsylvania are going to say, "I'm going with Newspaper A's endorsement." None. What presidential endorsements actually do is create a perception of bias. A perception of non-

independence. Ending them is a principled decision, and it's the right one. Eugene Meyer, publisher of The Washington Post from 1933 to 1946, thought the same, and he was right. By itself, declining to endorse [presidential candidates](#) is not enough to move us very far up the trust scale, but it's a meaningful step in the right direction. I wish we had made the change earlier than we did, in a moment further from the election and the emotions around it. That was inadequate planning, and not some intentional strategy.

I would also like to be clear that no quid pro quo of any kind is at work here. Neither campaign nor candidate was consulted or informed at any level or in any way about this decision. It was made entirely internally. Dave Limp, the chief executive of one of my companies, Blue Origin, met with former president [Donald Trump](#) on the day of our announcement. I sighed when I found out, because I knew it would provide ammunition to those who would like to frame this as anything other than a principled decision. But the fact is, I didn't know about the meeting beforehand. Even Limp didn't know about it in advance; the meeting was scheduled quickly that morning. There is no connection between it and our decision on presidential endorsements, and any suggestion otherwise is false.

When it comes to the appearance of conflict, I am not an ideal owner of The Post. Every day, somewhere, some Amazon executive or Blue Origin executive or someone from the other philanthropies and companies I own or invest in is meeting with government officials. I once wrote that The Post is a "complexifier" for me. It is, but it turns out I'm also a complexifier for The Post.



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You can see my wealth and business interests as a bulwark against intimidation, or you can see them as a web of conflicting interests. Only my

own principles can tip the balance from one to the other. I assure you that my views here are, in fact, principled, and I believe my track record as owner of The Post since 2013 backs this up. You are of course free to make your own determination, but I challenge you to find one instance in those 11 years where I have prevailed upon anyone at The Post in favor of my own interests. It hasn't happened.

Lack of credibility isn't unique to The Post. Our brethren newspapers have the same issue. And it's a problem not only for media, but also for the nation. Many people are turning to off-the-cuff podcasts, inaccurate social media posts and other unverified news sources, which can quickly spread misinformation and deepen divisions. The Washington Post and the New York Times win prizes, but increasingly we talk only to a certain elite. More and more, we talk to ourselves. (It wasn't always this way — in the 1990s we achieved 80 percent household penetration in the D.C. metro area.)

While I do not and will not push my personal interest, I will also not allow this paper to stay on autopilot and fade into irrelevance — overtaken by unresearched podcasts and social media barbs — not without a fight. It's too important. The stakes are too high. Now more than ever the world needs a credible, trusted, independent voice, and where better for that voice to originate than the capital city of the most important country in the world? To win this fight, we will have to exercise new muscles. Some changes will be a return to the past, and some will be new inventions. Criticism will be part and parcel of anything new, of course. This is the way of the world. None of this will be easy, but it will be worth it. I am so grateful to be part of this endeavor. Many of the finest journalists you'll find anywhere work at The Washington Post, and they work painstakingly every day to get to the truth. They deserve to be believed.