



Winter is Coming: The Trump Regime and the American Press

#wictrump

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Jay Rosen @jayrosen_nyu
pressthink.org



Part 1: State of peril

The predicament of the U.S. press
after Trump's election



Predicament: 1

An economic crisis in the news business has led to thinned out newsrooms and poor quality service, especially at the local level.



Predicament: 2

American journalists are operating in a low trust environment for almost all institutions, all leaders.



Predicament: 3

Trust in the news media itself is at historically low levels in the U.S., especially (but not only) among Republicans.



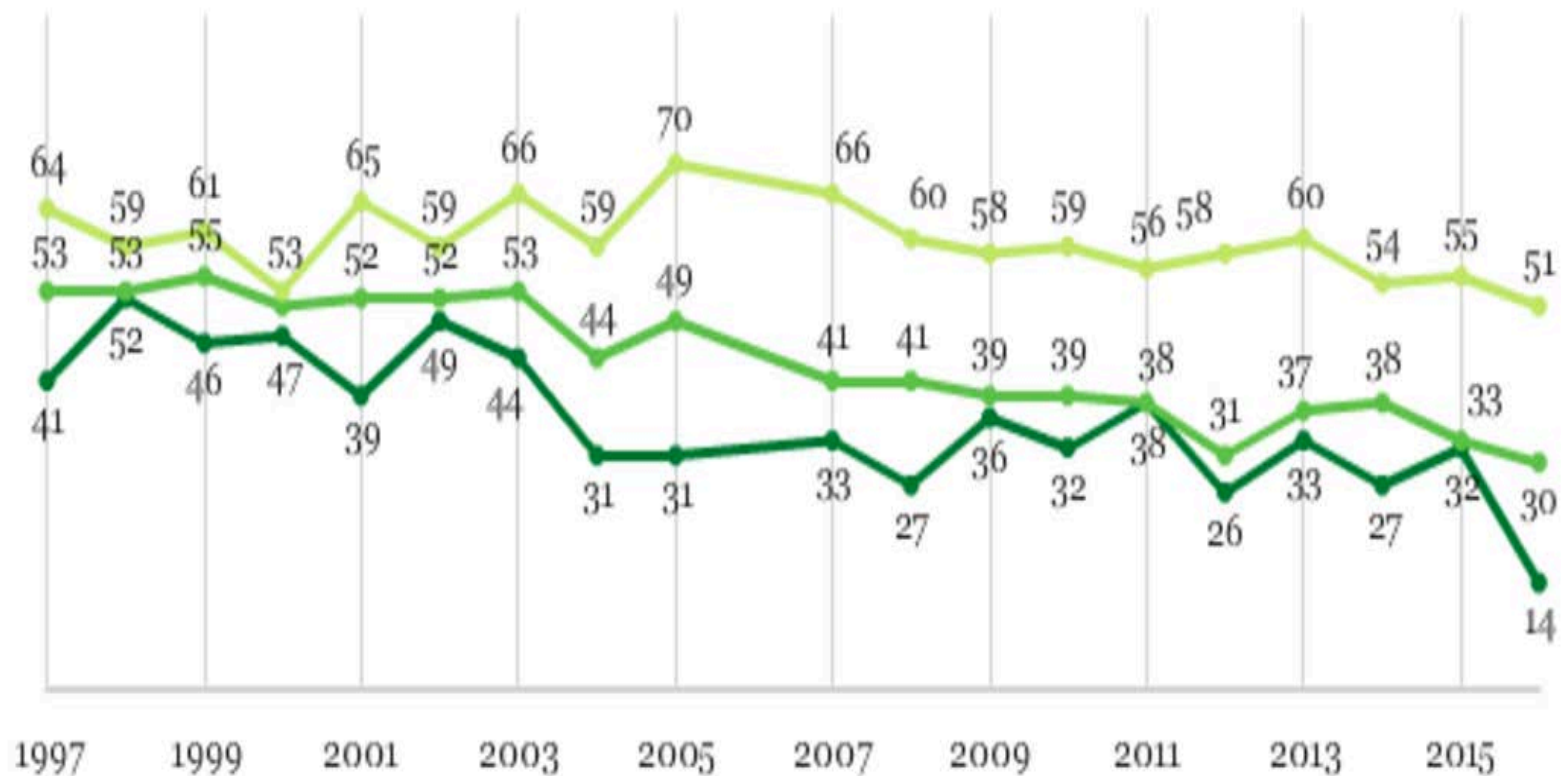
Predicament: 4

On the political right, there is an organized campaign to discredit the mainstream press— and it's working.

Trust in Mass Media, by Party

% Great deal/Fair amount of trust

■ Republicans ■ Independents ■ Democrats



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Predicament: 6

One fifth to one third of the voters are increasingly “lost” to the national press. There is an information sphere distinct from mainstream journalism.



Predicament: 7

Decades ago the press took a wrong turn by focusing on the “game” of politics and connecting to voters through the knowledge insiders had about how to win.



Predicament: 8

Money, talent, investment, prestige, and opportunity in journalism are concentrated in expensive cities on the coasts.



Predicament: 9

For journalists the events of 2016 were a devastating blow, but no season of hard reform has followed from those events.



Predicament: 10

For reasons not well understood, reality seems to have become a weaker constraint in the political sphere of Western democracies.



Predicament: 11

The power to inform is shifting to the tech industry's platforms, which look with indifference on "fourth estate" functions that journalists were proud to inherit.

Part 2: A presidency without precedent

Trump is different. More different than the press was ready for.



Without precedent: 1

Trump's authoritarian style gains traction by trashing the norms of democracy. But informal norms of democracy are what gave the press its settled role in public life.



Without precedent: 2

Hate speech against journalists has become a routine by which Trump keeps faith with supporters and eludes accountability.



Without precedent: 3

Hard to have a fact-based debate when the leader of the free world observes no distinction between true and false and cannot be successfully fact checked.



Without precedent: 4

Many things Trump does are best explained via Narcissistic Personality Disorder. But by their own code (fairness bias) journalists are reluctant to talk that way.



Without precedent: 5

With Trump in power there is a surplus of eventfulness. He keeps everyone in a constant state of alarm. Too much news! The pace is itself a kind of propaganda.



Part Three: Performance so far

The response of the press in the first 90 days of Trump.



Tricky question...

“Just do our job...” is the nearly unanimous sentiment in newsrooms about how to respond. But what if the job has changed?



Tricky problem...

The deep grammar of the presidency is being violated daily, but the press never had to notice such a thing before. Presidents from both parties obeyed it.



Things the press has been doing pretty well: 1

- * Beefing up White House coverage with more people.
- * Defending normal levels of “access.”
- * Cultivating anonymous sources in the executive branch.
- * Digging deeply into the Russia connection.

Things the press has been doing pretty well: 2

- * Depicting palace intrigue and internal turmoil.
- * Tracking campaign promises vs. the reality.
- * Reporting on conflicts of interest and Trump family business ties.
- * Handling Trump's twitter feed and TV watching habits.



Things the press has been doing pretty well: 3

- * Getting rapidly up to the speed on encryption and operational security.
- * Calling lies and falsehoods by their right names
- * Fighting Trump's distortions with newly feisty PR departments.
- * Appealing to core audiences for financial support.



What the press has not done well: 1

- * Conduct an industry-wide post-mortem on the debacle of 2016.
- * Take steps toward a strategy to address the trust puzzle.
- * Find a way to portray what is changing day-to-day at the agency level.
- * Organize and prioritize our attention amid a flood of news and controversy.

What the press has not done well: 2

- * Figure out what comes after fact-checking.
- * Respond in broader outline to the attack on evidence, science, expertise: accountability in the most basic sense.
- * Learn how to oppose without becoming the opposition party.

What the press has not done well: 3

- * Solidarity: Work together to outwit threats, prevent divide and conquer.
- * Found new institutions and alliances in response to what is a civic emergency.
- * Quit Kellyanne Conway.



Part Four: Project

Why I'm joining forces with De
Correspondent as it expands from
The Netherlands to the US



“What if news organizations optimized every part of the operation for trust. Not for speed, traffic, profits, headlines or prizes... but for trust. What would that even look like?”

My answer: It would look a lot like De Correspondent.



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Thank you! #wictrump

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