

Media Use and Political Trust in an Emerging Democracy: Setting the Institutional Trust Agenda in Kosovo

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Even though the consequences of media use for political trust are a saturated target of research, empirical studies that examine media content are limited to the effects of negative news and strategic framing on Western audiences. This study explores how agenda-setting effects on institutional attributes and performance prime citizens' trust in political institutions in a transitional society. Drawing on survey and content analysis data, it suggests that the most important dimension of political trust is media priming of institutional efficiency and honesty. Whereas perceptions of economic performance have a significant positive relationship with trust in institutions, perceptions of political performance do not show any significant correlation with political trust.

Keywords: political trust, attribute agenda-setting, attribute priming, media and democratization, Kosovo media

Introduction

This study aims to investigate the role of mass media in democratization processes in Kosovo, a post-conflict transitional society in Southeastern Europe, by examining media effects on citizens' political trust. Normative theories of democracy claim that political trust is critical to democracy (Diamond, 1993) as it links citizens to the institutions that represent them (Bianco, 1994) and enhances both the legitimacy and the effectiveness of democratic government (Hetherington, 1998). Since political trust influences both perceptions about the quality of the democratic regime and political involvement (Norris, 1999; Putnam, 2001), it directly affects both the regime's survival and its effective functioning.

Scholars have sought the origins of political culture in historical influences, institutional performances and political leadership, and social and economic changes (Almond & Verba, 1963; Diamond, 1993; Hetherington, 1998; Inglehart, 1997). Media effects in these processes have been generally taken for granted based on the theoretical assumption that free media pave the way to healthy democracy in countries in transition. Scholars seem to have reached a common consensus that recognizes mass media's critical role in democratization (Hall & O'Neil, 1998; Hyden & Okigbo, 2002; Jakubowicz, 2002; Pasek, 2006). They usually acknowledge the media's supporting role in the early stages of

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democratic transition but are cautious to presume their positive effects on the quality of democracy evolving in subsequent phases of democratic saturation (Gunther & Mughan, 2000; McConnell & Becker, 2002).

The debate about the relationship between democratization and media in Eastern Europe has long focused on the empowering virtues of the state versus the market, producing some pessimistic observations about the outcome of the media system in this region (Jakubowicz, 2007). This study answers the call to shift this discourse toward the relationship between media and their audiences (Mickiewicz, 2008) to determine the consequences of these new media systems on political culture in Southeastern Europe. Building on recent research that suggests news media inform citizens about current events in transitional societies, build self-efficacy and support for democracy, and inspire a participatory citizenry (Loveless, 2010; Tworzecki & Semetko, 2010; Voltmer & Schmitt-Beck, 2006), this study investigates how the type of content might mitigate these effects.

Relying on a theoretical framework that merges attribute agenda-setting (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997) and attribute priming (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002)—two prominent theories that explain cognitive and attitudinal effects of media content—this study investigates the relationship between media use and political trust in a hierarchical model of effects. It is first an attempt to link attribute agenda-setting and priming effects of mass media to the development of political trust in a society undergoing political transition. Second, this article empirically tests the media malaise–mobilization debate in a non-Western country and highlights the role of media content as a mediator between media use and trust. It also expands the empirical horizon beyond the impact of negative news (Patterson, 2003) and strategic framing (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), exploring how news emphasis on institutional attributes and institutional performance affects political trust in transitional societies.

Media Content and Political Trust

The vigorous debate on the role of mass media in promoting and sustaining political culture and civic orientation (Almond & Verba, 1963) has produced two theoretical traditions that compete to explain this interaction. The media *malaise* thesis predicts that mass media will cause political alienation by fueling citizens' cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Patterson, 2003; Robinson, 1976). The *mobilization* approach, on the other hand, asserts that mass media contribute to citizens' political interest, learning, efficacy, and participation (Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger, & Bennett, 1999; Bowen, Stamm, & Clark, 2000; Moy & Pfau, 2000; Norris, 2000).

Research suggests that the two theories are not at odds with each other (Avery, 2009) and there is ground for "a dual effects hypothesis" (Aarts & Semetko, 2003). As Avery pointed out: "Media exposure discourages political trust under some conditions but promotes trust under other conditions" (2009, p. 424). The relationship between media use and political attitudes is highly dependent on audience characteristics (Avery, 2009; Moy & Pfau, 2000; Norris, 2000; Pinkleton & Austin, 2001) and media characteristics (Aarts & Semetko, 2003; Avery, 2009; Bennett et al., 1999; Moy & Pfau, 2000). Citizens' media choices also seem to be important dimensions for citizens in countries undergoing political transitions (Loveless, 2008, 2010), as they "influence the development of political attitudes and thus have

political consequences" (Loveless, 2010, p. 470). This study focuses on the type of media content as a mediator between media use and political trust.

In general, studies investigating the consequences of media content for political trust focus on the negativity of the news (Patterson, 2003) and the strategic frame of political news (Cappella & Jamieson 1997; de Vreese, 2004a). Negativity in television news is attributed to the style of reporting that incorporates ever shorter sound bites, the rise of an interpretative journalism (Hallin, 1992), and the adoption of "episodic" political news coverage that lacks context (Iyengar, 1991). Moreover, news is packaged into a "strategic frame" (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997) focused on the "horse race" aspects of the political game such as "winning" and "losing." Strategic news framing has diffused from the U.S. into the journalistic practices abroad (Brettschneider, 1997), including to Balkan media (Dimitrova & Kostadinova, 2013).

Generally negative media coverage has a higher potential to affect political attitudes (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1994), even though, depending on its frame, negative information does not always lead to cynicism (de Vreese, 2005). Strategic frames have been associated with increased political cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; de Vreese, 2004a; Valentino, Beckman, & Buhr, 2001). Mutz and Reeves (2005) found that exposure to uncivil discourse in television leads to less trust in Congress, politicians, and the government system. However, experimental research done by de Vreese (2004a, p. 208) suggested that the effect of a strategic frame on political cynicism "was not persistent and diminished over time" and that in the context of European politics, "strategic reporting is not per se cynicism-invoking" (de Vreese, 2005, p. 284).

Although negative news reporting can erode specific support for leaders, government, or policies, people who pay attention to the news are generally more knowledgeable and trusting in the political system as a whole (Norris, 2000). Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, and Cole (1990) made the case that even negative information can be informative for audiences, for in a competitive electoral context, negative news might enhance involvement. The relationship between media use and trust is generally mediated through political knowledge, which leads to political discussions and self-efficacy (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). As Shah, Rojas, and Cho (2009, pp. 210–211) suggested, "Individuals use the news information they acquire via broadcast or print to reflect and deliberate about local issues," so mass media "help individuals organize their thoughts about their 'imagined community' while also providing the basis for political discussion that can lead to civic action."

In general, as de Vreese pointed out, "the spiral of cynicism is not omnipresent and when distinguishing differences in news *content*, the effects are considerably different too" (2005, p. 293). This study examines news coverage of institutions and its consequences for political trust through the lens of attribute agenda-setting and attribute-priming theories. The following section will discuss theoretical explanations of how media content influences audience perception of institutional competence and integrity, as well as attitudes towards institutions.

The Consequences of Agenda Setting for Political Trust

Over the last four decades, hundreds of empirical studies have suggested that mass media play “the role of civic [*sic*] teacher” in democratic societies (McCombs, 2004, p. 51) by setting citizens’ agenda of issues and their respective attributes—the first step in public opinion formation. At the first level, agenda-setting theory explains how people’s perception of the most important issues in their country is affected by the salience of those issues in media news reports. At a second level, attribute agenda-setting theory stipulates that by emphasizing certain attributes or characteristics while describing issues or objects, mass media draw their audiences’ attention to those properties when people think or talk about those issues (or objects) (Weaver, McCombs & Shaw, 2004, p. 259). Mass media have the potential to transfer to the audience both the qualifications and personality traits of political objects they cover in their reports, and the positive or negative tone of those traits (Kiousis, 2005; McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, & Llamas, 2000).

The literature suggests that agenda-setting effects of mass media are consequential for public opinion formation. Priming theory in particular psychologically links agenda-setting effects to the formation of political judgment by offering a comprehensive explanation of how citizens formulate their political attitudes as a consequence of media content they consume (Kim et al., 2002; Kim & McCombs, 2007; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990).

Parallel to the two levels of agenda-setting effects, the literature emphasizes two separate aspects of media priming mechanisms—issue priming and attribute priming—that result from increased media salience of issues (or political objects) and the tone associated with those issues (Pan & Kosicki, 1997, p. 25). According to priming theory, news media call attention to some issues or problems and ignore others to provide audience members with specific political knowledge they tend to use when forming political judgments (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, p. 63). Attribute priming is a process in which “certain issue attributes emphasized in the media will become significant dimensions of issue evaluation among the public” (Kim et al., 2002, p. 12). Media use can induce positive or negative evaluations of political leadership based on the tone in which media reports describe the issues (Kim & McCombs, 2007; Pan & Kosicki, 1997; Sheaffer, 2007).

Even though Iyengar and Kinder (1987) conceptualize media priming as a general phenomenon, priming theory has traditionally been used to examine the evaluation of political figures, such as presidents (Iyengar & Simon, 1993) and prime ministers (de Vreese, 2004b). This article engages attribute-priming theory to investigate how people judge political institutions. It assumes that during the attribute agenda-setting process, media make various aspects of issues and traits of institutions more accessible, priming the pieces of information people will rely on when forming opinions of political institutions.

Despite some scholars’ suggestion that “Western media theory is a poor guide for our expectations in non-Western, transitional states” (Loveless, 2008, p. 167), the existing theories merit consideration as an initial step toward understanding media effects elsewhere while developing a more generally applicable theoretical framework. Thus, the first set of hypotheses tests the relationship between

media exposure, the transfer of institutional attributes from media content to audiences (attribute agenda-setting), and citizens' evaluations of institutional performance regarding issues (attribute priming).

H1a: There will be a significant correlation between media use and the attribute agenda-setting index of institutional competence and integrity (attribute agenda-setting).

H1b: There will be a significant correlation between media use and positive evaluations of institutional performance of the most important issues (attribute priming).

This study also assumes that by emphasizing different attributes of political institutions—their competence and integrity, and their effectiveness in dealing with issues—mass media prime citizens to rely on that information when forming trust in those institutions. When media place positive emphasis on institutional attributes, trust in institutions is greater.

H2a: The attribute agenda-setting index of institutional competence and integrity will be associated with higher trust in institutions.

H2b: Positive evaluations of institutional performance on issues will be associated with higher trust in institutions.

Media use and the basis of trust. The literature differentiates between various bases of support, respectively the aspects of an institution that are evaluated in forming public opinion (Citrin & Muste, 1999; Miller, 1974), and identifies economic and political factors as the main endogenous influences on political trust (Norris, 1999; Nye, Zelikow, & King, 1997). On one hand, political institutions are trusted or distrusted to the extent that they produce desired economic outcomes (Citrin & Green, 1986). Comparative research on variations of political trust across countries (Mishler & Rose, 1997, 2001; Norris, 1999) suggests that in countries undergoing political transition, “citizens’ confidence in their political system is tied to the system’s ability to increase or maintain well-being” (Catterberg & Moreno, 2006, p. 46). However, a second position emphasizes political factors as the major determinants of trust in institutions (Clarke, Dutt, & Kornberg, 1993; McAllister, 1999). During democratic transitions, “citizens weight independently—and much more heavily—the political performance of the system,” which includes the “the capacity to maintain order, to govern transparently, to maintain a rule of law, and to otherwise respect and preserve the democratic rules of the game” (Diamond, 1999, pp. 171–192).

H3a: Positive evaluations of economic performance will be associated with higher trust in political institutions.

H3b: Positive evaluations of political performance will be associated with higher trust in political institutions.

RQ 1: Which evaluations—economic or political performance—will have a stronger correlation with political trust?

Several scholars have pointed the need to expand beyond economic and political arguments into more specific attributes that might directly impact trust. Citrin and Muste (1999, p. 467) distinguished

eight different bases of support focused on institutions' trustworthiness, fairness, worthiness of pride, effectiveness, efficiency, responsiveness, compassion, and integrity. Miller, Goldenberg, and Erbring's list of attributes includes "efficiency, honesty, competence and equity" (1979, p. 67). However, this literature does not identify which of these attributes has a stronger relationship with trust. The only empirically tested attribute that has a negative impact on trust is governmental corruption (Catterberg & Moreno, 2006; Hibbing & Patterson, 1994; Mishler & Rose, 1997, 2001).

The priming literature sheds some light on this relationship, however. Iyengar, Kinder, Peters, and Krosnick (1984), studying media effects on leadership evaluations, distinguished among three types of judgments that evaluate the president's general performance, competence, and integrity. This line of research found that media priming effects tend to be more powerful on the evaluation of the president's general performance than on the personality assessment (Iyengar et al., 1984; Iyengar & Simon, 1993).

This literature prompts the following hypothesis:

H4a: The attribute agenda-setting index of institutions' integrity will be associated with higher trust in those institutions.

H4b: The attribute agenda-setting index of institutions' competence will be associated with higher trust in those institutions.

The Context of the Study

Kosovo is a novel case through which to investigate the relationship between media use and citizens' political trust. It is one of the first newly independent countries in post-World War II Europe to have had its political institutions re-engineered by Western countries. Following the civil conflict in the late 1990s, Kosovo built its new democratic institutions under the supervision of the United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU). Since then, the international authorities have gradually transferred autonomy back to local authorities. However, the most important institutions of law and order are still under international administration, especially by the EU and NATO. The newly established self-governing institutions remain fragile as they struggle to operate under a new political system.

In general, the initial euphoria of the political transition period in the new, post-communist societies of Eastern Europe has given way to a remarkable degree of political cynicism. Citizens of Central and Eastern Europe are at least skeptical of political parties, civil society institutions (Mishler & Rose, 1997), parliaments (Hibbing & Patterson, 1994), and other political institutions (Mishler & Rose, 2001), and they explicitly mistrust their executive institutions (Miller, Koshechkina & Grodeland, 2004). Yet, as in Western democracies, political distrust in post-communist societies expresses lack of support for specific institutions rather than a diffuse absence of support for the democratic system as a whole (Hibbing & Patterson, 1994).

Similarly, the data from this study suggest that citizens of Kosovo have moderate levels of trust in international institutions of law and order (NATO military forces in Kosovo [KFOR], the police, and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo [EULEX]) but lower levels of trust in local institutions

(government and parliament). Investigating the determinants of political trust in Kosovo is particularly interesting given that the idea of the nation has not yet firmly taken root there, as the state and its institutions are still under construction.

The media played an inconsistent role in transitional processes in Eastern Europe. Mass media became largely pluralistic, taking up democratic functions while operating in a market-led system (Gross, 2002; Gulyas, 2003). Meanwhile, in Southeastern Europe, mass media were "a driving force in the democratization of the Balkan societies" and "an instrument in the hands of the nationalistic forces" (Lani & Cupi, 2002, p. 77) that are to blame for the bloodshed in the region during the 1990s.

Supported by Western donors, Kosovo established a new media system operating in a free market. The country's three national television stations, nine daily newspapers, and hundreds of local radio and television stations represent a wide spectrum of opinions. With 86% viewership, television remains the main source of information in Kosovo, whereas newspapers and radio have considerably smaller audiences, 7% and 5% respectively (Index Kosova, 2009, cited in Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 2010). About 53% of households in Kosovo have an Internet connection (Index Kosova, 2009). Nevertheless, as in the rest of Eastern Europe, media in the Balkans operate under political pressure, economic problems, and chaotic media laws (Lani & Cupi, 2002). Considering the political pressure and polarization (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 2010), media in Kosovo cannot be expected to be neutral "dispensers" of news as Western media theories assume, which makes the investigation of media effects in this environment even more intriguing.

Methods

Content Analysis

The following media organizations were included in the media content sample: three national television channels—Kosovo Public Television (RTK), Koha Television (KTV) and Television 21 (TV21); two national daily newspapers—*Koha Ditore* and *Express*; and two national radio stations—Radio Kosova and Radio Dukagjini. RTK and Radio Kosova are both publicly owned broadcasting media that the ruling party has controlled for the last five years prior to this study. Similarly, the daily newspaper *Express* is considered to be close to the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), led by Prime Minister Hashim Thaci. On the other hand, the television stations KTV and TV21 are privately owned, as are Radio Dukagjini and the daily *Koha Ditore*. The latter four are regarded as the most objective, trusted news media in Kosovo.

The political news content of the selected media was collected and analyzed from September 15 to October 24, 2010, six weeks prior to the administration of the survey (considered the optimal span for agenda-setting effects to be observed; see McCombs, 2004). This study is based on the analysis of 710 television news stories (389 for RTK, 320 for KTV, and 289 for TV21), 399 radio stories (133 for Radio Kosova and 266 for Radio Dukagjini), and 347 newspaper articles (167 from *Koha Ditore* and 180 from *Express*).

Adopting the approach of McCombs et al. (2000), this study took as its unit of analysis each paragraph in any story that mentioned a target Kosovo institution. The Kosovo institutions analyzed were KFOR, EULEX, local police, local courts, the Kosovo Parliament, and the government of Kosovo. The news content was coded for the following dichotomous positive or negative institutional attributes: corrupt/fair, honest/dishonest, caring/selfish, efficient/inefficient, and knowledgeable/unwise. As in previous agenda-setting studies (Kim & McCombs, 2007; Kiousis, 2005; McCombs et al., 1997), the list of attributes captured two lines of institutional assessment: the job-related attributes or the degree to which institutions performed as expected (efficient, knowledgeable), and the personality traits or degree to which jobs were performed within ethical boundaries (fair, honest, caring).

Additionally, this study investigated the issues that dominated the media agenda. The 18 issues coded for in this study were: political dialogue with neighboring Serbia, rule of law, corruption, foreign policy and recognition of independence, interethnic relations, crime and violence, environment, health system, education system, economy and infrastructure, poverty and living standards, employment, energy policy, social security, agriculture, privatization of publicly owned enterprises, administration issues, and elections. Each paragraph was coded for the presence of an issue and the valence with which the issue was discussed (positive, neutral, negative).

A graduate student in sociology (an Albanian native speaker) was hired and trained to code 10% of the news content for the inter-coder reliability test. Scott's pi inter-coder reliability coefficients were within the acceptable standards of .70 and higher (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). Coefficients for institutional attributes ranged from .74 to .88, coefficients for issues ranged from .80 to .97, and coefficients for issue valence ranged from .72 to .77.

Survey Data

Social Research Kosova, a public opinion research company based in Kosovo's capital, Pristina, collected the public opinion survey data used in this study. The survey was conducted from October 22 to November 1, 2010, among a representative sample of the Albanian population aged 18 and over living in the Pristina region.

The total sample size was 717, with a response rate of 77%. Data collection relied on a stratified 3-stage probability sampling strategy. The first stratification was according to type of settlement, with 65% of respondents from urban and 35% from rural settlements. Next, households were selected by the random route technique, starting from polling stations. The household member interviewed for the study was selected using the Kish scheme developed for each household (Frey, 1989). The survey was conducted face-to-face at the respondent's home. Fieldwork control was done with 30% of the total interviewees in all strata, proportional to sample size. Sampling error calculated for this survey is +/- 3.7 at 95% confidence level.

Variable Measurement

Attribute agenda-setting index. Because this study is interested in attribute agenda-setting effects at the individual level, it uses an alternative measure adopted from similar studies (Moon, 2011; Wanta, 1997; Wanta & Hu, 1994). The *attribute agenda-setting index* measures the distance between the salience of positive institutional attributes in the media and the emphasis on these attributes by the audience. Higher scores symbolize closer ties between media and public agendas, capturing the basic concept of attribute agenda setting theory. This scale differs from previous measures in that it does not differentiate between “cognitive” and “affective” attribute measures (McCombs et al., 2000) but rather combines them. However, most previous attribute agenda-setting research has relied on aggregated data that limit statistical power, with the exception of one study (Moon, 2011). Relying on a similar index as the one used in the present article, Moon (2011) found that news attention was a good predictor of the index measuring attribute agenda-setting effects at the individual level, which in turn triggered strong attitudes toward presidential candidates and political participation in the 2004 U.S. elections. These results bolster the credibility of this index, particularly in the absence of a more reliable, widely tested individual attribute agenda-setting measure.

The creation of the attribute agenda-setting index involved several procedures that aimed to match respondents’ perceptions of institutional attributes with the media content they consumed.¹ The first was to measure respondents’ attribute agenda. A *public opinion score* was extracted using a set of questions that examined citizens’ evaluation of five attributes for seven political institutions in Kosovo. Respondents were asked which of the following attributes describe Kosovo political institutions: corrupt/fair, dishonest/honest, inefficient/efficient, knowledgeable/unwise, and selfish/caring. The analysis considered only the scores for positively valenced attributes. In a second step, measuring the media agenda, a *media score* was calculated by dividing the percentage of the positive media coverage of each attribute by 50.²

Third, the *distance value* between the two agendas was calculated by subtracting the media score from the public opinion score. Finally, the distance value was weighted by the percentage of total news

¹

$$\text{Attribute agenda-setting index} = \sum_{i=1}^n (X-Y) Z_i$$

X = public opinion score (mentions of the positive attribute by public); Y = media score (% of positive media coverage of the attribute / % of all possible values); Z = % of the total coverage of the attribute; n = number of attributes.

² The question that measured citizens’ mention of attributes had two possible answers representing negative and positive valence. Thus, this calculation controls for all the respondents—those exposed to both positive and negative media coverage of institutional attributes. This procedure follows a similar approach by Wanta and Hu (1994), whose individual agenda-setting index considered scores on both the five most important issues and the five least important issues to help guard against potential result bias.

coverage of the institutional attributes emphasized during the six weeks prior to the survey.³ Attributes that are more salient in the media have greater weight than less emphasized attributes (Wanta & Hu, 1994) because they have a higher likelihood of influencing citizens' judgment.

An attribute agenda-setting index was created for each institution by summing up the scores from each of their attributes. Then, an overall attribute agenda-setting index was created by adding individual institutions' indexes (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$).⁴ Higher scores indicate stronger agenda-setting effects.

Attribute-priming index. This index measures the distance between the positive media reports on issues and the likelihood of citizens' positive evaluation of institutional performance on those issues. Higher scores represent the public's tendency to rely on the positive tone of issues emphasized in the media when judging institutional performance, and thus stronger attribute-priming effects.

The procedure for creating the attribute-priming index was similar to that used to devise the attribute agenda-setting index.⁵ Public perceptions on the most important issues in Kosovo were measured by the standard Most Important Problem question "What are the three most important problems in Kosovo?" The four top issues on the public agenda were the economy, crime, corruption, and foreign affairs—the same issues with the most salience in the media coverage.⁶ Next, respondents were asked, "How do the institutions deal with those problems?" and chose one of four answers: not well at all, not that well, quite well, and very well).⁷ *Media score* was created for all four issues by dividing the percentage of the positive coverage of each issue by 25 (one fourth of the total possible answers for the performance question). A distance value between public opinion and media coverage was created for each

³ For example, if the government attribute "corrupt" received 35% positive coverage, then the media score was $Y = 35/50 = .7$. If a respondent said the government was "corrupt," ($X = 1$) the absolute distance was weighted by .3 ($Z = 30\%$), producing the final attribute agenda-setting score $(1 - .7) \times .3 = .09$.

⁴ Factor analysis of the individual attribute agenda-setting indices exhibited substantial loadings for all institutions (government .866, parliament .803, EULEX .536, police .569, KFOR .501, and courts .736).

⁵ For the attribute-priming index, the variables in the above formula denote the following: X = public opinion score (public evaluation of issue performance); Y = media score (% of the positive media coverage of the issue / % of all possible values on the issue performance score); Z = % of the total media coverage of the issue; n = number of issues.

⁶ Media reports on the top four issues numbered 1,363 for rule of law, 589 for foreign affairs, 1,051 for the economy, and 272 for corruption. The public's mentions of top issues numbered 102 for rule of law, 119 for foreign affairs, 799 for the economy, and 288 for corruption (288). Spearman's ρ correlations between media and public issue agenda was .660, $p < .05$ ($N = 13$).

⁷ Besides being the top issues on the news agenda, the selected four issues also had the greatest expressed valence in the news reports: "rule of law" and "foreign affairs" had the most positive coverage, and "economy" and "corruption" had the most negative news coverage. Including the most relevant and the least relevant issues in the index follows the similar procedure Wanta and Hu (1994) used to prevent potential bias in the results.

issue by subtracting the media score from the public opinion score. The final distance scores were weighted by the percentage of stories that covered the issues in the media.⁸ The sum of the weighted distance values for all four issues (Cronbach's $\alpha = .626$) was divided by the total number of issues.

Media use. This variable was measured with a question that assessed citizens' attention to news media. Each participant was asked, "How much attention do you pay to news about national politics in a printed NEWSPAPER/national TELEVISION/national RADIO/on INTERNET?" The respondents chose one of five possible answers: none at all, a little, a moderate amount, a lot, and a great deal.

Institutional trust. The operationalization of political trust in this study is similar to measures used in comparative literature focused on political institutions as a whole rather than on a particular leading institution (Catterberg, 2003; Mishler & Rose, 1997, 2001). The trust questions used in this study, adopted from the New Democratic Barometer (developed by the Paul Lazarsfeld Society in Vienna), asked respondents:

I am going to name a number of political institutions. For each one, could you tell me to what extent you trust each of these political institutions? Please, indicate your response on a scale from 1, for the complete absence of trust, to 7, for great trust.

The institutions listed were government, parliament, courts, police, EULEX, and KFOR. For this study's analysis, a political trust index was created by adding trust scores in each of the institutions measured on a 7-point scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .804$). As an additional measure of internal consistency, the institutional trust measures were subject to a factor analysis (with Varimax rotation) exhibiting substantial loadings for all institutions (government .692, parliament .741, EULEX .782, police .656, KFOR .501, and courts .562). The constructed variable is an index that ranges from 7 to 49, with higher values expressing higher levels of trust in institutions.

Control Variables. Three demographic variables were selected as control variables in this study's analysis: age, education, and gender. Communication scholarship has demonstrated that people with different characteristics tend to have different media use habits, with age, education and gender making a difference for news media use as a whole (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000) and for news source/platform selection (Norris, 2000). Further, political science literature points to these three variables' relevance for political attitudes (Inglehart, Basanez, & Moreno, 1998) and participation (Putnam, 2001; Norris, 1999). Age was measured in years; gender was represented by a binary variable (0 for females, 1 for males). Education was assessed on a four-point scale ranging from 'elementary school,' through 'high school,' 'college,' and 'graduate school.' Additional controls for partisanship and political interest were added in the analysis.

⁸ E.g., if the issue of "corruption" received 35% positive coverage, then the media score was $Y = 35/25 = 1.4$. If a respondent said that institutions were handling the problem of corruption "not that well" ($X = 2$), then the absolute distance was weighted by .3 ($Z = 30\%$), producing the final attribute-priming score $(2 - 1.4) \times .3 = .18$.

Findings

Attribute Agenda-Setting and Priming

H1a, which predicted a significant relationship between media use and attribute agenda-setting index on institutional attributes, was supported. The attribute agenda-setting index has a significant relationship with attention to newspapers ($\beta = .142, p < .01$), Internet ($\beta = -.169, p < .01$), and radio news ($\beta = .184, p < .01$). These data imply that the more people pay attention to newspapers and radio news, the more likely they are to concur with media regarding the attributes of the country's political institutions, whereas people who pay attention to Internet news are less likely to do so. No significant relationship was observed for attention to television news (see Table 1, column 1).

H1b predicted a significant relationship between media use and positive evaluations of institutional performance. However, only attention to Internet news ($\beta = .91, p < .05$) bore a significant positive relationship to the attribute-priming index, suggesting that people who pay attention to Internet news are more likely to rely on the positive tone of new coverage of issues when judging institutional performance. However, these data also suggest a strong relationship between the attribute agenda-setting and attribute-priming indices ($\beta = .256, p < .01$), implying that people who adopt positive attributes of institutions from the media are more likely to positively evaluate institutional performance (see Table 2, column 2).

Table 1. OLS Regressions Testing the Relationship Between Media Use, Attribute Agenda-Setting, Priming Effects, and Political Trust.

	Attribute Agenda-setting	Attribute Priming	Political Trust
Television attention	.029	-.041	-.046
Radio attention	.184**	.007	.012
Newspaper attention	.142**	.071	-.009
Internet attention	-.169**	.091*	-.019
Attribute agenda-setting		.256**	.696**
Attribute priming			.097*
Partisanship	.165**	.121*	-.037
Political interest	.000	.046	.000
Age	-.011	.012	.002
Gender	.033	.037	.049
Education	-.097*	-.124*	-.028
R^2	.143	.135	.528
N	538	512	512

Note: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. This table presents standardized coefficients (β).

Media Use and Political Trust

H2a and H2b, which predicted a significant relationship between media use and political trust—mediated through attribute agenda setting and priming indices—were both supported. As data in column 3 of Table 1 imply, the attribute agenda-setting index ($\beta = .696, p < .01$) and attribute-priming index ($\beta = .097, p < .05$) both have a significant positive relationship with overall trust in institutions. These data suggest that citizens who embrace positive institutional attributes and institutional performance from media reports are more likely to have higher trust in institutions. No significant direct relationship was observed between different measures of media attention and political trust. These results explain about half of the variance in the data ($R^2 = .528$).

The mediation hypotheses between media use and political trust are further supported by statistical mediation tests developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008). As the data in Table 2 suggest, taken as a set, the attribute agenda-setting and attribute-priming indices mediate the effects of media attention on political trust. For radio, the total indirect effect through the two mediators has a point estimate of .922 and a 95% BCa bootstrap CI of 0.478 to 1.415; for newspapers, .703 and a 95% BCa bootstrap CI of 0.199 to 1.2937; and for the Internet, -.818 and a 95% BCa bootstrap CI of -1.311 to -.304. Comparing the two indices, the attribute agenda-setting index is a better mediator of effects of media attention on political trust, as it shows significant indirect results across all media except television. The attribute-priming index is a significant mediator only for the effects of newspapers attention on political trust (see Table 2).

Table 2. Mediation of the Media Attention Effects on Political Trust Through Attribute Agenda-Setting and Attribute Priming.

Indirect Effects	Estimate	Bootstrapping		
		SE	Lower	Upper
Television				
Attribute agenda-setting	.099	.268	-.153	.599
Attribute priming	-.027	.044	-.472	.043
Total	.077	.281	-.505	.606
Radio				
Attribute agenda-setting	.889*	.231	.476	1.368
Attribute priming	.036	.037	-.019	.142
Total	.922*	.241	.478	1.415
Newspapers				
Attribute agenda-setting	.635*	.268	.1611	1.221
Attribute priming	.068*	.049	.0001	.2167
Total	.703*	.273	.1992	1.2937
Internet				
Attribute agenda-setting	-.854*	.243	-.023	-.373
Attribute priming	.036	.041	-1.336	.140
Total	-.818*	.251	-1.311	-.304

Note: * $p < .05$. Age, gender, education, political interest and partisanship entered as covariates.

Media Use and the Basis of Political Trust

The next goal of this study was to explore which attributes and issues emphasized in the media were more likely to determine trust in political institutions. The relevant set of hypotheses predicted that positive evaluations of economic and political performance would have a positive relationship with trust in institutions (H3a, H3b), and that the agenda-setting index for the attributes of institutional integrity and competence would have a positive association with trust in institutions (H4a, H4b). Table 3 presents the data for these hypotheses.

Table 3. OLS Regressions Testing the Relationship Between Media Use and Basis of Political Trust.

	Model 1	Model 2
Television attention	-.044	-.032
Radio attention	.016	.126**
Newspaper attention	-.015	.064
Internet attention	-.006	-.124**
Economic performance		.241**
Foreign affairs performance		-.046
Corruption		.080
Crime performance		-.007
Fairness	.069 [^]	
Honesty	.226**	
Caring	.027	
Efficiency	.354**	
Knowledge	.171**	
Partisanship	-.021	.050
Political interest	.013	-.010
Age	-.004	.006
Gender	.053	.051
Education	-.032	-.069
R²	.543	.139
N	538	512

Note: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, [^] $p < .1$. This table presents standardized coefficients (β).

As model 1 in Table 3 suggests, the agenda-setting indices of institutional honesty ($\beta = .226$), efficiency ($\beta = .354$), and knowledge ($\beta = .171$) are all significant at .01 confidence levels, suggesting that people who are likely to adopt the salience of institutional integrity and competence attributes from news reports are more likely to trust them. Yet the efficiency and honesty measures seem to reflect the

strongest effects. The data in this model explained about half of the variance of trust in political institutions ($R^2 = .543$) after controlling for political interest, partisanship, age, gender, and education.

Further, model 2 in Table 3 suggests that only the positive evaluations of economic performance have a significant relationship with trust in institutions ($\beta = .241, p < .01$), supporting H3a. People who agree with media reports of institutions' positive performance are more likely to have high levels of overall trust in institutions. However, the data did not support H3b, as the coefficients for media priming of the political issues (foreign affairs, corruption, and crime) were not significant at conventional standards. In this case, the data explained only about 14% of the variance in trust.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study confirms general assumptions that in societies undergoing political transitions, a plural media system can fulfill one of its most basic democratic functions: informing people about institutional performance. Contrary to the skeptics' fears, the results imply that mass media *are* beneficial to the democratization process, as they contribute to citizens' formation of attitudes to political institutions that are not necessarily exclusively negative. As suggested by previous research (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001), knowledge accumulated via media exposure is a relevant mediator for political trust.

Hypotheses H1a and H1b, which predicted a significant correlation between media use and attribute agenda-setting and attribute-priming indices, are both supported. The significant correlations between these variables suggest that news media are capable of conveying the efficacy and integrity attributes of political institutions in Kosovo and helping citizens form attitudes on institutional performance regarding the most important issues. As in the second-level agenda-setting effects found in Western countries, this study suggests, media content relates "to people's perceived salience of public issues (and objects), but also to their understanding of the substance of those issues (and subjects)" (Takeshita, 1997, p. 27).

Moreover, confirming previous research on attribute priming (Kim et al., 2002), this study's findings suggest that the valence of institutional attributes emphasized in media content become important dimensions of people's assessment of political institutions. Hypotheses H2a and H2b predicted that attribute agenda-setting and attribute priming would be associated with political trust, and both were supported, demonstrating that political knowledge is used to form perceptions that affect political trust.

Contrary to suggestions in some previous research, the results do not support the claim that media content produces only cynical citizens (Capella & Jamieson, 1997). Acknowledging theses of both malaise and mobilization, the results of this study suggest that media use for political information has a dual effect on political trust. Internet use for political information has a negative indirect relationship with overall trust in institutions, whereas radio and newspaper use have positive indirect relationships with general trust in institutions, mediated through attribute agenda-setting. These findings suggest that media use might produce diverse levels of political trust, thus creating an environment in which citizens are

neither blindly submissive and trusting nor totally distrustful of the political institutions in their country (Diamond, 1993).

Further, this study illuminates the aspects of institutional attributes and issues emphasized in the media that become important factors determining trust in institutions. The data suggest that institutional integrity and competence are both key dimensions of political trust. Contrary to previous research (Iyengar et al., 1984; Iyengar & Simon, 1993), this study suggests that media priming of the evaluation of traits of professionalism (efficiency and knowledge) as well as personality assessments (honesty) are both important dimensions of political trust, even though the strongest effects pertain to institutional efficiency and honesty. Moreover, this study suggests that perceptions of positive economic performance have a significant positive relationship with trust in institutions, although perceptions of positive political performance do not show any significant correlation with political trust. These data confirm Mishler and Rose's (1997, p. 444) conclusion that in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, "trust is greatest among those who feel best about their family's current economic circumstances and are most optimistic about their future prospects."

This study has its own limitations, so caution in interpreting its results is advisable. Obviously, new indices used to test media effects at the individual level face inherent reliability challenges. Future studies might consider replicating and refining the attribute agenda-setting index used in this study. In particular, this study measured only agenda-setting effects on positive institutional attributes. Previous research suggests that negative media content might have a more powerful agenda-setting effect than positive coverage (Wu & Coleman, 2009), as well as more relevant consequences for political trust.

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