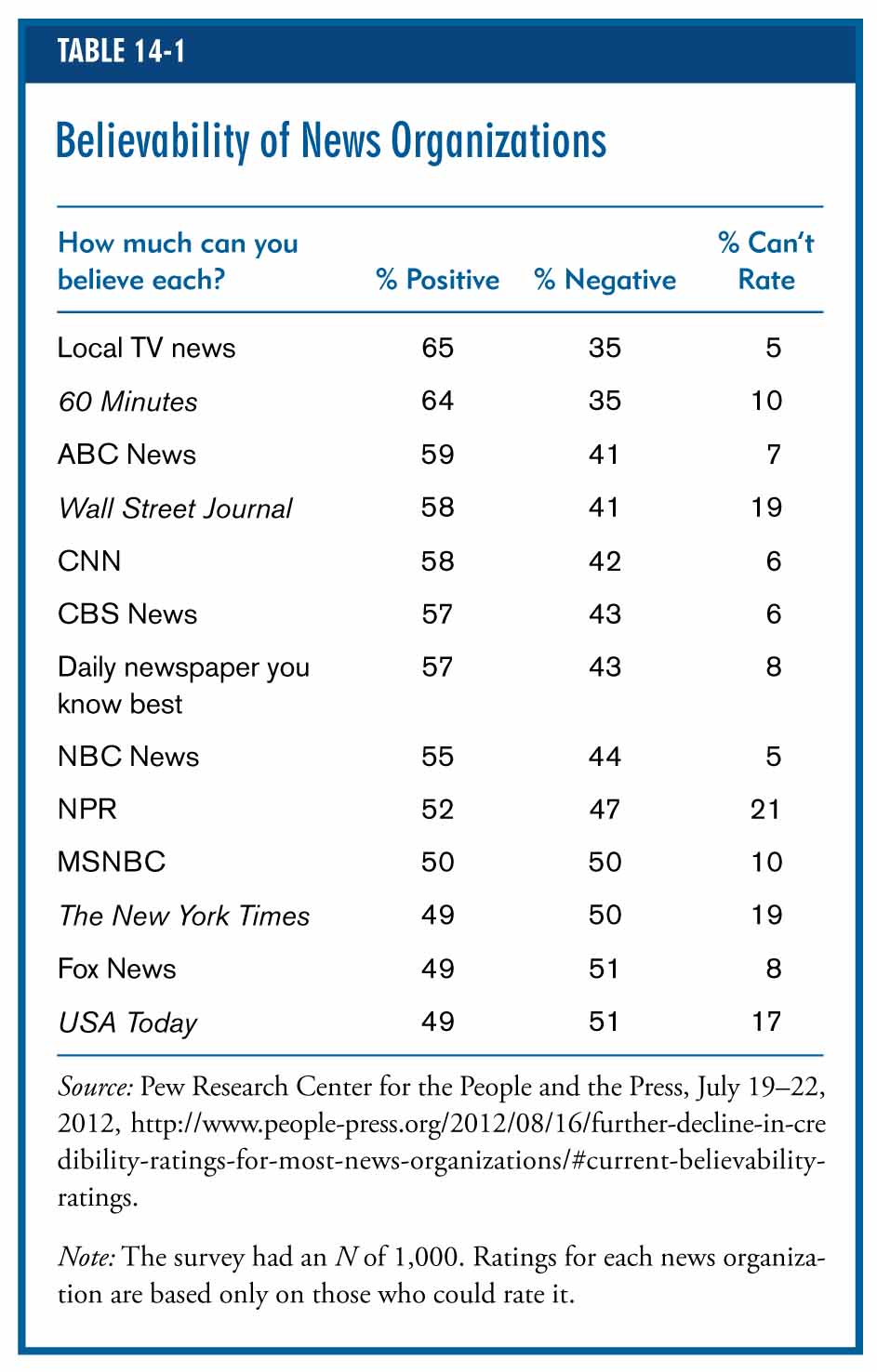
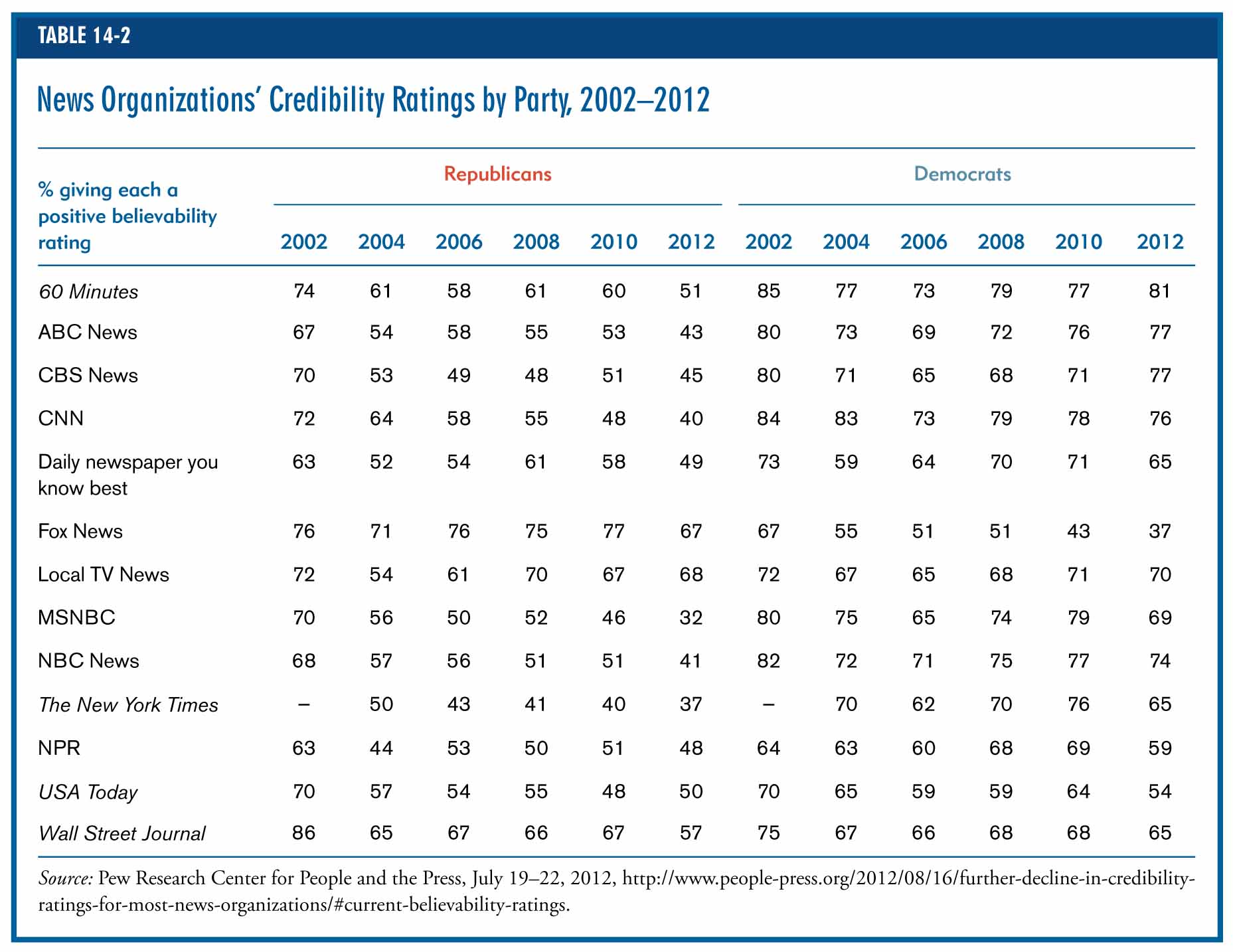
The Logic of American Politics, 7th Edition

Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck

Data Literacy Exercises: Chapter 14

Table 14-1 and 14-2:

****

****

**Learning objectives:** 14.2 Discuss the ways in which news is a consumer product and how that influences the news. 14.4 Identify the ways in which news is a product of politics.

Once upon a time, believe it or not, there were only 3 major TV networks. Because the airwaves were limited, and because it was the responsibility of government to determine who had access to this rather narrow bandwidth (considered at the time to be a public utility), imposition of the equal time provision and the fairness doctrine on TV was much more forceful than it was for the printed press (where access was only limited by the ability to buy a printing press and a business permit). Perhaps of equal or greater importance, each of the 3 networks needed to be fairly unbiased as they, and their corporate advertisers, were competing for the same national market. Most of what Republicans claimed was a liberal bias in the news was most likely caused by the press being in an adversarial relationship with the president, and through most of the pre-cable days of national TV (1952-1980s), the president was a Republican.

Newspapers, on the other hand, had for years maintained a partisan bias, as many were created as organs for local party machines, and as most cities had at least two competing newspapers each tilted in the direction of one of the major political parties. As the following graph indicates, at least as measured by presidential endorsements, the majority of newspapers favored Republican presidential candidates (the lone exception being 1964). By now, readers of this web section should be aware of depending solely on numbers. Might it not be the case that many Democratic endorsing papers had larger readership and the Republican bias was a factor of the prevalence of Republican sentiment in small town America? Again, circulation numbers follow the overall pro-Republican trend.

The most significant change during this period was in the percentage of newspapers (and their circulation) that would not commit to a party endorsement. In 1952, those percentages were 18 and 9 percent, respectively. In 1988, they were 55 and 35. In 1996, those percentages rose to 70 ad 74%.

Source: Stanley and Niemi (2006), *Vital Statistics on American Politics, 2005-2006*, CQ Press, Table 4-17.

With the advent of cable, then satellite, and finally the internet, the logic behind this differential application had disappeared. As newspapers before them, TV and TV-like internet networks now may choose to be fair for ethical reasons (see discussion of bias on p. 583-584), but have limited legal reasons to do so. And economically, even a small slice of the news market can reap huge financial gains.

As the news supply chain became more fragmented, news sources could appeal to smaller, more select audiences. Bias and polarization became more the rule than the exception. Over the last decade, Democrats, but especially Republicans, have found most news sources to be less believable.\* The following table displays the change in believability for the two parties for those news sources listed in Tables 14-1 and 14-2. Both sets of partisans have lower expectations of the believability of these media platforms. With the major exception of Fox News, the drop has been more pronounced for Republicans than Democrats. Between 2002 and 2012, Republicans were 9 percentage points less likely to believe in what Fox News was presenting, but Democrats dropped by 30 percentage points.

Perhaps of greater significance is that, within this overall drop, the believability views of Democrats and Republicans have become more polarized. Again using figures from Table 14-2, the following graph shows the percentage difference in believability percentages between both sets of partisans. For all but one media source, the gap between Democrats and Republicans has widened.

In a previous section (see video on Perceptual Screening), we discussed how polarization occurs not only because individuals filter what they hear and see through partisan and ideological lenses, but also because they tend to choose information sources closer to their already held convictions. Further investigation into the Pew Research Center’s data, some of which was used in the text’s chapters, confirm this.

“Consistent conservatives” are more likely to get their news from one source (47% claim Fox) than “consistent liberals” (15% CNN, 13%NPR, 12% MSNBC, 10% *New York Times*).\*\* They trust many fewer sources of news than do “consistent liberals.” Of the full list of 36 news sources offered, “consistent liberals” are more likely to trust than distrust 28 of the. “Consistent conservatives” are more likely to trust than distrust only 12 of them. Moving to the newest sources of information, they are also 15 percentage points more likely to see more Facebook posts in line with their views, although “consistent liberals” are slightly more likely to get political news on Facebook, and more likely to “defriend” someone with opposing views (which makes that 15 percentage point gap all the more telling).

\*\*Source: Amy Mitchell et al., Pew Research Center, October 2014, “Political Polarization and Media Habits”, <http://www.journalism.org/files/2014/10/Political-Polarization-and-Media-Habits-FINAL-REPORT-11-10-14-2.pdf>. The definition of “consistent liberals” and “consistent conservatives” is based on a ten item questionnaire that covers issues of economics, regulation, race relations, defense, immigration, the environment and gay rights. For a listing of these items, see <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/appendix-a-the-ideological-consistency-scale/>. Of course, ideology and partisanship are not one and the same, but, as both previous chapters in this text and evidence from the Pew research center indicate, the two are become more consistently linked.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. According to Table 14-2 as well as its reconfiguration in this section (Believability Rating Change), between 2002 and 2012:

a. The credibility ratings of all news organizations has declined but only among Democrats.

b. The credibility ratings of all news organizations has declined but only among Republicans.

c. Only the credibility of certain news organizations have decreased.

\*d. The credibility ratings of all news organizations has declined among both Democrats and Republicans.

@ Feedback: The data show a decline for all organizations among members of both parties, although the 2012 Republican Fox News ratings are a bit anomalous.

2. In general the declining credibility of news organizations has been more pronounced among Republicans than Democrats.

\*a. True

b. False

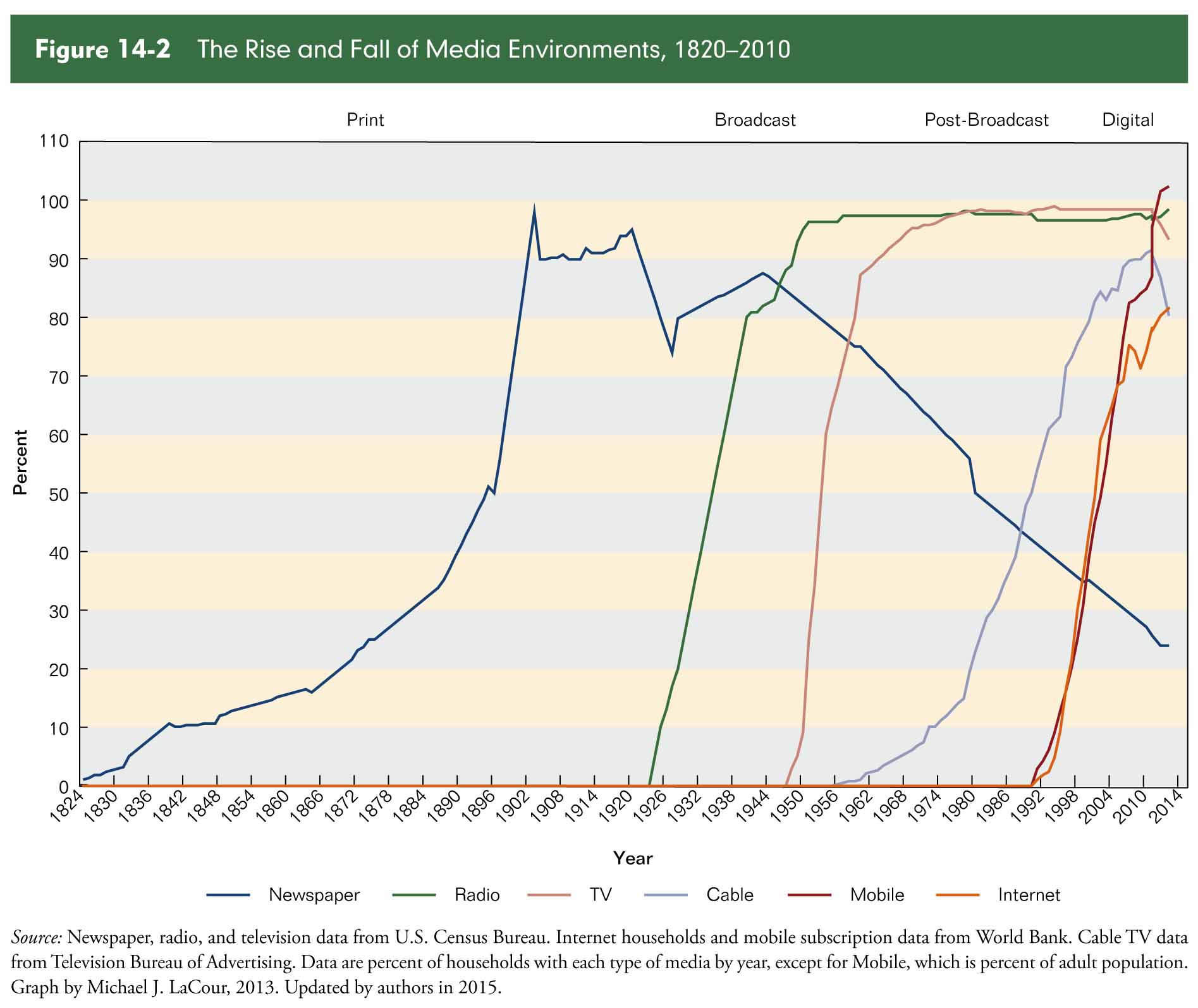
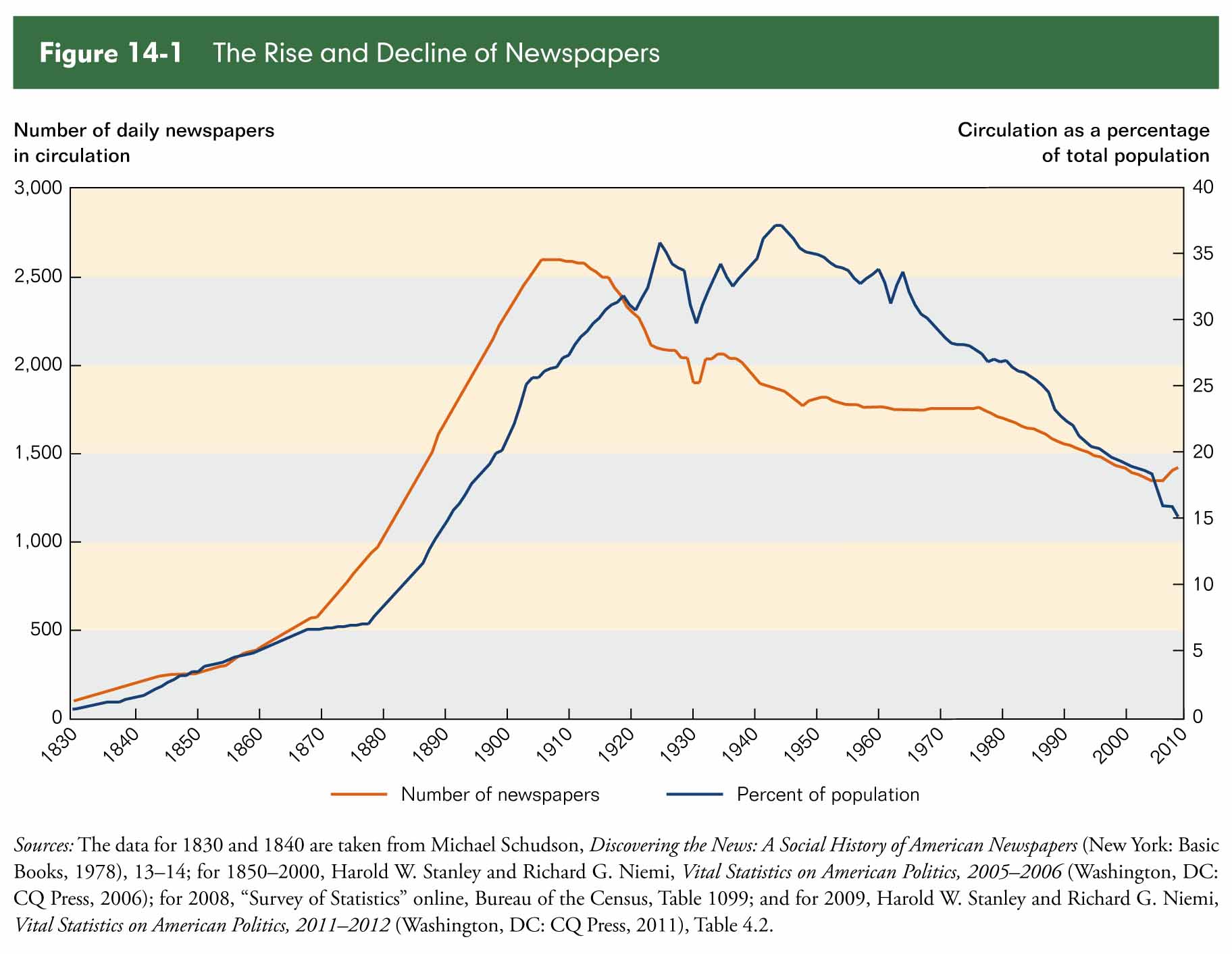
@ Feedback: With the exception of Fox News, Republicans have been more likely to lose faith in news sources than Democrats.

3. From 2002-2012, the credibility gap between Republicans and Democrats has increased for all news organizations.

\*a. True

b. False

@ Feedback: The increased gap has been rather pronounced for most sources, mainly (with the exception of Fox) due to the greater decline among Republicans.

Figure 14-1 and 14-2:****

**Learning objective:** 14.1 Summarize the development of the news business and technology.

Clearly, the percentage of individuals who get their news and other information from the traditional printed press has declined. As recently as 1991, 56% of respondents in the Pew Research Center’s “News Consumption Survey” got their news from newspapers. By 2012, that figure dropped to 29%, less than the percentage who got their news from TV (55%), online (39%), and radio (33%). The overall decline or increase for each platform is represented in the chart below. Note that the data upon which these figures are based are not mutually exclusive. In any year, any individual could receive ones news from more than one source. With the exception of online sources, all platforms have declined as a source for news.

\*Figures on online usage began in 2004 when 24% of respondents indicated they received news online. By 2012 that figure rose to 39%.

Source: Pew Research Center, <http://www.people-press.org/2012/09/27/slideshow-television-vulnerable-in-changing-news-landscape/pp_12-09-26_newsconsumption-slideshow-01/>

The decline and increase in the use of other sources, however, differs by age group. Between 2006 and 2012, the proportion of 18-29 year olds who watched any news on TV dropped by 15 percentage points. While those 65 and older increased their viewership by 4. The following table lists the percentages within each of four age groups who received their news the day before the survey from each platform in 2012. Age groupings were chosen to match other Pew center results. Expected age differences are also evident if we separate those who read the paper printed newspaper and watched TV as opposed to reading or watching their online versions.

Source: Survey data downloaded from Pew Research Center website <http://www.people-press.org/2012/06/03/2012-media-consumption-survey/>

**Questions to Consider:**

1. According to Figures 14-1 and 14-2

a. The number of newspapers has decreased but not their use by U.S. households

b. The number and use of newspapers have both decreased but newspapers still surpass other media environments in usage

c. In the 20th Century, both the number of newspapers and their circulation (as a percentage of population) decreased simultaneously

\*d. In the 20th Century, both the number of newspapers and their circulation (as a percentage of population) decreased, but the drop in circulation did not occur until midcentury.

@ Feedback: Newspaper subscriptions, adjusted for population, have now reached near late 19th century levels. This is at least partially due to the introduction of TV. More households now also have access to every other media environment.

2. According to the section graph (Percent Receiving News from Listed Source), among all media platforms, only newspapers declined as a source for news.

a. True

\*b. False

@ Feedback: TV, radio, and newspapers have all declined as a source of news. Only online media environments have increased in popularity.

3. Which two of the following show clear increased use with age (News Platform by Age)?

\*a. Newspapers

\*b. TV

c. Radio

d. Online sources

@ Feedback: Both newspapers and TV are more relied on by older individuals than younger ones in a clear linear fashion. Radio and online sources demonstrate more complex patterns.

4. Looking at the same figure, those 65 and over are most likely to get their news from which source?

a. Newspapers

\*b.TV

c. Radio

d. Online sources

@ Feedback: In 2012, those 65 and over were most likely to get their news from television (73.5%) with newspapers a distant second choice (51.1%). TV is also the main source of news for every other age group except 18-29 year olds who have recently become most dependent on online sources (34.1% to 35.2%). Note that these options are not mutually exclusive. As many individuals acquire news from more than one source.