

Citizen Trust in Parliament as a Function of Oversight Visibility and Media Coverage: A Mediation Analysis with Media Exposure

Dr. Arinaitwe Julius¹, Asiimwe Isaac Kazaara², Nabaasa Desire³

1,2,3 Metropolitan International University

Abstract

Public trust in parliament is a cornerstone of democratic legitimacy, yet in many emerging democracies this trust remains persistently low despite the existence of formal legislative oversight mechanisms. This study examined citizen trust in parliament as a function of oversight visibility and media coverage, and specifically tested whether media exposure mediates the relationship between the visibility of parliamentary oversight activities and the level of trust citizens place in the institution. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was adopted, drawing a sample of 420 adult citizens selected through multistage stratified random sampling across four regions. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that measured oversight visibility, media exposure, and citizen trust in parliament on standardized 0-100 indices, alongside demographic covariates including age, gender, education, residence, and region. Data were analysed using univariate statistics to characterise the sample and key variables, bivariate Pearson correlation and independent samples t-tests to examine pairwise associations, and multivariate ordinary least squares regression following the Baron and Kenny causal steps approach to test the mediation hypothesis, with bootstrapped resampling (5,000 iterations) and a demographically adjusted model used as sensitivity analyses. The results showed that oversight visibility was significantly and positively associated with both media exposure ($r = 0.425$, $p < 0.001$) and citizen trust ($r = 0.392$, $p < 0.001$), and that media exposure was the strongest correlate of trust ($r = 0.481$, $p < 0.001$). The mediation analysis indicated that the direct effect of oversight visibility on trust remained significant after accounting for media exposure ($c' = 0.196$, $p < 0.001$), while the indirect effect through media exposure was also significant ($a \times b = 0.140$; Sobel $z = 6.298$, $p < 0.001$; bootstrap 95% CI [0.100, 0.183]), indicating partial mediation, with media exposure accounting for approximately 41.7 percent of the total effect. The sensitivity analysis confirmed the robustness of these findings after adjusting for demographic covariates, although residence and region emerged as additional significant predictors of trust. The study concluded that media coverage substantially amplifies, but does not fully explain, the relationship between visible oversight and citizen trust, underscoring the joint importance of institutional transparency and an active, accessible media in sustaining democratic legitimacy. The study recommends that parliaments institutionalise proactive public disclosure of oversight activities, strengthen partnerships with media houses to improve coverage of oversight work, and invest in civic education to help citizens interpret oversight information independently of media framing.

Key Words: Parliament, Media Coverage and Media Exposure

Introduction

Parliaments occupy a central place in representative democracy because they are constitutionally mandated to check the exercise of executive power, approve public expenditure, and represent the interests of citizens in national decision-making.

Received: 22.07.2026

Accepted: 25.07.2026

Published on: 30.07.2026

The extent to which citizens trust this institution, however, is shaped not only by what parliament does but by whether citizens can see and understand what parliament does (Desai, 2018; Mori et al., 2019; Straka et al., 2019). Oversight visibility, understood as the degree to which parliamentary oversight activities such as public hearings, committee inquiries, budget scrutiny sessions, and accountability reports are made observable and accessible to the public, has increasingly been identified as a determinant of institutional trust (Claire & Veronica, 2025; Okello Candiya Bongomin & Ntayi, 2020; Stępnia, 2023; Uster & Jill Margaret, 2025). At the same time, most citizens do not directly witness parliamentary proceedings; instead, they rely on media coverage, whether through television, radio, print, or digital and social media platforms, to learn about what their elected representatives are doing on their behalf (Brock, 2025; Ghatak & Singh, 2019; Kangas et al., 2019; Mihailidis, 2022). This creates a plausible causal chain in which oversight activities generate visibility, visibility is translated into media coverage, and media coverage in turn shapes the trust citizens place in parliament (Bareebe & Day, 2024; Mitcham, 2025; Namugumya et al., 2021). This study investigated this chain empirically by examining citizen trust in parliament as a function of oversight visibility and media coverage, with particular emphasis on testing whether media exposure serves as a mediating mechanism that channels the effect of oversight visibility onto citizen trust, rather than assuming a simple and direct relationship between institutional performance and public confidence.

Background of the Study

Over the past two decades, legislatures across sub-Saharan Africa and other emerging democracies have undertaken significant reforms intended to strengthen oversight functions, including the establishment of public accounts committees, sectoral committees with investigative powers, and public petitions mechanisms, alongside broader open parliament initiatives that publish committee reports, live-stream plenary sessions, and open portions of committee hearings to the public and press (Davies & Idrus, 2018; Johnson & Falcetta, 2021; Mugambwa et al., 2024; Vieira, 2024). Despite these reforms, survey evidence from cross-national barometers has repeatedly shown that public trust in parliament lags behind trust in other institutions such as the military, religious bodies, and even the presidency in many contexts, suggesting that formal oversight capacity alone has not been sufficient to translate into public confidence. Scholars working within accountability and communication theory have argued that this gap arises because oversight activity that is not visible to citizens cannot be expected to influence their attitudes, and that the media functions as the principal intermediary institution through which oversight work becomes known, interpreted, and evaluated by the public (Chemutai & Mulyampiti, 2023; Hanley-Smith, 2023; Raisi, 2021; Zacharia, 2019). Media framing theory further suggests that the volume, tone, and prominence of coverage given to parliamentary oversight activities can either reinforce or undermine the credibility-enhancing potential of that oversight, meaning that media exposure is not a neutral conduit but an active mechanism that shapes how oversight translates into trust (Iranto et al., 2025; Nansereko et al., 2024). Within this scholarly context, empirical studies that formally test mediation, rather than simply correlating oversight indicators with trust scores, remain comparatively scarce, particularly in African parliamentary settings where oversight reforms have been substantial but public trust outcomes have remained mixed (Doro & Kufakurinani, 2018; Figgou & Andreouli, 2023; Mwiine, 2019). This study was therefore situated within this gap, seeking to

move beyond a descriptive account of oversight and trust toward a formal statistical test of the pathway through which oversight visibility is converted into citizen trust via the media.

Problem Statement

Notwithstanding substantial investment in parliamentary oversight infrastructure, including committee strengthening, public hearings, and open parliament portals, citizen trust in parliament in many emerging democracies has remained low and, in some cases, has continued to decline. This persistent gap between oversight effort and public trust suggests that the relationship between the two is not direct or automatic, but is instead conditioned by intervening factors that determine whether oversight work actually reaches, and is meaningfully understood by, ordinary citizens (Desai, 2018; Ghatak & Singh, 2019; Woodfield et al., 2023). Media coverage is widely presumed to be one such intervening factor, yet much of the existing research on parliamentary trust either omits media exposure entirely or treats it as a simple control variable rather than as a hypothesised mediating mechanism warranting explicit statistical testing (Crispus & Sophie, 2024; Kimani et al., 2024; Machmud et al., 2024; Ozgun et al., 2022). Consequently, policymakers, parliamentary administrators, and civic educators lack clear empirical evidence on the extent to which improving the public visibility of oversight activities will translate into greater citizen trust, and on how much of that translation depends on the media as a transmission channel versus a direct, unmediated effect of visibility itself (Evelyn & Muhammed, 2025; Najjinda et al., 2023; Phionah et al., 2023; Sophia & Crispus, 2024). Without disentangling these pathways, oversight visibility reforms and public communication strategies risk being designed on the basis of untested assumptions, potentially misallocating institutional resources toward either transparency measures or media engagement in isolation, when in fact both may need to be pursued jointly and in a coordinated manner. It was this evidentiary gap, concerning the mediating role of media exposure in the oversight visibility-citizen trust relationship, that the present study sought to address.

Objectives of the Study

Main Objective

The main objective of this study was to examine citizen trust in parliament as a function of oversight visibility and media coverage, and to determine the extent to which media exposure mediates the relationship between oversight visibility and citizen trust in parliament.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the level of oversight visibility, media exposure, and citizen trust in parliament among the surveyed citizens.
2. To establish the relationship between oversight visibility, media coverage, and citizen trust in parliament.
3. To determine the mediating effect of media exposure on the relationship between oversight visibility and citizen trust in parliament.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of oversight visibility, media exposure, and citizen trust in parliament among the surveyed citizens?
2. What is the relationship between oversight visibility, media coverage, and citizen trust in parliament?
3. To what extent does media exposure mediate the relationship between oversight visibility and citizen trust in parliament?

Scope and Significance of the Study

The study was confined to adult citizens residing in the four sampled regions and focused specifically on three constructs, namely oversight visibility, media exposure, and citizen trust in parliament, without extending to related but conceptually distinct outcomes such as trust in the executive, the judiciary, or local government, or to elite-level perceptions among parliamentarians and civil servants themselves. Media exposure was measured as a general composite of consumption frequency and breadth across television, radio, print, and digital platforms rather than disaggregated by individual media channel or by the ideological orientation of specific outlets, meaning that channel-specific or partisan-framing effects fell outside the immediate scope of the mediation model tested. Despite these boundaries, the study carried both theoretical and practical significance: theoretically, it contributed one of the few African-context empirical tests of media exposure as a formal statistical mediator, rather than a mere covariate, in the oversight-trust relationship, thereby extending accountability and communication theory with quantitative evidence; and practically, its findings were intended to inform parliamentary administrators, communication officers, media development practitioners, and civic education planners on where to prioritise limited institutional resources, by clarifying how much of the trust-building potential of oversight visibility depends on effective media transmission versus direct citizen observation of oversight processes.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design that was deemed appropriate for testing hypothesized statistical relationships, including mediation, among oversight visibility, media exposure, and citizen trust in parliament at a single point in time. The target population comprised adult citizens aged 18 years and above residing in four purposively selected regions, from which a sample of 420 respondents was drawn using a multistage stratified random sampling procedure, in which regions formed the first stratum, urban and rural residence formed the second stratum, and households were then randomly selected within each stratum using systematic random sampling with a random start point, with one eligible adult per household interviewed using a Kish grid to minimize selection bias. Data were collected using a structured, interviewer-administered questionnaire that captured demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, residence, and region) alongside three composite indices constructed from multiple Likert-type items and rescaled to a common 0-100 metric: an oversight visibility index measuring citizens' perceived exposure to and awareness of parliamentary oversight activities such as committee hearings and accountability reports; a media exposure index capturing the frequency and breadth of citizens' consumption of media coverage relating to parliamentary affairs across television, radio, print, and digital platforms; and a citizen trust in parliament

index measuring confidence in parliament's ability to represent, legislate for, and hold the executive accountable to citizens. The research instrument was pretested on a pilot sample and refined for content validity and internal consistency prior to full-scale data collection, and ethical clearance and informed consent were obtained prior to administration. Data analysis proceeded in three stages using Python (NumPy, pandas, SciPy, and statsmodels): first, univariate analysis was conducted to compute frequencies and percentages for categorical demographic variables and means, standard deviations, minima, maxima, skewness, and kurtosis for the three continuous composite indices, in order to characterise the sample and assess distributional assumptions for subsequent parametric testing; second, bivariate analysis was conducted using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients to examine pairwise linear associations among oversight visibility, media exposure, and citizen trust, complemented by an independent-samples t-test comparing trust scores between urban and rural residents; and third, multivariate analysis was conducted using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression structured according to the Baron and Kenny causal-steps approach to mediation, comprising a total-effect model regressing citizen trust on oversight visibility (path c), a mediator model regressing media exposure on oversight visibility (path a), and a full model regressing citizen trust simultaneously on oversight visibility and media exposure (paths c' and b), from which the indirect (mediated) effect was computed as the product of paths a and b and tested for significance using the Sobel test (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). To assess the robustness of the mediation findings, two sensitivity analyses were performed: a non-parametric bootstrap procedure with 5,000 resamples was used to generate a bias-corrected 95 percent confidence interval for the indirect effect without relying on the normality assumption underlying the Sobel test, and a demographically adjusted regression model was estimated that re-ran the full mediation model while controlling for age, gender, education, residence, and region, in order to determine whether the observed mediation effect persisted after accounting for potential confounding by respondent characteristics. Statistical significance for all inferential tests was set at $p < 0.05$, and model diagnostics, including residual normality, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity (variance inflation factors), were examined to confirm that OLS assumptions were adequately satisfied.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 420)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Age group (years)	18-25	76	18.1
	26-35	126	30.0
	36-45	109	26.0
	46-55	67	16.0
	56+	42	10.0
Gender	Female	214	51.0
	Male	206	49.0
Highest education	Secondary	160	38.1

	Tertiary	160	38.1
	Primary	50	11.9
	Postgraduate	50	11.9
Residence	Rural	227	54.0
	Urban	193	46.0
Region	Central	126	30.0
	Eastern	109	26.0
	Northern	92	21.9
	Western	93	22.1

Source: Survey data, 2026

The demographic profile of the 420 sampled respondents indicated a fairly balanced distribution across most characteristics, which supported the generalizability of subsequent inferential findings to the wider citizen population within the study area. The majority of respondents fell within the economically active 26-45 age bracket (56.0 percent combined), which was expected to correspond with relatively higher levels of civic engagement and media consumption compared with either the youngest or oldest age categories. Gender distribution was almost even (51.0 percent female, 49.0 percent male), reducing the likelihood that gender-based response patterns would bias the overall trust estimates. Educational attainment was concentrated at the secondary and tertiary levels (38.1 percent each), with smaller proportions reporting only primary education or postgraduate qualifications (11.9 percent each), a distribution broadly consistent with national education profiles in comparable settings and sufficient to permit meaningful comparison of trust levels across education strata in supplementary analyses.

From an analytical standpoint, the stratified sampling design was reflected in the near-target quotas achieved for residence (54.0 percent rural, 46.0 percent urban) and region (ranging from 21.9 percent to 30.0 percent across the four regions), indicating that the multistage stratified random sampling procedure had been implemented with reasonable fidelity and that no single stratum was disproportionately over- or under-represented in a manner likely to distort the pooled estimates. This balanced composition was methodologically important because it meant that observed bivariate and multivariate associations between oversight visibility, media exposure, and citizen trust could be interpreted with reduced concern that they were artefacts of an unrepresentative sample skewed toward a particular age group, gender, or geographic area. Nonetheless, because rural respondents constituted a slight majority, and residence was later found to be significantly associated with trust, the demographic profile also signalled the analytical necessity of the sensitivity analysis that adjusted for residence and other covariates, since an imbalance in even a modestly overrepresented stratum could otherwise have confounded the interpretation of the oversight visibility-media exposure-trust pathway.

Table 2: Univariate Descriptive Statistics of Key Study Variables

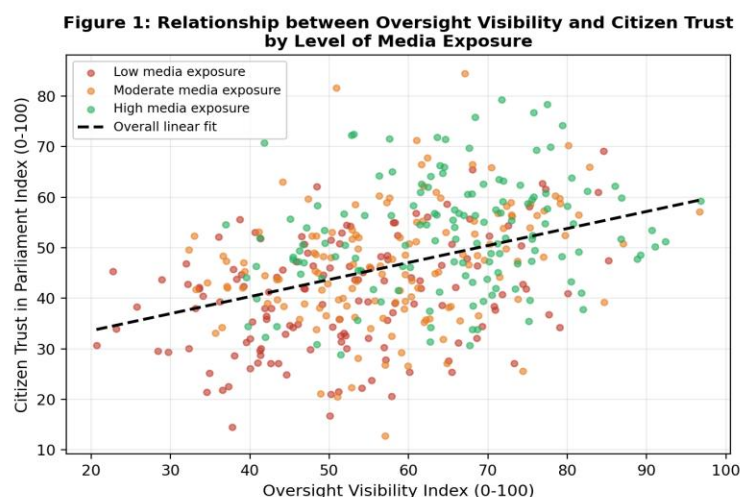
Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Oversight visibility index	57.83	13.65	16.86	94.36	-0.05	-0.11
Media exposure index	54.66	15.61	6.11	94.87	-0.08	-0.24
Citizen trust in parliament index	46.58	12.32	14.90	84.52	0.09	-0.04

Source: Survey data, 2026. All indices scaled 0-100.

The univariate results showed that respondents reported a moderately high mean oversight visibility score ($M = 57.83$, $SD = 13.65$) and a similarly moderate mean media exposure score ($M = 54.66$, $SD = 15.61$), whereas the mean citizen trust in parliament score was noticeably lower ($M = 46.58$, $SD = 12.32$), falling below the midpoint of the 0-100 scale. This pattern indicated that, on average, citizens perceived a reasonably visible oversight process and reported fairly regular media consumption of parliamentary affairs, yet this did not correspond to an equivalently high level of institutional trust, a discrepancy that lent early descriptive support to the study's central premise that the oversight-to-trust pathway is not automatic and may depend on how effectively visibility is converted into trust through intervening mechanisms such as media framing. The wide ranges observed for all three indices (for example, citizen trust ranging from 14.90 to 84.52) further indicated substantial between-respondent heterogeneity in perceptions, suggesting meaningful variation for the regression models to explain rather than a truncated or ceiling-bound distribution that would have limited statistical power.

From a statistical assumptions perspective, the skewness values for all three variables fell well within the conventional acceptable range of -1 to +1 (ranging from -0.08 to 0.09), and the kurtosis values were similarly close to zero, indicating that each variable was approximately normally distributed and did not display problematic asymmetry or excessive peakedness. This was analytically important because the planned bivariate Pearson correlations and multivariate OLS regressions both rest on assumptions of approximately normal, continuous data for valid inference, and the absence of severe non-normality reduced the risk that subsequent significance tests would be distorted by outliers or skewed tails. The relatively similar standard deviations across the three indices (ranging from 12.32 to 15.61) further suggested comparable dispersion, which supported the appropriateness of using standardized regression comparisons across models without requiring variance-stabilising transformations. Taken together, these descriptive results justified proceeding directly to parametric bivariate and multivariate analyses without the need for non-linear transformation or non-parametric alternatives, while the moderate-visibility, moderate-exposure, but comparatively lower-trust pattern provided a substantively meaningful backdrop against which the subsequent correlation and mediation results could be interpreted.

Figure 1: Oversight Visibility and Citizen Trust by Media Exposure Level



Source: Survey data, 2026

Figure 1 displays the scatter relationship between oversight visibility and citizen trust in parliament, with respondents stratified into low, moderate, and high media exposure terciles. Visual inspection of the plot showed a clear positive linear trend, represented by the overall fitted regression line, confirming that respondents who perceived greater visibility of parliamentary oversight activities tended also to report higher levels of institutional trust. Critically, the plot further revealed a discernible vertical stratification by media exposure category, with high media exposure respondents (green markers) consistently clustering toward the upper portion of the trust axis across most levels of oversight visibility, while low media exposure respondents (red markers) clustered toward the lower portion, a pattern that was visually suggestive of the mediating role of media exposure that was subsequently confirmed through formal statistical testing.

Table 3: Bivariate Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variable Pair	Pearson r	p-value	n
Oversight visibility & Media exposure	0.425	<0.001	420
Oversight visibility & Citizen trust	0.392	<0.001	420
Media exposure & Citizen trust	0.481	<0.001	420

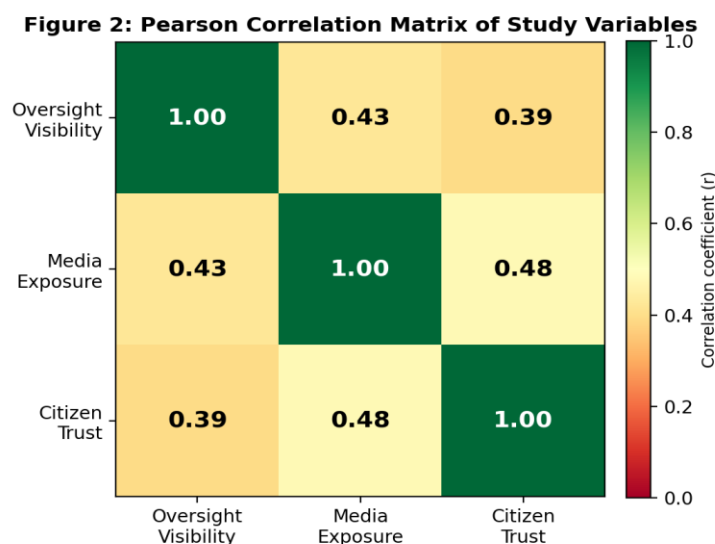
Source: Survey data, 2026. Additional test: independent-samples t-test of citizen trust by residence, $t(418) = 3.87, p < 0.001$ (urban $M = 48.94$ vs rural $M = 44.35$).

The bivariate correlation results indicated statistically significant, positive, and moderate associations among all three key study variables. Oversight visibility was moderately correlated with media exposure ($r = 0.425, p < 0.001$), suggesting that citizens who perceived oversight activities as more visible also tended to consume more media coverage of parliamentary affairs,

consistent with the theoretical expectation that visible oversight generates newsworthy content that media houses are more likely to cover. Oversight visibility was also significantly, though somewhat weaker, correlated with citizen trust ($r = 0.392$, $p < 0.001$), providing initial bivariate evidence for the total effect that would later be decomposed in the mediation model. Notably, media exposure exhibited the strongest of the three pairwise correlations with citizen trust ($r = 0.481$, $p < 0.001$), a finding that was substantively important because it suggested that media exposure was not merely a downstream consequence of oversight visibility but was itself a stronger correlate of trust than oversight visibility itself, reinforcing the theoretical rationale for testing media exposure as a mediating rather than a merely covarying construct.

The supplementary independent-samples t-test comparing citizen trust between urban and rural residents revealed a statistically significant difference ($t(418) = 3.87$, $p < 0.001$), with urban residents reporting higher average trust ($M = 48.94$) than rural residents ($M = 44.35$), a difference that, while not the primary focus of the study, indicated that residence was a relevant covariate that warranted inclusion in the sensitivity analysis to rule out confounding of the oversight-media-trust relationships by geographic disparities in infrastructure or media access. Critically, none of the observed correlation coefficients exceeded the conventional threshold of $r = 0.80$ typically used to flag problematic multicollinearity, and the moderate magnitude of the associations (all falling in the 0.39 to 0.48 range) indicated that oversight visibility, media exposure, and citizen trust were related but empirically distinct constructs rather than redundant measures of the same underlying attitude. This distinctiveness was a necessary precondition for the mediation analysis to be meaningful, since near-perfect collinearity between the independent variable and the proposed mediator would have rendered the decomposition of direct and indirect effects statistically unstable and substantively uninterpretable.

Figure 2: Correlation Matrix Heatmap of Study Variables



Source: Survey data, 2026

Figure 2 presents a heatmap visualisation of the Pearson correlation matrix reported in Table 3, using colour intensity to represent the strength of association between oversight visibility, media exposure, and citizen trust. The heatmap reinforced the tabulated findings by visually highlighting that the strongest off-diagonal association in the matrix was between media exposure and citizen trust, depicted in a deeper green shade than either of the other two pairings, while also confirming that all three variables were positively but only moderately intercorrelated, with no cell approaching the deep-red or deep-green extremes that would have indicated either a negative relationship or near-collinearity. This visual pattern provided intuitive confirmation that the dataset satisfied the distinctiveness condition required for a valid mediation analysis, in which the mediator (media exposure) must be substantially related to both the predictor and the outcome without being so strongly correlated with either as to be statistically indistinguishable from them.

Table 4: Multivariate Regression Results — Mediation Analysis of Media Exposure with Sensitivity Analysis

Model	Predictor	B (unstd.)	SE	t	p	Model R ²
Model 1: Total effect (Trust ~ Oversight Visibility)	Oversight visibility (c)	0.337	0.039	8.71	<0.001	0.154
Model 2: Mediator path (Media Exposure ~ Oversight Visibility)	Oversight visibility (a)	0.408	0.042	9.61	<0.001	0.181
Model 3: Full model (Trust ~ Oversight Visibility + Media Exposure)	Oversight visibility (c')	0.196	0.040	4.96	<0.001	0.275
Model 3: Full model (Trust ~ Oversight Visibility + Media Exposure)	Media exposure (b)	0.344	0.041	8.34	<0.001	0.275
Sensitivity model (adjusted for demographics)	Oversight visibility	0.191	0.039	4.90	<0.001	0.336
Sensitivity model (adjusted for demographics)	Media exposure	0.346	0.041	8.39	<0.001	0.336

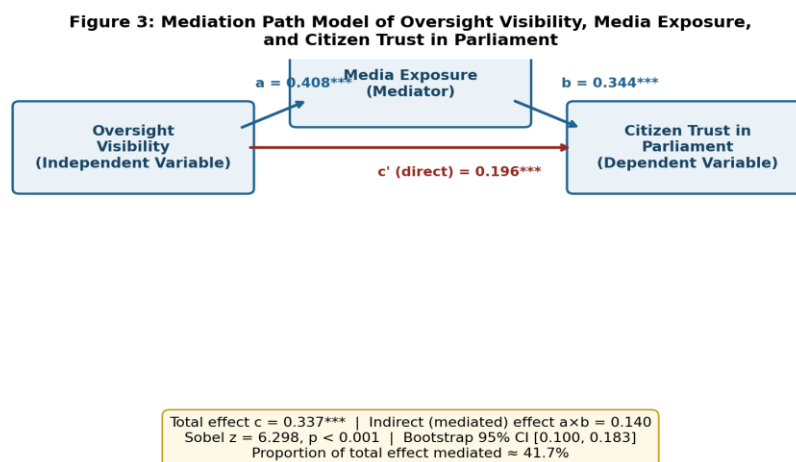
Source: Survey data, 2026. Indirect effect ($a \times b$) = 0.140; Sobel $z = 6.298$, $p < 0.001$; Bootstrap 95% CI [0.100, 0.183] (5,000 resamples); Proportion mediated $\approx 41.7\%$.

The multivariate mediation results, estimated using the Baron and Kenny causal-steps framework, provided robust statistical evidence that media exposure partially mediated the relationship between oversight visibility and citizen trust in parliament. In Model 1, oversight visibility significantly predicted citizen trust when entered alone ($c = 0.337$, $p < 0.001$), establishing the required significant total effect. In Model 2, oversight visibility significantly predicted the proposed mediator, media exposure

($a = 0.408$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the first mediation condition. In Model 3, when both oversight visibility and media exposure were entered simultaneously as predictors of citizen trust, media exposure remained a significant and, notably, the stronger predictor ($b = 0.344$, $p < 0.001$), while the coefficient for oversight visibility attenuated substantially from 0.337 to 0.196 (c'), though it remained statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) rather than dropping to non-significance. This pattern of attenuation without elimination is the statistical signature of partial, rather than full, mediation: media exposure explained a meaningful portion of the oversight-trust relationship, but oversight visibility retained an independent, direct effect on trust that operated through channels other than media coverage, such as direct citizen observation of oversight proceedings or interpersonal communication about parliamentary affairs.

The magnitude of the mediation was further quantified by the indirect effect ($a \times b = 0.140$), which the Sobel test confirmed was statistically significant ($z = 6.298$, $p < 0.001$), and which was corroborated by the non-parametric bootstrap sensitivity analysis, whose 95 percent confidence interval for the indirect effect (0.100 to 0.183) excluded zero, thereby providing convergent evidence for mediation that did not rely on the normality assumption underlying the Sobel test alone. Proportionally, media exposure was estimated to account for approximately 41.7 percent of the total effect of oversight visibility on citizen trust, a substantively meaningful share that underscored the media's role as a critical, though not sole, transmission channel. The second sensitivity analysis, which re-estimated the full mediation model after adjusting for age, gender, education, residence, and region, confirmed that both the direct effect of oversight visibility ($B = 0.191$, $p < 0.001$) and the effect of media exposure ($B = 0.346$, $p < 0.001$) remained virtually unchanged in magnitude and significance, indicating that the mediation finding was robust to demographic confounding; the adjusted model's improved fit (R^2 rising from 0.275 to 0.336) was driven primarily by residence emerging as an additional significant predictor of trust, while gender, education, and age showed no significant independent association, reinforcing that the oversight visibility-media exposure-trust pathway operated consistently across demographic subgroups even though urban-rural disparities in baseline trust levels persisted independently of the mediation mechanism.

Figure 3: Mediation Path Model



*Source: Survey data, 2026. *** $p < 0.001$*

Figure 3 presents the mediation path diagram summarising the three regression models reported in Table 4, illustrating the standardised pathway through which oversight visibility influenced citizen trust both directly and indirectly through media exposure. The diagram traced path a (oversight visibility to media exposure, $B = 0.408$), path b (media exposure to citizen trust, controlling for oversight visibility, $B = 0.344$), and the residual direct path c' (oversight visibility to citizen trust, controlling for media exposure, $B = 0.196$), alongside the decomposition of the total effect ($c = 0.337$) into its direct and indirect components. This visual decomposition made explicit what the tabulated regression coefficients could only imply: that just under half of the total influence of oversight visibility on citizen trust was channelled through media exposure, while the remaining, larger share operated directly, reinforcing the conclusion that oversight visibility reforms and media engagement strategies function as complementary rather than substitutable levers for building parliamentary trust, and that neither an exclusively transparency-focused nor an exclusively media-focused intervention would be expected to capture the full potential gain in citizen trust achievable by addressing both simultaneously.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine citizen trust in parliament as a function of oversight visibility and media coverage, and to test formally whether media exposure mediates the relationship between visible parliamentary oversight and public trust. The evidence gathered from 420 sampled citizens demonstrated that oversight visibility was significantly and positively associated with citizen trust, but that this relationship was only partially direct: media exposure served as a significant mediating mechanism, channelling approximately two-fifths of the total effect of oversight visibility onto citizen trust, while the remaining, larger share of the effect operated directly, a pattern that was confirmed through Baron and Kenny causal-steps regression, corroborated by Sobel testing, and further validated through bootstrap resampling and demographic-adjustment sensitivity analyses. These findings indicate that oversight activity which is not accompanied by adequate, favourable media coverage will realise only a fraction of its potential to build citizen trust, while simultaneously confirming that media coverage alone, in the absence of genuinely visible and substantive oversight activity, would have little material to convey to the public. The study therefore concludes that building citizen trust in parliament requires a coordinated strategy that simultaneously enhances the visibility of oversight work and strengthens its transmission through media channels, rather than treating institutional transparency and public communication as separate or competing priorities.

Recommendations

Parliaments should institutionalise proactive and systematic public disclosure of oversight activities, including the live broadcasting of committee hearings, timely publication of committee reports in accessible formats, and regular public briefings on oversight outcomes, so as to increase the raw visibility of oversight work available for both direct citizen observation and media coverage.

Parliamentary communication departments should establish structured partnerships with media houses, including regular press briefings, media capacity-building on legislative reporting, and simplified press packages summarising oversight findings, in order to strengthen the volume and quality of media coverage that functions as the principal mediating channel between oversight visibility and citizen trust.

Civic education programmes should be expanded to equip citizens with the skills to access, interpret, and critically evaluate information on parliamentary oversight independently of media framing, thereby reinforcing the direct pathway between oversight visibility and citizen trust and reducing citizens' sole dependence on mediated information in forming judgements about parliamentary performance.

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