



DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM, MEDIA AND  
COMMUNICATION, JMG

# PUBLIC TRUST IN POLITICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Investigative Journalism Taken Over by Politicians  
in Armenia

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Essay/Thesis:	15 credits
Program and/or course:	Master's program in Investigative Journalism (MIJ), Master's thesis in Investigative Journalism, JU2603
Level:	Second Cycle
Semester/year:	St/2021
Supervisor:	Annika Bergström
Examiner:	Monica Löfgren Nilsson

## Abstract

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Keyword: Public trust, investigative journalism, media and journalism, watchdog, political opposition, journalism, Armenian media, politics, media-politics relations, politicized media system

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**Purpose:** The aim of the research is to juxtapose the public trust towards investigations carried out by investigative journalists with the ones conducted by politicians in Armenia. The thesis also seeks to reveal the preconditions of trust in the two phenomena mentioned above.

**Theory:** Conditioned by the lack of prior research on the matter in Armenia, the theoretical framework of trust and its prerequisites is borrowed from western academic works and adapted for the Armenian public.

**Method:** The methodology used for the thesis encompasses both qualitative and quantitative research, more specifically a paper-based survey conducted in both rural and urban areas of Armenia with 2800 responders and an interview conducted with four of the survey participants.

**Result:** The research revealed that the investigations conducted by politicians are trusted significantly more, while the public trust score in investigative journalism is evidently low.

## Foreword

The thesis has been produced during my scholarship period at Gothenburg University, funded by the Swedish Institute, thus, I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Swedish Institute for the assistance and the provided opportunity.

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# Introduction

Similar to the field of journalism as a whole, investigative journalism in Armenia struggles due to several reasons. One of them is the obscure insight of the public on the definition of investigative journalism which is observed even in developed countries. Due to the unfamiliarity with the term, the education system in the country fails to provide prospective investigative journalists proper education. The lack of education often generates poor professionalization. Because of the low number of investigative journalists in the country, only one investigative newspaper operates in Armenia. Being the only investigative media outlet in Armenia, Hetq is entrusted with the responsibility to carry out the duties of the watchdog (Gijn, 2019). Due to the lack of educated professionals, the burden of being a watchdog is often distributed among political oppositions. The latter often execute "offensive and defensive" strategies against the ruling powers with the help of specially composed texts or performances (Hansson, 2018). Last year, the former ambassador of the Holy See, and Portugal, the son-in-law of the ex-president of Armenia, Mikayel Minasyan, started a political opposition campaign accompanied by investigative reports often containing leaks and disclosure of political events. Another active political and media field member who generally discloses facts and provides political and military leaks is Vardan Ghukasyan, an ex-member of RA Police. The latter started using Facebook live streams and his youtube channel for his anti-government campaign, which quickly became popular and heavily discussed among the public. Nevertheless, the effects of their reports are regularly divided into two mutually exclusive groups, creating the impression that trust is highly associated with personal preferences such as sympathy and antipathy (Sargsyan, 2014). Meanwhile, the reports of the only investigative online newspaper Hetq touch upon social, economic, and environmental issues (Baghdasryan, 2019).

The political reforms gave journalism transparency that the latter previously lacked while operating under the rule of an authoritarian regime. After the strict censorship of the ex-government, the absolute absence of censorship and freedom acquired by the journalists contributed to the distribution of political disinformation in large loads and fake news in general. Not enjoying the public trust before the revolution, journalism did not earn it afterward either (Baydar, 2013). Despite the distrust, the media still managed to lead to public polarization, caused by the highly opposing viewpoints of several societal groups, which was

triggered even more after the defeat of the country during the war. Meaning that the defeat was linked to the current government by certain societal groups, while others considered the previous government responsible for the territorial loss. Both the revolution and the conflict contributed to the rising number of investigative projects and reports being of high societal significance. The core mission of the revolution, which was to condemn and demolish the previously unpunished corruption and other wrongdoings of the previous government, surely generated the public's interest in unveiling how the latter abused their power (Danylenko & Grynchuk, 2019). Hence not only the investigative newspaper carried out several investigations, but politicians and individuals, as well. In contrast, projects carried out due to the revolution addressed the ex-government and condemned it for corruption, while the investigations carried out as a result of the defeat are aimed at the current government, as a considerable part of the society switched their political opinion as well. The government, nevertheless, addresses exposing discoveries as misinformation and fake news. (Freedom House, 2021)

The Republic of Armenia, as a country with a hybrid regime of governance, currently undergoes protests against the current government. The promising outcome of the Velvet Revolution in 2018 did not satisfy the expectations of the public. The worsening economic situation, defeat in the war, and loss of territories induced the public to start a demonstration against the ruling party (Iskandaryan, 2018).

Given the situation, journalism could have served as the primary link between the public and politicians. (Wei & Xu., 2019). Meanwhile, journalistic investigations should have revealed the true nature of the suspicions against the current government. Nevertheless, they failed to perform their duties as the state watchdog.

The strategies of using digital platforms for political reasons vary. Prime minister Nikol Pashinyan has created a platform where he can easily communicate with the public using Facebook live streams. At the same time, his opposition, Mikayel Miansyan, carries out investigations and publishes leaks on suspicious transactions of Pashinyan and his family, documents proving his ownership of offshore companies. The public response to the investigation varied based on the political preferences of the Armenian citizens (Mejlumyan, 2019).

Nevertheless, even though the investigation had a selective outcome on the public, it acted as a stimulus towards the escalation of the protests. The sharpening of political protests

was inspired by the leaks regarding the agreement between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia, signed by Nikol Pashinyan, while the public was unaware of his actions. The agreement, which assumed territorial concession, was only announced publicly after the three sides signed it. According to the agreement, a significant part of the disputed region passed under the rule of Azerbaijan. A few hours before the agreement's signature, Mikayel Minasyan published the drafted version of the agreement as a leak, provoking the public to take preventive actions. Nevertheless, the public trust makes the final point, and the central part of the public considered the article as a provocation and an attempt to start a revolution. Another significant portion of the Armenian public undertook actions after the published leak up to invading the Government building by breaking the doors and taking a parliament representative of his car, and attacking him physically ( Freedom House, 2021).

At the same time, the media agencies, especially the broadcast media and investigative channels, kept silent. The primary source of information was either the official pages of the ruling party members and PM Nikol Pashinyan or the opposition media including Mikayel Minasyan (Nalbandyan, 2021).

## *1.2 Research Aim*

The aim of the study is to reveal the reasons behind a higher public trust in the investigations carried out and presented by politicians compared to those of investigative journalists. The research is of a crucial importance as, first of all, it addresses the existing gap in the research within the framework of audience studies. By conducting an audience survey, it aims to question why investigations carried out by the opposition representatives play more crucial roles in the escalation of public distrust towards the current ruling powers than journalistic investigations. The thesis aims to analyze the correlation of trust with attitude, political point of view, and sentiment by comparing investigations conducted by journalists and investigations done by politicians. The analysis of public trust towards investigations carried out by politicians has not been addressed in Armenian research. More extensive exploration of investigative journalism in Armenia is still yearning, formulating a considerable gap of media analysis in Armenian scientific research. The phenomenon is addressed in a larger context in this particular academic work in aggregation with politics, political involvement in the media field, public trust in both politics and media. None of the

listed spheres has been thoroughly examined within the Armenian research works making this specific academic work of a high significance as the latter will not only establish the basis in the research encompassing several fields simultaneously. To analyze the phenomenon of trust towards the media, a quantitative survey has been conducted, analyzing and comparing the trust towards politicians' reports and investigative journalism in Armenia.

The thesis aims to answer the following research question, "What are the roles of oppositional investigations and journalistic investigations in the mind of the audience."

The following hypotheses are to be verified or falsified through the thesis: *Hypothesis 1.*

Investigative reports by the political figures tend to have more reach and engagement and simultaneously are more trusted in comparison with the investigations conducted by

journalists. *Hypothesis 2.* The predicted high level of trust towards the investigations by

politicians are conditioned by the low level of trust towards journalism. *Hypothesis 3.* Trust

is not a necessary condition for the person to follow a particular news outlet. *Hypothesis 4.*

The public trust in investigative journalism depends on the political preferences of the public.

*Hypothesis 5.* The level of trust in investigative journalism in urban and rural areas varies, depending on education, employment status.



# Background

## *2.1 Media Development in Armenia*

The advancement of the Armenian media, more specifically the process of its evolution and transformation, can be divided into two periods: the Soviet Union media era that lasted from 1920 up until its collapse in 1991 and post-Soviet Armenian media that emerged after Armenia gained independence in 1991 and functions without drastic changes till nowadays. The first stage comprises remarkable episodes of Armenian media history, such as the creation of Armenian Public Radio in 1921 and the Public TV Company of Armenia in 1957. Even though the creation of the very first Armenian newspaper was marked centuries earlier, the creation of the first official mass-circulation newspaper is marked during the Soviet Era, as well. Existing under the rule of the Soviet Union, Armenian media was heavily influenced by the ruling power. The strong control of the Soviet government over the Armenian media eliminated the opportunity of the Soviet Armenian media to function independently. Thus, the latter was mainly filled with Soviet-influenced communistic propaganda and ideology. The second stage of media in the newfound independent state of Armenia occurred hand in hand with the digital technology development and evolved around the latter further. With the gradual ideological modification among the public after the demolition of the communist-oriented mass outlook, ethical norms emerged in the Armenian media as an important component of the latter. Such changes have a close causal link with the increasing professionalization of the media field, its executors, and the increasing quality of their education (Baghiyan, 2020).

Armenia, as of 2020, ranked 61st in the Freedom of Press Index ranking, which is marked as a remarkable achievement. Armenia recorded an increase in the ranking by improving its position by climbing 19 points in the ranking. The positive result was conditioned by the Velvet Revolution that took place in Armenia in 2018. The report by Reporters Without Borders states that the revolution resulted in more blossomed media diversity. The latter points to improved inclusiveness of the media market. Nevertheless, the report also claims that despite the improvement, the independence of the newsrooms has not been achieved, and the Armenian media still lacks transparency. (RSF, 2020) As of 2021, Armenia fell two points down in the Press Freedom Ranking conditioned by the inability of the government to ensure the transparent practice of journalism. The start of the armed

conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenian and Azerbaijan only emphasized the already existing involvement of the state in the media by posing restrictions and establishing criminal responsibility for spreading fake information on the conflict or exposing confidential information under the state emergency status. The actions of the media were limited to reporting the official data provided by the government. Besides the hardships of the Armenian media caused by the war, the issue of not transparent media ownership and the lack of independence in the practice of journalism present before the Velvet Revolution remained unresolved despite the promising mission of the newly elected government. (EPF, 2018)

## *2.2 Digitalization of Media in Armenia*

The digitalization of media played an essential role in news consumption. Print media and broadcast quickly gave up their high rates to the newly emerged sources of information. The most recent study in 2019 carried out by the Regional Research Center organization related to the sources of information in Armenia. The results illustrated that 58.9 percent of Armenians tend to get information from the Internet, while the 2nd largest group preferred television with 35.7 percent. 4 percent of Armenians receive news and information from their relatives or friends, while radio and print media receive only 1 percent and 0.3 percent correspondingly (Media Initiative Center, 2019).

With the increase in the number of people using the Internet in Armenia, the media organizations expanded and were allowed to operate online. The expanded, more diverse media market succeeded, with the digital news overtaking the traditional media considering the audience share. Digitalization positively impacted the media field in Armenia as the latter allowed expanding the audience share and reaching different demographics easily. The modifications increased the speed of delivering the news and its volume (IREX, 2016). However, not all digital platforms record such success rates as social media, primarily Facebook. The social networks, predominantly Facebook, gathered many of the leading newspapers of Armenia, becoming the most consumed sources of information. The phenomenon is one of the many consequences of the Velvet Revolution on the media. The reason is that Facebook then encompassed the whole logistical, ideological and organizational communication of the revolution. The news outlets quickly grasped the possibility to expand their audience due to the high accumulation of the public in the social network. The Media Report-Armenia concluded that digitization was followed by the plurality of the expressed

viewpoints and diversity in the newsrooms. Yet, the media is highly dependent on the political elite due to high rates of political involvement in the field, often serving the latter's interests instead of the public's ( Melikyan et al., 2013).

The main function of the media operating in a democratic society and contributing to preserving democratic values is to “aid citizens in becoming informed” (Holbert, 2005, p. 511). By that, citizens become informed and educated enough on political matters to be able to make the best decisions possible in general and in political life as well. The question of public trust towards the media is getting more and more current and topical. The phenomenon of public trust is the belief that specific individuals in society are privileged to have a title with an expectation to hold the community's public interest and put the public interest above personal advantage.

Public trust is the phenomenon that defines the general belief towards the professional or a particular individual who acts in a certain way to serve or protect the public interest (Kioussis, 2001). In the information age, public trust strongly influences the strategic development of news media and journalism (Strömbäck et al., 2020).

### *2.3 Investigative Journalism in Armenia*

The Investigative Journalism Handbook by Al Jazeera divides investigative journalism's definition and working cycle into two sections; the first one aims to uncover the truth about new facts about specific issues or problems. According to Al Jazeera, the report should provide direct, clear, and precise evidence. The second definition explains investigative journalism's primary goal of serving the public and its interest, which often varies from "national interest." Investigative journalism should stay as a watchdog for society. (2020).

The development of investigative journalism in Armenia is barriered by political parallelism and state influence. The latter generates the pattern where the political oppositions and political figures dominate in state-media relations making the media the dependent variable (RSF, 2020).

# Theory

## *2.1 The Phenomenon of Trust*

Trust is a complex phenomenon interpreted in different ways in anthropology, cultural studies, philosophy, sociology, psychology, and economics. Both the trustor and the trustee aim to satisfy their own needs by placing trust and being trusted (Coleman, 1990, p. 96). The trustor, by no empirical means, can verify the intentions of the trustee (Seligman, 1997). The trustor thus becomes the vulnerable side of the relationship. The trustor develops his/her behavior based on his/her belief regarding the trustee's trustworthiness, which later transforms into a certain attitude towards the trustee's intentions (Riedl, 2012). In order for the trustor to believe in the trustee's trustworthiness, the trustor should believe that the trustee has competencies required for the relationship, benevolence. Thus the absence of self-centered motives and integrity of the set of principles the trustor himself/herself accepts (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). However, the notions of trust and trustworthiness should not be mistaken, as trust always involves a risk (Hardin, 2002). Trust having an optimistic disposition leads towards the desire of cooperation (Uslaner 2002), while distrust leads towards the opposite. However, from the sociological point of view, distrust and trust are more likely to be conditioned by social factors rather than psychological, for instance: education, employment status, membership of minority or ethnic groups, divorce, religion. (Newton et al., 2017). Taking into consideration the element of uncertainty, credibility becomes the key factor in building trust (Rotter, 1967). Sociological importance of it lies in trust being the precondition for any human social organism (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984).

Trust is not only the consequence of a certain behavior but also holds the ability to develop behavior itself (Fletcher & Park, 2017). Given the political context, institutional and interpersonal trust are connected to civic engagement and important political behaviors.(Putnam, 1993). Low levels of political trust can result in demonstrations and riots (Paige, 1971). Moreover, there is a strong link between trust and perseverance of the premises of democratic governance such as social homogeneity, equality in its various manifestations, absence of corruption (Newton et al., 2017).

Empirical researchers have attempted to standardize the measurement of media trust (Kohring, 2023); however, as a rule, media trust is considered only in the context of political categories consisting of freedom of speech and freedom of the media. From the point of view

of Anna Nenasheva, Candidate of Political Science, political freedom and pluralism of opinions are fundamentally important but by no means the only components of media trust (2018). To sum up, trust not only plays an essential role in every human interaction, it also influences further social life in every aspect (Tsfati et al., 2003).

## *2.2 Public Trust Towards Mainstream Media*

In some countries, the public considers the mainstream media not credible enough, given their disbelief in the latter's objectivity, especially in developing countries. The public believes accuracy is often sacrificed for commercial purposes. The mistrust towards the mainstream media will later be referred to as media skepticism. As in all the other forms of relationships, a key factor is the uncertainty. While in general, the trustor questions the motivations of the trustee, in this relationship, the public questions the journalist's intentions, whether the latter performs his/her duty of being a watchdog and avoids manifestations of bias. As both parties in the relationship aim to benefit the trustee, in this scenario, the public intends to gain from the activities of the journalists. While the public questions the accuracy and credibility of the journalist, more importantly, it questions the journalist's objectivity and fairness to be able to trust. Media skepticism is based on subjective perceptions. It also can be conditioned by the person's political viewpoint (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994).

Trust and credibility often go hand in hand, especially while being referred to the media (Kioussis 2001). While the notion of credibility is touched on in the literature more frequently (Kohring and Matthes 2007), trust is the key factor connected to accuracy and being unbiased (Thorson et al., 2010). Earlier, credibility was measured given the degree of the message being persuasive and the trustworthiness of the journalist. (Hovland and Weiss 1951). Nowadays, the reputation of the newspaper is also a key factor while determining the credibility of the journalistic piece (Fletcher & Park, 2017). Given the declining trust towards the mainstream media in several countries, the rising number of pieces published due to the digitalization of news endangers the democracy of a certain state (Silverman 2015). While deciding to trust the news, the public not only takes into consideration the objectivity and accuracy of the material, but also the reputation of the journalist and his/her past inclination towards what is true? (Coleman et al., 2012, 38)

In democracies where the media is believed to be independent, the public trust is subsequently higher, while in such countries where the role of the state is higher, public trust tends to be significantly lower (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019). The Reuters Institute Digital News Report, based on the survey in 2017 shows that the traditional media such as television and radio, the digital platforms created for news consumption, have more public trust. Meanwhile, placing journalism on social media platforms leads to a lower level of public trust (Newman et al., 2017).

### *2.3 Public Trust towards politicians*

Trust towards institutions is a key factor in the perseverance of democracy. Trust in political institutions is often linked to the voting turnout, interpersonal trust, perception of the policies, and political participation in a broader sense (Levi & Stoker, 2000). Public trust in politics is also closely related to social trust. In such countries where the level of corruption is high, it is more difficult to build a civil society that will go against the abuse of power by the government, instead will lead passive political life (Newton & Norris, 2000).

The phenomenon called "trust nexus" signifies the strong correlation of trust in politics with trust in the media (Hanitzsch et al., 2018). The relation is stronger in countries with more politically parallelized media systems. The research showed that in the case of the absence of the media, one would move along with his/her partisan predispositions instead of relying on the new affairs (Ladd, 2010, 2012).

The expectations of the public cannot condition the trust towards the government (Hardin 1998). Trust is formed based on the predictions made on past experience, and while politics comprises human behavior, predictions cannot be reliable. Moreover, the intentions of the government most often are not clear. Thus the public does not trust the government but has confidence in it (Luhmann 1979). The lack of confidence, in its turn, is not in the institution directly but in the leadership ability of the political figures.

To trust a political figure, the public seeks to see integrity, authenticity and competence. The sets are broad and comprise many notions. To be authentic, the political figure should display a desire to be in touch with ordinary people, their lives, and outlook. The importance of this specific notion has increased in recent years. Even while measuring

trust, the public gives more importance to integrity. Nevertheless, a significant part of people distrusting the political figure explains their mistrust by lack of authenticity.

While the earlier studies failed to prove the interpersonal connection between political trust and social trust, the recent sophisticated surveys proved that those displaying higher social trust tend to trust the politics as well (Newton et al., 2017).

Sweden, New Zealand, Finland, and Japan, considered advanced countries both economically and democratically, faced a severe decline in the public trust. The reasons were tax deficits, rapid changes in the currency, cuts in public services, the perpetuation of corruption, industrial conflicts, etc. Nevertheless, the social trust did not decrease and remain the same, but even increased in some of the countries. Three of the countries but Japan regained the same amount of trust after resolving the problems that occurred (Newton, 2006).

## Method

Qualitative and quantitative methods will be used for the research analysis, particularly a survey and interviews. The combination of the two methods intends to provide numeric data on the scale of the trust without overlooking the reasons behind the numbers. More specifically, interviews would not be sufficient to assess public opinion on a large scale. At the same time, a survey is not a suitable platform for collecting detailed opinions and can lack the depth essential for disclosing the answers. Surveys are selected as a more accurate way to determine the scale of public trust towards Armenian media and the field of politics, while interviews are to indicate the reasons.

### *3.1 Survey*

The initial plan was to conduct the survey digitally and spread its English and Armenian versions on digital platforms. Nevertheless, considering the low computer literacy level of the Armenian public aged 50 or more, there was a need to adapt to the public not to exclude any group. The method of quantitative analysis has been changed to paper-based. The paper-based survey was distributed within both urban and rural areas in Armenia with the help of a small team. The survey's main locations were selected as follows: Yerevan - as the capital of Armenia, Abovyan and Ejmiantsin, regions near Yerevan that are less populated but still considered urban areas, as well as the rural areas, the villages from the Ararat and Syunik region, namely Armash, Aygestan, Dvin, Getazat, Hnaberd, Berdik, Mrganush, Sisavan, Surenavan, Taperakan, Urtsadzor, Lanjanist, Shaghap, Urtsalanj, Vanashen. Some of the villages still do not have access to the Internet. Some of them have an issue with electricity. The only source of information for those living under such conditions is friends or relatives who are usually traveling to Yerevan.

The survey is named "Public Trust Towards Investigative Reporting by Journalists and Politicians in Armenia" with 2800 people from different age groups, locations, employment statuses, lifestyles participating. The survey results will reveal representatives of what demographics and political preferences generally experience trust or distrust towards the



representatives of the field of media and politics. The surveys will most notably question whether the public trusts those investigations conducted and published by politicians or investigative journalists.

### *3.2 Interviews*

As a further elaboration of the topic and further analysis of the hypotheses mentioned above, during the survey 4 candidates were selected to be interviewed and speak about their interpretations regarding trust, the credibility of investigative reporting by oppositions, and state powers and explain his/her reasons for trust or distrust.

The four interview participants were selected with the following aim to further examine the tendency of lack of trust towards journalists and the high acceptance of and trust of the public in political figures' conducted investigations and reports. Moreover, the aim of the interviews are to emphasize the social and economic impact that the politicians' investigations possess, as well as to question why the latter are significantly higher than the effect journalistic reporting has.

Two of the interviewees were selected from the rural areas from different age groups, accordingly, the other two interviewees were selected from urban areas, which aimed to present the difference in ideological perspectives regarding the matter, also to identify which reports interest the public the most. Participants were selected from different age groups to identify and present the ideological framework for the interviewee's specific demographic group.

The main topics of discussions were the means of trust and the possible preconditions to and reasons behind trust in the specific source. The survey has identified another aspect of the discussion that concerns the phenomenon of trust based on personal preference and acceptance of the argumentations in the particular report. The survey illustrates that an individual will tend to trust the report on some occasions if he or she shares the opinion or agrees with the ideas mentioned. Another topic of the discussion touched upon the phenomenon of correlating political activities and investigative reporting. The interview discloses the phenomenon of the public trusting investigations conducted by politicians who in fact had the personal benefit incentive to carry out an investigation in the great majority of the cases. Meaning how the public finds it proper that political figures who have political

interests or benefits and the facts that the investigations are mainly concerning the opposition power, which indirectly assumes the perpetuation of bias. To make it more, as an additional component of the discussion, the stage of journalism and cooperation with political figures were also discussed via interviews within different areas, aimed to compare the ideological approaches of urban and rural areas.

### *3.3 Advantages of using paper-based surveys in Armenia*

The country's defeat in the armed conflict, territorial and human losses triggered the public and led to its disobedience to the government. The uprising protests left no choice for the government but to dissolve the then government and organize snap elections. Despite the large scale of dissatisfaction with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, the political party led by him won in the parliamentary elections by scoring above 50 percent of the electorate. The latter means that by occupying the majority of the seats in the parliament, the political party will be given the prerogative to propose their Prime Minister candidate, who will immediately undertake the position due to the majority of the votes. Thus the victory of the political party meant the designation of Nikol Pashinyan as the Prime Minister. The official announcement of the election results on June 20 proceeded with harsh protests. Many citizens were detained or subjected to arrest due to their manifestation of disobedience. As a result of frequent political persecutions in the times of the previous authoritarian government, the opinion that expressing political viewpoints out loud can cause trouble not only for the person speaking in the form of persecutions, dismissal from work, physical assaults, threats, but his/her family as well. The rooted fear often prevents the public from expressing their political opinions. Doubting the anonymity of the online surveys, many would abstain from filling them in, especially during the electoral period.

The paper-based survey, the process of handing the forms personally, allowed short communication and description of the purpose of the survey itself, which built trust with the respondents after the anonymity of the survey was guaranteed to them. Although many of them decided not to share their opinion, others believed that the survey was anonymous and only for the research. Another advantage of the paper-based survey was the possibility to answer respondents' questions or explain any vague phrases. An instance is that many people

and most of the respondents from the villages did not possess any knowledge on the definition of the term investigative journalism.

As mentioned, the initial plan to have an online-based survey did not work as out of 300 respondents, none were from smaller urban areas or, in general, from rural areas. Even though the survey was shared on Facebook, Twitter pages, numerous research-related groups as well as by the research centers of local universities, it did not reach the desired scale and groups of people. Nevertheless, not in the desired quantity, but the shared survey had responders. The decision to disregard the answers to the survey was made in order to ensure the homogeneity of the answers.

Another reason for the paper-based survey being more efficient for this particular research is that the distribution process was more practical and accessible for reaching the desired groups than online surveys, hence due to the method, the survey was accurate and inclusive enough to base the analysis of the research on.

### *3.4 Disadvantages of using paper-based surveys in Armenia*

Despite the many advantages, using a paper-based survey had its disadvantages. The main drawback of the paper-based survey was the time consumption. A team of 5 legal age volunteers was formed to assist in dividing the workload of distributing the surveys in the selected locations. Around ten days were devoted to the questionnaire to receive responses in urban areas other than Yerevan and villages. In Yerevan, the approximate time to fill in the survey was about 9 minutes. Nevertheless, the most critical issue was not the time spent on the distribution but the fact that the surveys were handwritten. In a significant number of the cases, the handwriting of the responders was not detectable. Consequently, due to invalid responses or unreadable handwriting, around 50 surveys have been excluded. Another disadvantage of the paper-based surveys was the financial cost of their distribution. Meaning that while the online surveys could have been shared on digital platforms free of charge, a certain budget needed to be formed to reach villages or cities that were far from the capital city. Besides the financial costs, a logistical arrangement should have been set up prior to

carrying out the distribution. The arrangement encompasses the selection of the vehicle, time management, and minor organizational responsibilities.

Another disadvantage of the paper-based survey was that while using digital surveys, the responses are automatically grouped in a percentage and shown via visualizations making the analysis process significantly easier. There is no need to read the answers to each multiple-choice question unless the question assumes an open-ended response. Meanwhile, each of the responses to the paper-based surveys should have been read and thoroughly analyzed. In comparison with the online surveys, the survey analysis process was laborious and profoundly time utilizing. The paper-based responses were manually added to the data analysis software, which would then group the similar answers for further analysis, after which the latter has been extensively examined.

The initial estimated desired number of people who would participate in the survey was 2000. However, the number was then increased to 2800.

The primary implementation strategy was to have opinions and close to an equal number of responses from different social categories, which would assist in illustrating a precise and comprehensive conception of the public. Besides, nuances like the ratio of those residing in urban and rural areas have been taken into consideration as well in order to base the analysis on the most accurate data possible. According to the study by Aaron O'Neill, the urban population of Armenia is around 63.22 percent (O'Neill, 2021).

Thus, in accordance with urban statistics, the survey has around 57 percent of responses from Yerevan or other urban areas. Another intention for the survey was to question people from diverse employment and educational statuses, starting from high school or lower to Ph.D. studies or higher. As shown by the results, the desired outcome was successfully reached.

### *3.6 The survey, aim of the questionnaire*

The structural part of the survey was divided into three parts. The first part encompassed the general demographic, the second part was devoted to uncovering the viewpoint and trust of the public in the Armenian media, journalism, and investigative reporting, and finally, the third part addressed the trust or mistrust towards politicians and their journalistic or investigative practice.

The survey aimed to receive an objective and unbiased viewpoint. Thus intense attention was paid to the structure of the questions and word choice, trying to avoid manipulative, catchy, biased, or abhorrent words not to have any influence on the actual responses. The questions and answer options were generated in a neutral and clear structured tone. The survey aims to illustrate the phenomenon of trust or mistrust towards politicians or political figures that have published investigative reports, as well as to illustrate a comparative study between the trust towards the journalistic or in general media agencies and politicians or political parties. Another angle and an essential part of the survey questions the trust, roots and preconditions of mistrust.

Initially, the respondent is answering the following 2 questions, “On the scale of 1-10, assess your trust towards the investigations you have interacted with from the listed below” and “How much have you interacted with the specific investigative report?”

The main aim behind the two subsequent questions in reverse form was to identify the actual roots of trust and eventually connect the dots between two important facts: the level of knowledge and awareness of the investigative reports and viewpoint on personal preference of whether a reporter or a politician. In other words, the survey and the study aim to question whether the trust and positive opinion on the report have any connection with the author's public reputation and the public's viewpoint on him/ her.

People who assess their trust towards the investigative report of a politician, without any engagement with the article, have been asked for a further short interview to describe their reasons for mistrust and their preconditions to trust the news of an investigative character.

Another psychological technique of the survey was to ask the responders to assess the importance of the listed preconditions for their trust towards investigative journalism. The question aims to push the respondent to think about important marks for their trust, and what are the main reasons that they generally have low trust towards the investigative pieces. The survey did not include any contact information, personal details that will identify the specific respondent as promised to the responders. Thus the survey believed to be anonymous by the responders led to a more open and honest answers of the respondent, as well as generating a more comfortable discussion.

### *3.7 Questions*

The first section of the questions aimed to provide the demographic data, which later on would be used to analyze and categorize the groups. Meaning that further analysis would reveal representatives of which demographics tend to trust or distrust the most. The first question asked the responder's age with an open-ended answer section, which furtherly to be categorized from 18 to 25, 25 to 35, 35 to 50, and 50 and higher. Although the question can create sensitive or uncomfortable circumstances while asked in person rather than online, it allows to conduct the segment analysis. Even though the survey was given to representatives of different age groups, the age gate of 18 and higher was defined. The reason was to match the age of the responders to the legal age eligible for voting as well in order to understand the political opinions of those who have the right to make political decisions.

Another demographic question asks the gender of the respondent with the options: male, female, prefer not to say, and eventually with an open-ended option for the responder to fill in his/her answer. Questions about the highest achieved level of education and employment status are needed to analyze the role of education and employment from the respondent's viewpoint. This particular question would not only complete the portrait of the responder but would also shed light on such a significant question as, "Does the level of education affect the phenomenon of public trust and how?" For the answer section of the question regarding the education level, the respondent had to choose from 5 options: Did not attend school, High School, Bachelors, Master, Ph.D. or Higher.

While the last demographic question observes the respondent's employment status and offers 4 answers: employed, unemployed, retired, and student. As the survey aims to include people aged more than 60, the option "retired" was needed.

The second group of questions aimed to reveal the media consumption of citizens in Armenia; although numerous surveys and reports provided partial data on this question, the finalized media consumption and the most popular media sources were not applicable. The data provided by previously conducted surveys are either not inclusive enough from the point of different societal segments for building a general image of the matter or does not encompass popular news consumption platforms and lacks depth in its further analysis. Thus, the question would generate how often people follow news and illustrate what their favorite news channels were, why they have chosen to consume particularly those channels, and how

they follow the news. Based on the previously conducted research, the provided options were generated more closely with Armenian cultural and social tendencies rooted in the times of Soviet Armenia. Thus, the question asked to select from options: Newspapers, TV, Radio, digital platforms and social media.

A number of questions were using a ten-point scale, which allowed the respondent to rate a particular subject from a scale of 1 to 10 not limiting the answer and allowing depth and an explanation. The method mentioned above allows one to understand the respondent's viewpoint, opinions related to the specific matter and could be analyzed accurately during the further steps. For the question regarding the trust, from the scale 1 to 10, 3 point or lower is considered as distrusting, and 7 point or higher, is considered as trusting.

The first scale question discussed trust, openly asking the respondent to provide a numeric answer to the question. The idea was to firstly understand the level of trust among citizens and further elaborate the answers with additional interview questions. Some questions also aimed to analyze the level of satisfaction of citizens with the media and journalism. Thus, it provides numerous answer options from very satisfied, neutral to very dissatisfied.

Analyzing and monitoring main online media news channels, a shortlist of the most preferred and famous media outlets was created.

A) Hetq, an Investigative online newspaper operating in Armenia, is followed mainly for its investigations. The newspaper has approximately 233.000 followers on Facebook and an active webpage which is used in aggregation with a Facebook page as the only platform operating for news distribution.

B) Tert.am, which is a media channel with 630.000 followers on Facebook and an active webpage

C) News.am the social media page of which as of 2021 is currently not operating due to a ban in several cities of the country with 791,000 followers on Facebook. However the agency has a highly active webpage, which provides news in Armenian, Russian, Turkish, English.

D) BlogNews which is mainly concentrated on sharing opinions or sharing other media publications and has around 477.000 Facebook followers. Besides, it has a web page that is operating highly actively.

E) 1in.am which is an online news channel that belongs to the Public Television of RA, operates both on Facebook with 689,000 followers and has an active webpage.

F) Azatutyun (tr. Freedom) - Media channel funded by USA, has displayed high activity since the start of Velvet Revolution, is famous for frequent live streams, currently has 1.180.000 Facebook followers. Has an actively operating Webpage.

G) 168 Hours is an online newspaper that has also a paper-based weekly newspaper of the same name which is one of the most popular newspapers in Armenia. The Facebook page has 187,000 followers. 168.am webpage provides news analysis and global news in Armenian, Russian, and English.

H) Mediamax online Newspaper has 88,120 followers on Facebook and has a webpage that has proactive traffic on webpage

I) MediaPort (Telegram) – the most well-known Telegram channel famous for its leaks and investigative reports regarding Armenia, which was highly active before snap elections in Armenia on June 20. Mediaport is considered as an opposition media channel with around 30,000 Telegram channel members.

J) Civil Net is one of the most well-known and long operating media agencies that expands its activities to Nagorno-Karabakh as well. Has around 429.000 followers on Facebook.

Other famous newspapers which were presented in the survey are

Panorama.am with 21,500 followers on Facebook

Aravot.am with 271,650 followers on Facebook

ArmLur with 60,650 followers on Facebook

Hraparak with 218,000 followers on Facebook

ArmNews - News outlet that is associated with Mikael Minasyan

The above-mentioned general news providers are considered well known or active in Armenia (Bergmann, 2021).

### *3.8 Limitation and Further Research*

Media trust has been heavily analysed and researched before. With the media development, continuous innovations in the news and information distribution technologies, the research is also expanding on contemporary and advanced media. Trust as a correlational aspect of the media, and the public as the main media consumer, have been actively discussed and addressed in academic works as well. The phenomenon of the close relations between the fields of media and politics has been current since ancient times. The tendency started being



addressed from different perspectives in academic works as well. In his research, Afonso de Albuquerque addressed the connection between media and politics, stating that due to the latter's stability, the recurrent pattern can be easily identified. (Albuquerque, 2013) Political Parallelism is one of the four dimensions come up by Hallin and Mancini and addressed in "Comparing Media Systems" to identify the country's media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Political Parallelism is defined as the key aspect that pinpoints the relations between politics and media. In the great majority of cases, the behaviour of the media agencies is prescribed as the dependent variable giving dominance to the behaviour of the political representatives (Albuquerque, 2013). Nevertheless, the political involvement in media activities is less evident in countries with presidential systems compared to those with parliamentary systems. To further elaborate on the thought, in parliamentary countries such as for instance Italy, the government is the pivotal body playing the central role in the country, while in presidential countries such as the USA, the prerogative to present the public issues of high significance is distributed between the president and journalism (Samuels, 2002: 480).

With that said, the research output in disclosing the nature of media and state relations has gradually increased. As a common concern regarding the relevance of Hallini and Mancini's dimensions beyond the Western world, Albuquerque also points to the fact that the concept of political Parallelism may not apply to not Western countries as described in "Comparing Media Systems," but instead may need modifications in its implementation (2013).

Numerous books and articles based on the theoretical framework of Hallin and Mancini researched and discussed the application of the concept of political Parallelism in countries other than the Western world and in different societies. Nevertheless, the topic of this research is particular and has not been addressed academically. The research fills in the gap in the existing research on the other side of the relationship between media and politics, which is the public itself and reflects not the nuances of the relationship but instead the public's response to the relationship. This research adds an important component to the media-politics relations that has been overlooked. The component is the degree of trust from the side of the audience of such relations. There are noticeable gaps in the academic research on the topic of politics, media, and trust altogether globally. In Armenian academic research, these three components have not been put together before. Hence this particular academic work is highly significant as it establishes a basis for further research on the matter.

One of the most vivid limitations of the research is the absolute absence of academic works connected to the matter in the region. Thus, the Western approaches should have been used and adapted to the specifications of the region.

The overwhelming part of the existing secondary literature concerns politics and democracy. The Caucasian region research about trust towards media is not applicable or lacks depth and important components decisive for an accurate analysis. However, there has been an active impact on information and statistics development in Armenia in recent years by numerous international organizations conducting surveys and developing data. Nevertheless, an in-depth analysis of media, trust, and politics is not available.

Another limitation of the research is connected to the actual practice of journalism and understanding of the public what journalism is and what its mission is. As the topic evolves around investigations and investigative reports by politicians, some participants do not understand the concept of investigative journalism. The latter was expected as investigative journalism, being a relatively new branch in journalism that is hardly defined in other parts of the world as well.

As mentioned, further research shows a huge gap in the research on media and journalism. While the media still plays a huge role in people's lives, the research can also develop and innovate the media, making it more trustworthy. The existing literature on media in the region usually addresses the matter shallowly, often touching upon the consumption rates rather than analyzing or diving deeper into the preconditions and reasons of the existing consumption rates or their consequences.

As a country with a highly politicized society and media system, Armenia lacks academic analysis of the relations between the media and politics. To measure the degree to which politics is involved in the state's media system, Hallin and Mancini's theoretical framework can be applied. More specifically, to disclose the matter, the dimensions of political parallelism and the role of the state may be current for application. Furthermore, the analysis can be expanded to the Caucasian region to disclose the socio-political differences between the countries and how the two dimensions can be applied to countries with a shared history.

# Result

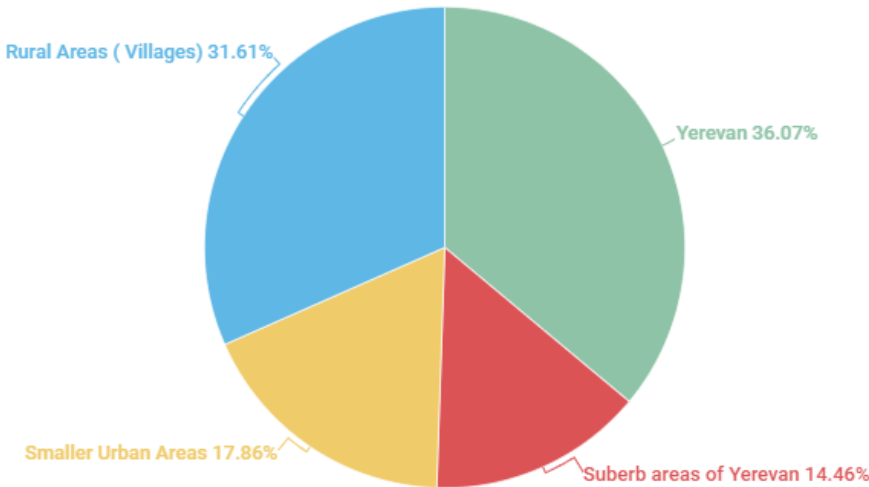
## 4.1 Demographic Results of the Survey

As previously mentioned, the survey was conducted in Yerevan (capital city), Abovyan and Ejmiatsin cities, regions near Yerevan that are less populated but still considered urban areas, as well as the rural areas, the villages from the Ararat and Syunik region, namely Armash, Aygestan, Dvin, Getazat, Hnaber, Berdik, Mrganush, Sisavan, Surenavan, Taperakan. The number of overall participants of the hand-in survey was 2800, where the first group, aged 18 to 30, gathered 1146 people. The second and third groups, which included 30 to 45, and people aged 45 and more, had 1032 and 522 individuals. The main group of people under the age of 30 was in urban areas, while in villages, the main part of participants were adults aged 30 and more.

According to the report about the population of RA by the Statistical Committee of RA, around 63 percent of the population is living in urban areas, which complies the 1.860, 554 out of nearly 3 million population, and 37 percent lives in rural areas, which is 1,102,698 individuals (Statistical Committee of RA, 2021).

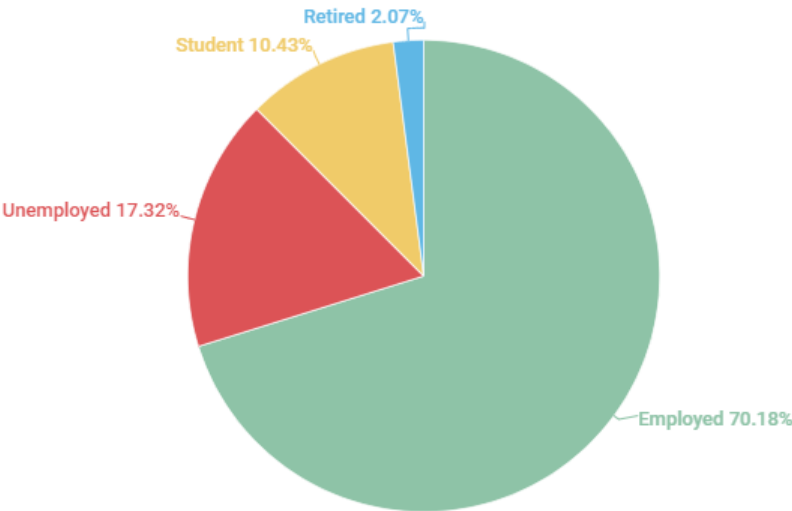
Thus, the survey aimed to follow the pattern, and the main region of participants was Yerevan with 1010 participants, which is 36 percent of all participants. In addition to this, 405 individuals were from suburban areas of the city (14%), and 500 were from smaller urban areas (18%). Finally, 885 people lived in rural areas of Ararat and Syunik region, which is about 31 percent

*Proportions of survey participants residency areas*



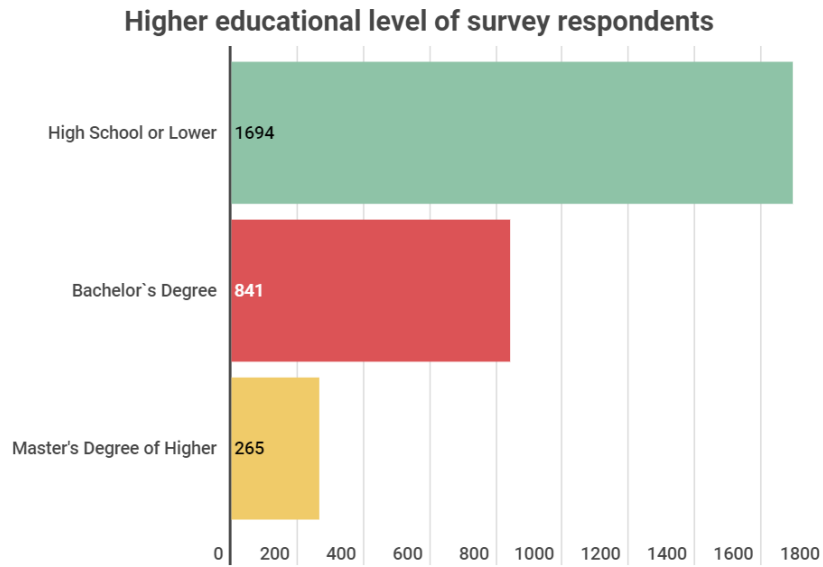
The number of employed participants was 1965, which equals to around 70 percent. Less than 500 individuals were unemployed, which equals to 17 percent. The number of retired citizens and students was 292 and 58 respectively.

*Employment Status of survey respondents*

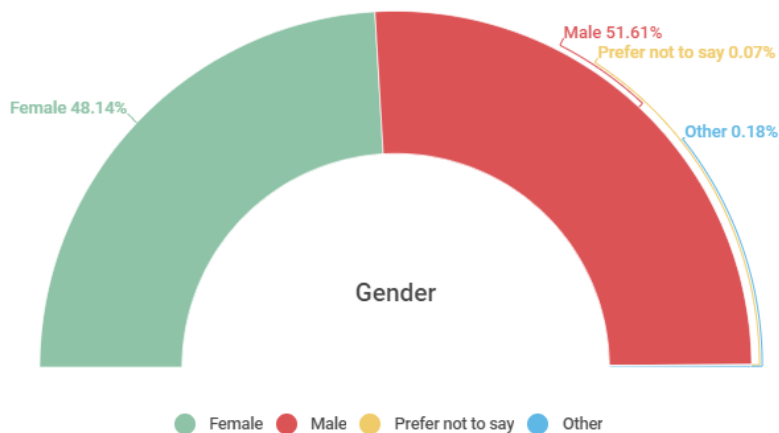


60.5 percent of survey participants have selected high school or lower, which means that they have not proceeded to the university level. As a further elaboration, the number of people completing University degrees was gradually higher in Yerevan compared to rural areas. Hence, people residing in rural areas tend not to proceed with a higher education after completing their school studies. Meanwhile, the described pattern is much less frequent as of the capital city Yerevan. The main reason for the pattern is the lack of access to education and financial means in rural areas. The main universities of the country are situated in Yerevan.

As a result, around 30 percent of participants have completed a bachelor's degree, and around 9 percent have taken their education higher, having either a master's degree or higher. Less than 1 percent preferred not to answer questions regarding their education level. There is no data to compare it with the survey sample results of employment and education level in Armenia conditioned by the lack of prior studies. Thus, the sample is considered as not representative.



Aiming to keep the equality of male and female participants, the pattern of gender equality of participants was the following. 51.6 percent were male, 48.2 percent of participants were female. Additionally, 0.2 percent selected the option “other.”



In general, the demographic part of the survey illustrates the following pattern: A comparison of the demographic part of the survey's statistical results is needed to elaborate on the main concerns regarding the trust towards investigative journalism reported by politicians and journalists.

The survey tells the following: the central part of the participants from the rural district is older in comparison with urban area residents, on the other hand, while comparing

the education status of participants, the analysis illustrates that the number of people that have attended university is lower in rural areas while compared to the percentage as of urban areas.

## 4.2 Survey Analysis

### 4.2.1 News Consumption in Armenia

The survey results will be divided into two sections, which aim to show the difference of media trust perceptions in rural and urban areas. The survey illustrates that in urban areas, 9 percent of participants tend to follow news on TV, another 3 percent use radio for daily news updates. 87 percent of participants use social media to receive news. As further elaborated, the main part of participants is actively following news on Facebook, Twitter, or Telegram.

**Table 1 News consumption by residence (percent)**

Media Consumption in Armenia						
Residency Area	Newspaper	Radio	Social Media	Television	Sum	Number of Participants
Rural Areas	0%	10%	58%	32%	100%	1290
Urban Areas	1%	3%	87%	9%	100%	1510

As *Table 1* illustrates the percentages are different for urban and rural areas, while evidently Television and Radio are considered as a widespread source for receiving information. The consumption of news via social media in urban areas is high, with 87percent, while in rural areas it is still the most widespread source but with 58 percent. The newspaper industry that originated and produced at a high pace in the 1990s is currently the most unpopular news source and does not play any key influence on the media industry. (Baghiyan, 2020) The survey shows that only 0,3 of respondents from rural areas tend to follow news published in daily or weekly newspapers. The number is slightly higher in urban areas, with approximately 1 percent.

The main part of the people following news from newspapers claimed that they are unable to use television or social media. Another reason for their preference is their belief that the media industry does not have freedom of information in Armenia; thus, those news

agencies that operate via broadcast media or social networks are believed by the described contingent to be “controlled by the state”.

After the "Velvet Revolution" in Armenia that took place in 2018, media has become a tremendous part of people's lives. Starting from the 1990s, the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, the urge to follow the news and be aware of the then current events was rising. Nevertheless, due to the lack of official information sources or news agencies, the main source of obtaining news was communications with friends and relatives. (EPF, 2018)

However, the tendency to regularly follow the news varies based on the residency area. According to the survey, only 2 percent of respondents settled in rural areas follow the news more than three times a day. The number of people who tend to follow the news more regularly is significantly higher in urban areas, conditioned by the access to the internet or modern gadgets and internet availability. 14 percent in rural areas and 31 percent of people in urban areas are following news 1 or 2 times daily. According to the responses, the increase in the news consumption rates by several responders is conditioned by the armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan which awakened the urge to be more alert and aware.

In contrast, 15 percent of rural residents follow news only once a week or less. This clear distinction vividly shows that in urban areas people are more engaged with the media field than in rural areas.

In addition to this, around 20 percent of all participants follow news 2 to 4 times on a weekly basis. While the numbers are different in the group of people that are interacting with news 5 to 6 times daily: the percentage in rural areas is 58 percent, and in urban areas, including Yerevan, is around 39 percent.

#### ***4.2.2 Trust in Media and Journalism***

From a 1 to 10 scale, after the answers of the 2800 survey participants, the average score of media fields and journalism trust in Armenia is 3.8. While the results of the same question were drastically different in rural and urban areas. In Yerevan 2,9 is the average score of media trust. Many of the participants commented on the current stage of media and journalism, speaking about the state control over journalism, unprofessionalism of reporters and biased coverage.

Nevertheless, the trust in media and journalism was significantly higher in rural areas. Important to note, that people who follow news on television or radio tend to trust media and news outlets more than people following news on social media. Social media acts as a platform uniting plenty of news options. Meanwhile, it is worth stating that television restricts the viewers by providing only a few news channels in Armenia.

**Table 2. Trust scale in Media Sources in Armenia (Scale 1 to 10)**

Trust in Media Sources (Scale 1 to 10)						
Residency Area	Newspaper	Radio	Social Media	Television	Sum	Number of Participants
Rural Areas	7.1	7.3	3.6	6.4	4.8	1290
Urban Areas	4.9	5.1	2.7	4.3	2.9	1510

Table 3 shows the satisfaction scale in media sources in Armenia is generally low. In comparison between rural and urban areas, the survey shows that in urban areas respondents are more dissatisfied than in rural areas. However, respondents from both rural and urban areas are mostly dissatisfied with social media as a source of information, while people who obtain information from radio and newspapers are tend to more satisfied. (see Table 3)

**Table 3. Satisfaction scale in Media Sources in Armenia (Scale 1 to 10)**

Satisfaction in Media Sources (Scale 1 to 10)						
Residency Area	Newspaper	Radio	Social Media	Television	Sum	Number of Participants
Rural Areas	5.1	5.2	2.2	4.1	2.9	1290
Urban Areas	4.5	4.3	1.2	3.2	1.5	1510

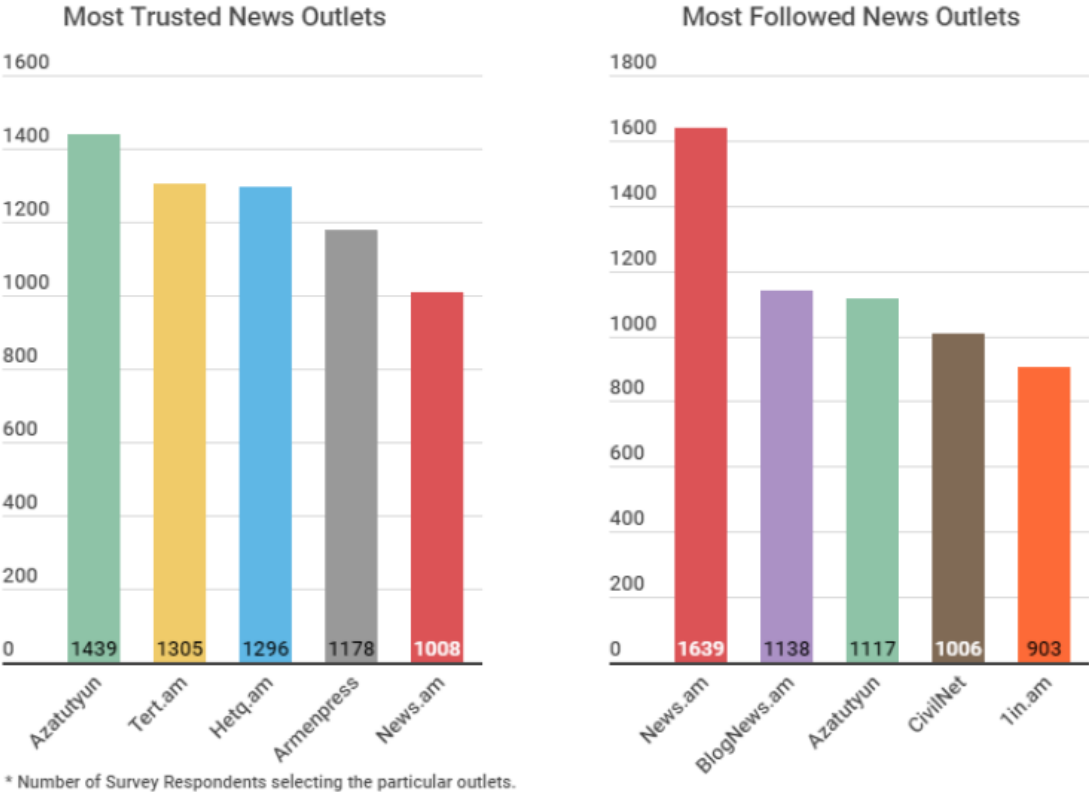
Overall, only 544 responders out of 2800 were trusting media in Armenia, while 1820 individuals were dissatisfied with media. The analysis of the survey shows that 268 people who were dissatisfied with media level in Armenia, are still trusting journalism and media.

This sets a contradiction that even though people trust the media outlets, they can also be dissatisfied with the quality. Meanwhile, the majority of individuals that are not trusting the media, are not satisfied with the results, which can take to the point that the roots of distrust also depend on the lack of satisfaction, on numerous factors such as professionalism, media bias, political parallelism, state control, dependency.



Another aim of the survey was to identify the most trusted and followed media sources in Armenia. As a result, the most trusted media outlets were Tert.am, Hetq.am, Azatutyun, while the most followed and viewed media outlets were News.am, BlogNews and Azatutyun.

## News Outlets



Around 7 percent of participants did not mention any trusted or followed media outlet, a few people stated that they are only following international media outlets, such as BBC, Aljazeera, or The Guardian.

Thus, we can conclude that the Hypothesis 3, stating that trust is not a necessary condition for the person to follow a particular news outlet, was correct. To furtherly elaborate, the chart above illustrates that Hetq.am and Tert.am were selected by the participants as most trusted, however both media outlets were not selected as respondents followed news outlet. The chart above shows that News.am and BlogNews.am were the most followed, as furtherly elaborated during the discussion with reposados, the most followed news outlets are considered the fastest updating and most accessible.

### 4.2.3 Trust in Investigative Reports by Politicians and Journalists

The main question related to investigative reporting and political investigative articles, aimed to assist the research questions and purpose. The question provides different options of investigative reports, with some of the options being reports of politicians that leaked political, financial, criminal information regarding a particular power, asking the respondents to tell the level of knowledge about the particular article and trust score form the scale 1 to 10.

**Table 4. Trust score and percentage of people acquainted with the Investigative Report by Politicians.**

Reported /Article Name	Only Picture or Headline	Small Part	Skim Reading	Full Article (Video)	Rumors	Not Heard	Trust Level (Scale 1 to 10)
Mikael Minasyan - Requiem 6	13%	13%	10%	16%	39%	9%	6.7
Vardan Ghukasyan - RA MOD	9%	7%	3%	10%	55%	16%	5.9
Mikael Minasyan - Investigation on A. Mirzoyan	9%	4%	2%	69%	9%	7%	5.7
Media Port - Lele Thepe	6%	4%	5%	11%	49%	25%	3.2
Hetq.am - Illegal Constructions	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	98%	2.8

Number of participants -2800

#### Article 1. “Requiem 6” by Mikael Minasyan

Mikael Minasyan is one of the main opposition figures that are only famous for his leaks and investigations directed to disclosing the wrongdoings of the ruling power and political, military figures.

The specific investigative project includes numerous series, where Mikael Minasyan speaks about various corruption cases, illegal political activities, suspicious transactions related to the Prime Minister or his family. In fact, series six named Requiem illustrates the

corrupted activities of PM of RA Nikol Pashinyan, money laundering and criminal cases committed by the ruling power of Pashinyan. The video series of Requiem 6 was shared on the Facebook page of Mikael Minasyan; however, as it also included leaked documents and strictly confidential information. It was spread all over the Internet at a fast pace, and overall, the investigative report was shared on Facebook more than 2000 times, with over 1.500.000 views and around 10,000 reactions.

The survey questions were divided into two sections, aiming to reveal the degree of public trust in a specific report furtherly followed up by questions aimed to discover the level of engagement with the particular report by the individuals. The objective is to question whether the public distrusts a certain report without familiarizing it and the reasons behind the phenomenon.

According to the survey, out of the total of 2800 people, approximately 9 percent have not heard about the investigation carried out by Mikael Minasyan called “Requiem 6.” The investigation was presented in a video format. Approximately 13 percent of respondents have seen only the headline or the post. 13 percent of participants have watched only a small portion of the video. In contrast, another 10 percent managed to do a skim watching, meaning that this portion of the public watched only the highlighted moments of the video. 39 percent said that they have heard some rumours or communicated about the investigation with acquaintances. Another 16 percent managed to watch the full video, which is around 40 minutes long. All of the participants regardless of the degree in which they have engaged with the investigation expressed their level of trust or distrust.

The responses showed that those who watched the full investigation tend to trust it more than those who interacted with the investigation to a lesser degree. In other words, 335 people out of more than 400 people who have viewed the full video investigation of Mikael Minasyan trusted the investigation. Meanwhile, the pattern is the complete opposite in the case of the people who have only heard about the investigation via rumours. From 1092 people, only 131 people have trusted this report. People that have read the headline or only a small paragraph tend to distrust. Around 59 percent did not mention the “Requiem 6” report as a trusted source.

This leads to the point that the level of trust in politicians and their reports also depends on people's general perception of them. As further explained, many of the people felt that the article was not credible enough for them to further read it.

The overall result for option number one, the investigative report by Mikael Minasyan, proves that although it was very popular and a vast majority of people engaged with the article in some form, public trust towards the investigation was not very high. Even though the level of trust amongst those who have heard about the investigation from rumours is significantly lower than among those who have watched the video, the first group noticeably contributed to the spreading of the investigation. To further elaborate on the point, those who have heard about the investigation from rumors tend to use the report in their daily communication. Thus, we can conclude even though people do not trust the specific report, if it leaks or provides confidential information, they can use it as a communication topic. As a result of the scaled assessment, the overall score of trust towards the Requiem 6 by Mikael Minasyan is 6.7.

## **Article 2. “Lele Thepe” by Media Port Telegram**

The second article was a short investigative report touching upon the autumn Nagorno Karabakh conflict escalation. The article mentioned one of the military operations that have failed. The short investigation explained and leaked the names that were standing behind the most unsuccessful operation during the autumn escalation in 2020 named “Lele Thepe.” Around a month later, Samvel Babayan, the Former Minister of Defense of Nagorno Karabakh who was accused by the MediaPort Telegram channel, explained the operation and confessed to being the organizer of the latter. Thus, the investigative report regarding Lele Thepe operation provided information corresponding to the reality.

The Telegram channel has around 20,000 followers, however, after the information was published, the local media channels spread it by referring to MediaPort. Thus, after a week, many people were sharing the post and reacting to the leak.

The survey shows that the majority of the group that knows about MediaPort's investigation learned about the investigation from acquaintances or have seen it online, mainly on Facebook.

What concerns the preconditions of the trust towards investigative journalism, the first question, which observes the trust level, proves that it is highly critical for the reader in Armenia to know who is behind the reporting group, meaning the owner or editor.

As there is a lack of information about MediaPort in general, who stands behind the channel, who are the executors, and all information regarding its ownership is based on rumors, the trust level is highly affected by that.

Remarkably, even though the main character of the report later confirmed the information, still the public tends to distrust MediaPort more with the overall pattern, where 64 percent are not trusting the investigation. Again, what proves that people who have not read the article or did not know what it is about have declared their distrust in the reporting agency.

According to the results, 49 percent received the news from rumors, 11 percent have read the full article, which was quite short. Due to the short size of the report, the small part and skim reading are counted together, with 14.5 percent of people viewing only pictures and headlines.

Although MediaPort has declared itself a free media and investigative reporting agency, many opinions have been shared about the fact that the agency is politically controlled, more specifically by the opposition. The latter works against the current ruling power in Armenia. To observe the score in numbers, from 1 to 10 scale, the score of trust in the agency is 3.2.

### **Article 3. “Illegal Constructions” by Hetq.am**

The only officially known investigative reporting newspaper Hetq published an article based on the investigation that aimed to explore and identify people who took advantage of the situation during the autumn escalation and illegally constructed houses or commercial areas. From the first sight, the article only covers the social angle of the issue. However, what makes it more unique and worth reading is that many of the people who have reported to have committed illegal activities are political or military figures or have certain connections to the armed conflict.

The article provides location and a list of violations, initially published on their webpage, later on, shared on Facebook and Twitter. The publication on the Facebook page with more than 200,000 followers was followed with around 50 reactions, less than ten comments, and seven shares. Overall as estimated as a result of the analysis, the overall view rate is less than 15,000.

Out of the 2800 participants, 35 individuals knew about the investigations, out of which only four people have read the full article. What is interesting to note, 21 respondents have seen pictures and headlines, while 10 people have read short paragraphs or have done skim reading. However, none of the individuals participating in the survey received information about the Hetq's investigation from rumors or daily communication. Thus, it leads to the point that even though the investigation reveals facts regarding the illegal activities, it also includes names of military figures, however, it still failed to intrigue the audience or arouse their interest.

Due to the lack of awareness on the topic, many people showed their distrust, many of the participants avoided answering the question as they did not know about the report. However, many who claimed not reading the report eventually answered the question of trust. Meanwhile, many of the respondents selected low numbers, mainly 3 or 4. Further elaboration on this illustrates that even though people are not familiar with the report, they still seek to show their distrust towards media outlets. Thus, as a result, the score of trust is 2.8.

#### **Article 4. “RA Ministry of Defence” by Vardan Ghukasyan**

The next report was in video format by Vardan Gukhasyan, a former police member and currently a political figure. This particular report was selected as it disclosed information quite similar to the investigation conducted by the Hetq. It will be much easier to compare two pieces with similar features.

During the escalation of the conflict in the autumn of 2020, Vardan Ghukasyan started a pro-active media approach by doing live streaming, sharing leaks and discussing the situation in the frontline. Vardan Ghukyasyan attracts people's attention with his unique delivery style, heavily expressed emotions, uncensored speech, and aggressive behavior.

Before releasing the main investigative report, video devoted to the Ministry of Defense of RA, and the money laundering of Military figures, Vardan Gukasyan numerously leaked facts and figures related to the war and military, political unit, which later proved to be credible and correct. The current investigation speaks about money laundering with the former Minister of Defense and ruling military power's involved and who benefited from it. The long video also reveals reasons that have weakened the Military Forces of Armenia.

The video report was shared on his personal Facebook page and Youtube. However, many media outlets picked the topic and discussed it furtherly. The video has around 200,000 views on Youtube and 800 shares on Facebook.

10 percent of participants have watched the full video, while 53 percent of the participants have become familiar with the investigation from rumours and daily communication. However, as further elaborated, many of the respondents, after receiving rumours, have eventually watched the video. Around 16 percent did not know about the investigation, while the other 9 percent have seen the headline and cover picture. Ten percent of people have watched the highlighted parts or short parts of the video.

Some people mentioned that they partially trust the investigation or believe that it is exaggerated. However, the score of the trust, from rural and urban communities altogether, is 5.9. The score was noticeably higher in rural areas reaching up to 7.3 percent. Many of the people explained their trust based on Ghukasyan's individual characteristics, describing him as a great individual, others mentioned the interesting content and delivery style.

#### **Article 5. “Investigation on Ararat Mirzoyan” by Mikael Minasyan**

After the conflict escalation and agreement between Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan signed on November 9, the political opposition, as a proactive member of the media field, started online discussions, published articles and leaks. At that period, Mikael Minasyan leaked a document in the framework of his investigative series. Former RA Ambassador Mikael Minasyan made a sensational statement that RA National Assembly President Ararat Mirzoyan is a Turkish special services agent. According to him, Mirzoyan has been in the spotlight of the Turkish special services since 2005, when he was studying the process of genocide recognition in the United States. The investigative reports disclosed strictly confidential information, which states that Ararat Mirzoyan, the President of the National Assembly of Armenia, is a spy. Minasyan also published Ararat Mirzoyan's letter to the RA National Security Service as evidence, where he declares himself a Turkish agent promising to support the RA National Security Service as much as possible. This disclosure caused a huge sensation and public buzz in the Armenian social and political circles. Politicians have made many comments in this regard.

What is also remarkable to state, more than 2000 shares and 11000 overall reactions on different Facebook pages made the investigation of Mikael Minasyan highly famous. The survey shows that only 7 percent of respondents do not have any knowledge regarding this matter, while 69 percent of survey participants have read the whole article. In addition to reading the article, Nineteen percent have learnt about the investigation from rumours. 4 percent of the participants have managed to read only a paragraph of the article, although the article was quite short.

The investigative report was shocking for the viewer and it reports sensational information. As explained by a few of the survey responders, the information was too shocking, sensational and at the same time suspicious to believe in. Thus, the trust score was lower in comparison with the Requiem 6 again by Mikael Minasyan. In rural areas, the score was lower. However, with the high level of trust in Yerevan, the score was 5.7.

The results of the analysed data confirmed the hypothesis 1, proving the higher reach of and at the same time trust in investigations conducted by politicians when compared to investigations carried out by journalists.

Out of the analysed 5 major investigations, the least reach and public trust received the investigation carried out by Hetq, despite the latter being the only investigative newspaper in the country. Yet, the most reach and public trust received the one conducted exactly by a politician.

#### ***4.2.4 Trust in Politicians in Armenia***

Currently, there is an evident relationship between the fields of media and politics in Armenia, with high levels of political interference in the media field. In contrast, many politicians own media agencies or work as an editor or a journalist in a news agency. Participants of the Survey have been provided with a list of politicians, which they would select not for personal or political preference but as a credible source of information that the respondent is trusting.

#### **Table 4. Trust in Armenian political figures.**



<b>Trust Score towards Politicians in Armenia</b>	
<b>Politicians</b>	<b>Trust Score (Scale 1 to 10)</b>
<b>Mikael Minasyan</b>	<b>5.4</b>
<b>Nikol Pashinyan</b>	<b>4.9</b>
<b>Robert Kocharyan</b>	<b>4.7</b>
<b>Serzh Sargsyan</b>	<b>4.6</b>
<b>Vardan Ghukasyan</b>	<b>4.2</b>
<b>Edmon Maruqyan</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Gagik Tsarukyan</b>	<b>2.6</b>
<b>Vazgen Manukyan</b>	<b>1.9</b>
<b>Arthur Vanetsyan</b>	<b>1.7</b>

Number of participants -2800

Currently, the Facebook page of PM Nikol Pashinyan has also been considered a fast working media source since the very start of the Velvet Revolution. Many of the citizens are receiving information from his Facebook page on a daily basis, considering the Facebook page a credible source of information. However, according to the survey, the most trusted politician of Armenia is Mikael Minasyan, with a score of 5.4

Secondly, the most trusted politician is Nikol Pashinyan, with 4.9. However, as an opposition figure, Mikael Minasyan is usually reporting investigations conserving Nikol Pashinyan as well. Paradoxically, some respondents have selected as trusted media sources both M. Minasyan, and N. Pashinyan.

Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan have around 4.7 percent of trust and other political figures that are currently interfering with media fields with investigations and leaks or open online discussions record considerably lower levels of public trust.

The lowest rate of trust has Artur Vanetsyan recording 1.9 percent.

The survey results conclude that even though several sources are trusted significantly more than others, the overall score of trust does not exceed 7 neither in politicians nor in investigative journalists. If we compare the statistics with the popularity, it will show the pattern where even though the politicians' investigations are not trusted much, they easily become popular.

Mikael Minasyan, with his investigative series and unique delivery style, attracted the public's attention. Nevertheless, a factor preventing a higher level of public trust towards him and his activities is his relation to the former president of RA. Being the son-in-law of the ex-

president who was overthrown by the public due to their distrust and antipathy towards him, Minasyan is being associated with the president creating a negative image of him.

Mikael Minasyan created a new style for information and investigation reporting with his video series. According to the survey, which used the scale style of questioning, the overall trust score towards Mikael Minasyan's investigation is 6.2. However, the opinions of those residing in rural areas tend to differ from those living in urban areas regarding this matter. The trust score of the respondents living in urban areas 7.1, while in rural areas, the score is considerably lower. The phenomenon of distrust without proper awareness occurs frequently in rural areas. Many participants who have not read any investigations by Mikael Minasyan but based on their personal preferences, have decided to show their distrust towards M. Minasyan.

The further communication with survey respondents also addresses the phenomenon of people trusting or distrusting a politician while not necessarily experiencing sympathy towards him/her.

Many of the participants responded that they always trust revealing investigations about the figure that they particularly don't like. What is notable, none of the participants of the further discussion responded "never," which means that without possessing any information about the investigation, the reader can agree with it, if the report shares their opinion regarding a certain matter. The pattern is again different in rural and urban areas, as many of the participants from urban regions mentioned some necessary preconditions for trusting even though the investigative report shares their opinion.

Only a few participants mentioned the importance of facts and accurate data as well as credible sources. A key factor in understanding what segment represents a certain opinion is education. The results of the survey state that while those with lower levels of education tend to trust the source regardless of its credibility with the only precondition of the post corresponding to their political opinion, those with higher level of education tend to question the credibility of the source even if the information piece represents their opinion.

The statistics show that most of the people who are distrusting investigative reports by politicians are always trusting the leaks or investigative articles that share their opinion.

Another question that observes the key indicators of public trust towards investigative journalism explains the following. The most important criteria for the public to trust investigative reports is the professionalism of the media representatives. More than half of the

respondents have stated that professionalism and high reputation are critical values for their trust, another group of people believed that experience is the most valuable point for the investigative reporter and thus if the reporter is not experienced enough or is not well known the information piece may respectively be less trusted. As mentioned by the participants of both rural and urban areas, the most inconsequential condition for the trust is the network and connections the media agency is believed to have.

Many participants mentioned that they had been influenced or changed their opinion at least once after reading an investigative report; another theory brought to attention was the importance of discussion with others, where people are also questioning whether the report is credible. Numerous people mentioned that they have never developed opinions based on investigative reporting, even if credible facts and documents have been provided. The final question discusses the effect of investigative reports on respondents. Around 20 percent of people mentioned that they had not been affected significantly, or the influence did not play any key importance in their lives.

Another group of people declares that they have shaped a certain viewpoint based on the reports and decided to change their political viewpoint. Many people following investigative reports by politicians stated that they had joined the protests or political disobedience activities in Armenia. The biggest impact, as observed, is the change of opinion and influence on their lifestyles such as avoiding certain actions based on reports. To mention one of the answers, "If the report contradicts my political opinion but instead provides trustworthy facts, I may change my opinion, as I did after watching the series by Minasyan."

### *4.3 Interview Analysis*

All participants raised the statement that political figures are more trustworthy. The main explanation for the opinion is that those politicians who have interfered with other powers are aware enough to identify the gaps and the possible wrongdoings of others. They are in close correlation with state bodies and possess such concealed information that even investigative journalists cannot access. Thus, in case of possible illegal activities, it is rational that the opposition might report it as it is one of the main obligations of the opposition to confront activities that they find inappropriate or inapplicable.

Another reason to trust investigations carried out especially by politicians brought up by the responders, is connected with the first mentioned reason. The investigations carried out by investigative journalists are not trusted, conditioned by the belief among the public that those do not possess necessary networks and connections to disclose concealed information of a high significance. However, politicians can also have much more resources which will allow them to work efficiently. A respondent from a rural area mentioned a strong gap in journalism and information publishing in Armenia. Thus assistance from politicians is needed. Three of the interviewees said that they usually trust sources that they are familiar with. Thus, many citizens do not know investigative journalists, and in contradiction, public figures are well-known.

Another decisive factor brought up by the interviewees in determining the level of trust or distrust towards investigations is the degree in which the investigation is sensational. Even though the more sensational the investigation is, the more public buzz it has the potential to create, the more the investigation is thrilling, the more unrealistic it looks in the audience's eyes. The public trusts sources that they think might correspond to reality, meaning that if the article speaks about unbelievable things, the public may have trust issues towards it. "I tend to follow politicians and their professional profiles, which means that I am also following their investigative reports and projects revealing the corruption of political or state powers. However, it is much harder to trust the report if you are not trusting the reporter itself." The respondent noted that if a politician is hated or not accepted by the public for his political ideology or characteristics the chances that the public would trust him and his activities is significantly lower. However, if you are sharing the political ideology with a figure and you admire his work, eventually, his reports will be automatically trusted.

In the modern age, the role of investigative journalism and a watchdog of the state is crucial. A similar duty holds the opposition power. Thus the role of the watchdog should be distributed between journalists and opposition powers to disclose the wrongdoings of the ruling power.

Interviewees shared the opinion that the opposition's political investigations are the most efficient and interesting. It usually speaks about the illegal activities of state and political bodies. "In comparison with media investigations, politicians tend to examine a broader theme of the issue, which is usually related to economic, political or military misconduct."

An individual addressed an idea that currently, in Armenia, only the secondary topics are covered and investigated by journalists, and meanwhile, politicians are making the most of it. The expressed idea relates to the escalation of the armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Many rumors have been spread regarding breaching war laws or even internal betrayals. The latter have not been addressed by investigative journalists conditioned by the lack of accessible information. Meanwhile, the opposition powers started campaigns against the ruling power, revealing as affirmed by them concealed information.

Another highlighted point was the style of delivery. A particular interviewee from a rural area addressed the style of reports delivery. According to him, politicians are using a more interesting and innovative style, often reinforcing ideas of a populist character. The latter showed that the politicians' persuasive language and rhetorical devices while revealing concealed information have a greater influence than the neutral language used by investigative journalists in their objective reports. It tends to show that exaggeration and manipulation are the best and most efficient tactics to have an influence on the public. Meanwhile, investigative journalists are proposing a more journalistically professional and unbiased analysis of the topic; however, it is not considered persuasive for a reader in the region.

"I tend to trust the facts; however, I will be more interested and excited to read the article written by the opposition power about the topics that I am currently interested in," says one of the interviewees. One of the interviewed survey participants has added that another reason to trust exactly a politician can be the degree to which the politician is more influential and reputable.

Another interviewee emphasized the media stage in Armenia. As mentioned by her, currently, the media and journalism are highly controlled and managed by the state. "I assume that working on an investigation can be limited by a high number of barriers and obstacles. That is one of the main reasons the number of investigative reports is quite low, and it requires more effort and professionalism to complete and publish an investigation. As a more powerful figure, the politicians who are also using personal resources or those accessible for them with rich networks are the substitute of the investigative reporters and play the role of the watchdog of the state powers."

Another idea that the interviewee provided is journalists' lack of interest in confronting the state powers in their wrongdoings. The interests of opposition representatives are much

higher to investigate the illegal activities of state powers. The lack of interest can be conditioned by the fact that many of the journalists, after experiencing threats and even physical assaults as a result of their published investigations, prefer not to proceed with scrutinizing the state and publishing information of a high significance and do not touch upon the topics which can endanger themselves.

"For me, the reports that are sharing my perspective or are close to my beliefs tend to look the most trustworthy." "If you are reading an investigative report by a political power that tends to disagree with your opinion regarding a specific fact, then the first reaction will be a rejection, as you think that it might not be correct. Living in a country with such a turbulent political system assumes a large load of provocative information used by one political party against the other. It often appears to be quite challenging for those adhering to a certain political opinion to accept information against it."

To conclude, currently, in Armenia, the process of trusting the reports if it does not share an opinion is particularly challenging, due to ideological obstacles. Based on the interviewees' theories, knowing the reporter is an important factor, as based on the reputation of the author, one should trust or distrust the report. While the latter is an important prerequisite for trust, it is often not taken into consideration if the report is to be shared or spoken about in daily communication. Thus, it is much more important to know the source, such as what media agency is behind the report or who is associated with it, rather than who the author is.

The overall opinion defines that the rhetoric driven by politicians has much more influence in general. In regard to investigative reporting, the power that the investigations carried out by politicians is incomparable when juxtaposed with the ones published by investigative reporters themselves.

Another opinion regarding the politicians as a more powerful and credible source of information, politicians who are actively working in the sphere of news and investigations reporting are divided into two sectors: those reporting as opposition or as a ruling power. Meanwhile, the opposition is more active and has more influence as the social-political impact is much higher. Investigative reports concerning illegal activities or wrongdoings of the ruling power can easily persuade the public to change minds or even start a protest. However, to pressure the opposing powers, the ruling government is publishing statements or anti-opposition documents, spreading leaks, and investigating the financial means of

opposition figures. In this structure, investigative journalists are operating as secondary figures and are not the key players. However, the activities of the investigative journalists are mainly considered by the public as an assistance, which means that their investigations only assist the main activities and projects that politicians are implementing. This can lead to the point that the role of the watchdog is applied only by oppositional powers.

All interviewees mentioned that they tend to change their opinion or be influenced by a report of politicians rather than journalists'. "If the report concerns facts or truly investigates a case, I will consider the option of changing my mind. I think that I will be influenced more by politicians than journalists. The main reason is that political figures are an active part of our lives, meaning that people are used to following their professional work, ideas, or statements."

One of the respondents stated that currently, in her point of view, the media and politics cooperate while carrying out investigations. Still, politicians may publish or share the final results, and this gesture speaks about the dominance of the politicians and journalists being the dependent variable in this relationship.

There is a practice that the politicians are often using investigative reports published by journalists for their own benefit. By that raising awareness of the report as well.

If analyze the answers given by the participants, the pattern where the investigations conducted by the opposition enjoy greater trust and societal impact will be illustrated. The main reason is that regardless of the self-serving motives, the latter disclose concealed information on the wrongdoings of the ruling government by providing credible evidence and facts that are intriguing and thought-provoking. The practice described above is inherent to the duties of investigative reporters as well. However, due to several factors such as the authority of a politician, style of presenting, used rhetorics, network and greater access to information of a high significance, the investigations by political representatives are usually more trusted.

Moreover, during daily communications, a significant portion of the public tends to discuss investigative reports of oppositions rather than by ruling power. Opposition is executing one of the main duties for the citizens, that is, revealing the wrongdoings of state bodies whose main motive should be working for the benefits of its residents. Thus, constant monitoring is compulsory to pinpoint any deviation from the core duties of the government.

## Discussion

*Hypothesis 1.* Investigative reports by the political figures tend to have more reach and simultaneously are more trusted in comparison with the investigations conducted by journalists.

As according to the results of the analysed data the most trusted investigation with the highest reach is the one carried out by Mikael Minasyan, while the least has been carried out by the only Armenian investigative newspaper Hetq, I confirm the hypothesis 1.

*Hypothesis 2.* The predicted high level of trust towards the investigations by politicians are conditioned by the low level of trust towards journalism.

Based on the survey and interview responses, claiming the untrustworthiness of the Armenian journalism and the resultant higher trust in the investigations carried out by politicians conditioned by the discussed above factors, I confirm the hypothesis 2.

*Hypothesis 3.* Trust is not a necessary condition for the person to follow a particular news outlet.

Based on the result of the analysis showing that the most followed media outlet is actually not the most trusted, I confirm the hypothesis 3.

*Hypothesis 4.* The public trust in investigative journalism depends on the political preferences of the public.

Based on the further discussion following the survey, revealing the tendency of the participants to trust the politicians, the public trust tends to depend of personal preference towards the particular political figure, thus the hypothesis 4 is confirmed.

*Hypothesis 5.* The level of trust in investigative journalism in urban and rural areas varies, depending on education, employment status.

The analysis of the conducted survey proves that hypothesis 5 is applicable both in urban and in rural areas. Those residing in rural areas tend to have significantly higher trust towards journalism compared to those living in urban areas. Those with higher trust in journalism amongst the public residing in rural areas more often use television and radio as the main sources of information. The urban public experiences a greater dissatisfaction with local journalism than the rural public. I confirm the hypothesis 5.

The trust in politicians has differing preconditions. According to the conducted survey personal perception ranks as one of the most important aspects decisive for the level of trust



in the politician. The survey showed that a significant portion of the public often overlooks the actual content of the investigation published by a politician if the latter does not enjoy that particular public's sympathy. Nevertheless, the public expresses its negative opinion without fully familiarizing with the content.

The survey revealed another important numeric data which compares the popularity of the investigations conducted and published by politicians and actual investigative journalists. According to the survey the public tends to read investigations by politicians more often than by those of the only investigative newspaper of Armenia.

The conducted four interviews highlighted the lack of knowledge of the term investigative journalism. The latter's function was attributed to the list of politician's duties by the interviewees. The reason is that the public sees journalists as yellow press agents functioning under the harsh control of the government, thus excluding the opportunity of them scrutinizing the powers they themselves work for. By explaining the reasons for their distrust towards the media, the interviewees described the repeating pattern of the survey.

Another interesting phenomenon the interviews revealed that was absent in the survey was the significance of the form the actual investigation was served to the public. The latter means that the public gives its preference to a speech with rhetorical devices and calls to actions involved, rather than an objective and unbiased report. This signifies a pattern where due to persuasive tools used in their delivery styles, politicians sound more persuasive and trustworthy. In contrast, a significant part of journalists does not use persuasive vocabulary, not pushing the audience to make a certain decision. Another remarkable discovery was the public tendency to trust those with whom they are familiar. The public automatically considers a familiar face more credible than an unknown journalist behind a sensational story. While trusting the person due to his/her delivery style pinpoints the significance of pathos, in this case, the public gives to ethos, hence authority as well.

Another tendency which the interviews have revealed is the inclination of the public to trust a source if they agree with the ideas stated. In such cases, the importance of pathos and ethos decreases as the public does not need further persuasion to change opinions. In such cases, the public already complies with the source and accepts it regardless of the delivery style or persuasive tools.

Another important factor for higher public trust that the interviews helped reveal is the degree to which the source is realistic. To further elaborate, if the piece comprises sensational

ideas that may be perceived as unrealistic, the investigation is less likely to be believed in. Thus, for the public to have trust towards the investigation, the latter should not go beyond the boundaries of staying realistic. Nevertheless, the degree of sensationalism is directly related to how the journalistic piece will spread. Meaning that the more sensational it is, the more widespread the latter will become. However, the high distribution level does not mean that the public will trust the piece.

Both the survey and interview result overall provide the same theories and remarks regarding the trust towards political figures' investigative reporting practice.

To start from the impact of investigative journalism, the survey has proven that there is a lack of interest and trust towards investigative journalism in Armenia.

However, as the analysis has shown, the only investigative media channel in Armenia, Hetq, was the most trusted source of news and general information. However, if we compare it with politicians' investigative reports, it is evident that the statistics regarding trust and interest are incomparable. Thus, the survey has shown that Hetq has high trust and a comparably solid media reputation. Meanwhile, in the field of investigative reporting, it is not efficient and trusted.

Meanwhile, the opposite scenario is with Mikael Minasyan, a political figure that is actively working on investigative reports. As a political figure, he is not highly trusted. In rural areas, the rate of trust towards Mikael Minasyan is comparably lower than the rates of the ruling power. Meanwhile, his investigations are considered the most impactful and trusted.

The analysis has shown that personal preference is playing a key factor in trusting. For instance, the investigations of Vardan Ghukasyan have a high rate of trust and awareness, as furtherly elaborated by the reasons behind following or trusting the reports and investigations by V. Ghukasyan was associated with public perception towards his individual characteristics. Many of the participants stated that the main reason that they are following his investigations are the interesting delivery styles, ironic and sarcastic statements, which makes the investigations more persuasive and catchier.

The interviews have shown that public perception towards investigative reporting by the opposition is better, which follows with higher trust and impact on further decision making of the public.

The general ranking of trust towards investigative journalism in Armenia was 3.8, a bit lower than the medium. Meanwhile, both the satisfaction level and trust were generally lower, which leads to the point that due to lack of satisfaction, the trust is deficient as well. Interviews reviewed the paradoxical phenomenon that the public often tends to actively react to those news agencies that they distrust. The public seek scandals or leaks for the further usage during their daily communication routine, however they do not necessarily believe in it. Thus, generating the misconception among the Armenian public, as classifying journalists as solely yellow press agents and hence resulting in higher rates of distrust towards the field of journalism. As a substitute to journalists, who are often not taken seriously by the public, the politicians are assigned the obligations to provide daily news and information.

Due to the increase of distribution of fake and biased news, the public started to ponder on the news agencies the same way: as credible sources of information, regardless of the orientation of the latter.

The higher rate of trust in political figures is conditioned by the lack of journalistic professionalism, hence the public attempt to replace their primary means of information with officials.

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# Appendix

## 6.1 Appendix 1 - Survey Questionnaire

1 *How old are you?*

(open ended)

2. *In what kind of area do you live in?*

- 1) Rural area
- 2) Smaller urban area
- 3) Larger urban area
- 4) Yerevan

3. *Gender*

- 1). Male
- 2). Female
- 3). Other
- 4). Prefer Not to Say

4. *Highest Education level achieved?*

- 1) High School and Lower
- 2) Bachelors
- 3) Masters or higher

5. *Employment status.*

- 1) Employed
- 2) Unemployed
- 3) Retired
- 4) Student

6.1 *What is your main source of news* 6.2 *How often do you check news?*

A) Television B) Radio C) Social Media D) Newspapers

1) Once a week

2) 2-4 times a week

3) 5-6 times a week

4) 1-2 times a day

5) More than 3 times daily

7. *On the scale 1 to 10 how much do you trust the media field and journalism in Armenia?*

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

8. *On the scale 1 to 10 assess your satisfaction with the quality of journalism in Armenia.*

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

9.1 *Select the media outlets you tend to trust?* 9.2 *Select the media outlets you tend to follow?*

Hetq, Tert.am, News.am, BlogNews, 1IN.am, Azatutyun, 168.am

Mediamax , MediaPort (Telegram), Civil Net, Panorama.am Aravot.am , ArmLur,

Hraparak , ArmNews, Sputnik, (Add your option)

10.1 *On the scale of 1-10 assess your trust towards the investigations you are familiar with from those listed below.*

1 Mikael Minasyan - Requiem 6

2 Mediaport Telegram - The operation of Lele Thepe was originated by Samvel Babayan

3 Hetq.am - Illegal Constructions during War

4 Vardan Gukhasyan - Ministry of Defence (Money Laundering)

5 Mikael Minasyan - Evidence of Ararat Mirzoyan being a spy

10.2 *How much have you interacted with the investigation?*

- A) Only Picture or Headline
- B) Small Part (Short Paragraph)
- C) Skim Reading
- D) Full Article
- E) Rumors

11. *On the scale of 1-10 assess your trust towards the following politicians.*

Nikol Pashinyan, Gagik Tsarukyan, Robert Qocharyan, Serzh Sargsyan, Edmon Maruqyan, Vazgen Manukyan, Arthur Vanetsyan, Mikael Minasyan, Vardan Ghukasyan

12. *On a scale of 1 to 10 how much do you trust Mikael Minasyan and his investigations?*

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

13. *On the scale of 1 to 10 how much do you trust the politicians that you do not like?*

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

14. *Assess the importance of the listed preconditions for your trust towards investigative journalism? (very important, fairly important, not very important, not at all important, don't know)*

- A) Professionalism
- B) Popularity
- C) Experience
- D) Reputation
- E) Network and Connections

15. *Have you ever been influenced or persuaded or (changed viewpoint) after reading the investigative report?*

- 1) Always
- 2) Often
- 3) Sometimes
- 4) Seldom
- 5) Never

16. *Do you think reading inv reports affects you? If so, in what way?*

(Open Ended)

## 6.2 Appendix 2- Interview Questions

1. *Whose investigations do you consider more efficient, politicians' or journalists'?*
2. *Which investigative reports do you tend to trust more and why?*
3. *Do you generally trust the reports that you are not agreeing with?*
4. *Would you tend to trust the journalistic piece without knowing the author?*
5. *Do you believe that politicians' investigations are having significantly higher influence on the public?*
6. *What preconditions are needed for you to change your political opinion after reading an investigation carried out by a politician? (E.g. sympathy towards the politician, credibility, authority, etc.)*
7. *Do the investigations by opposition powers have a more significant impact on you rather than reports by the ruling government?*