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THE EFFECT OF FRAMING AND EXPERT OPINION ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF
PRESIDENT TOQAYEV'S POLICY AGAINST ELITE CORRUPTION

ФРЕЙМИНГ ЖӘНЕ САРАПШЫЛАР ПІКІРІНІҢ ПРЕЗИДЕНТ ТОҚАЕВТЫҢ
ЭЛИТАРЛЫҚ СЫБАЙЛАС ЖЕМҚОРЛЫҚҚА ҚАРСЫ САЯСАТЫН ҚОҒАМНЫҢ
ҚАБЫЛДАУЫНА ӘСЕРІ

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ВОСПРИЯТИЕ БОРЬБЫ ПРЕЗИДЕНТА ТОКАЕВА С ЭЛИТНОЙ КОРРУПЦИЕЙ

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Abstract

This thesis delves into Kazakhstanis' views on President Toqayev's measures targeting elite-level corruption in the wake of the Bloody January unrest of 2022. I examine the effects of framing and experts' opinions on public perception of these measures, on trust/distrust and approval/disapproval of these measures.

My findings from the nationwide survey experiment and three focus group interviews with residents of Astana and Shu (southern Kazakhstan) partially confirm each of the following: populism frame of Toqayev's anti-corruption policies had a substantial impact on the level of public support for criminal prosecution and asset return initiatives, with less influence observed on constitutional reform efforts. In contrast to anticipated results, exposure to skepticism frames did not reduce public support for the anti-corruption measures. Additionally, I found that the greater social media usage reduced public trust in the successful implementation of Toqayev's anti-corruption policies while simultaneously enhancing both skeptical interpretations of and support level for said policies.

Not surprisingly, expert opinion plays some role in shaping public perception of anti-corruption policies. Two-part survey results demonstrated the increase in support for all anti-corruption policies in the presence of expert opinion. My respondents from focus groups tended to believe that experts' educational credentials, authoritativeness, adherence to pre-existing beliefs of the respondents, and the content of expert opinion played vital roles in determining whether to trust expert opinion or not.

I expected that living in rural areas in the southern region would lead to higher levels of trust and lower levels of skepticism. The results from a two-part online survey confirm this. However, findings from focus group interviews revealed mixed results in relation to this expectation. Participants from Shu doubted Toqayev's sincerity in combatting elite-level corruption, whereas individuals from smaller southern towns who had moved to Astana exhibited stronger approval and commended President Toqayev for his efforts in combatting grand corruption.

Thus, my thesis offers important contributions to the theories of political learning and political communication with insights into how citizens become critical evaluators of authoritarian regimes.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Chapter 1. Introduction: Toqayev’s Campaign Against Corrupt Elite: To Trust or Not to Trust?	1
Chapter 2. Literature Review: Perception Unveiled: The Effects of Personal Characteristics, Experience, and Social Media on the Anti-Corruption Policies’ Perception	12
Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework: The Effect of Framing and Credibility of Anti-Corruption Messages on Their Public Perception	27
Chapter 4. Research Design	48
Chapter 5. Data analysis	55
Chapter 6. Conclusion: Framing Has Its Limits	80
Bibliography	84
Appendix A. Online Survey Questionnaire	91
Appendix B. Focus Group Questionnaire	101
Appendix C. Balance Chart	103

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1. Kazakhstan's CPI for the past 10 years	6
Figure 1. “Listening to Kazakhstan” World Bank,	10
Table 2. Pro-governmental and independent media outlets with a number of followers in social media platforms	33
Figure 2. Map of Kazakhstan.....	37
Figure 3. Theory of Melgar et al. (2010).....	39
Table 3. Description of Focus Group Participants	51
Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Control Variables	55
Table 5. Experimental Multivariate Regression	57
Table 6. Experimental Multivariate Regression (before-after contrast)	59
Table 7. Non-Experimental Multivariate regression.....	62
Table 8. Media outlets mentioned in focus groups.	66
Table 9. Bivariate Regression.....	70
Table 10. Bivariate regression (before-after contrast)	71
Table 11. Experts mentioned in focus groups	73

Dedicated to my dearest *apa*, Kumiskul', for encouraging me to study from the earliest years of my life, sometimes even with little threats.

Dedicated to my *ata*, Ashimkhan, for demonstrating the importance of social justice and teaching me discipline and honesty.

Chapter 1. Introduction:

Toqayev's Campaign Against Corrupt Elite: To Trust or Not to Trust?

Kazakhstan, a former Soviet state located in Central Asia and endowed with vast natural resources, was known as an island of stability, personalist autocracy and grand corruption led by Nursultan Nazarbayev in a turbulent region. Everything went upside down when, in early January 2022, the peaceful protests against gas prices that initially started in the western Mangystau region quickly spread across the country and turned violent in southern parts of the country, including the largest city of Almaty, leaving several hundred dead and wounded.

Many protesters expressed dissatisfaction with the existing socio-economic disparities and pervasive corruption at all levels of society. Although we still do not know the causes of what exactly took place during this week-long unrest that became known as Bloody January, it is certain that President Kassym-Zhomart Toqayev seriously considered public grievances. Shortly after quelling the unrest, he announced the creation of the “New Kazakhstan” in which there would be no oligarchy connected to Nazarbayev, which, in his words, caused massive inequality among the population, and vowed to return the illegally earned financial assets of magnates to Kazakhstan. Soon after, Toqayev signed the Law “On Measures to Return Illegally Withdrawn Assets to the State¹”. As of the end of July 2023, the General Prosecutor’s Office and the Anti-corruption Agency reported that 860 billion tenge (about 1.9 billion USD) was returned to Kazakhstan². What was shocking to the general public is that previously untouchable family members of former president Nursultan Nazarbayev, whose assets were recovered by this Commission³, were named: Bolat Nazarbayev (brother), Kairat Satybaldy (nephew) and his wife Gulmira, Timur Kulibayev (son-in-law), Kairat Boranbayev (ex-father-

¹ <https://www.akorda.kz/ru/o-merah-po-vozvratu-gosudarstvu-nezakonno-vyvedennyh-aktivov-26105812>

² <https://vlast.kz/novosti/56037-glava-antikora-dolozil-tokaevu-o-vozvrate-aktivov-pocti-na-860-mlrd-tenge.html>

³ https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=38448850

in-law of the grandson) and Kairat Sharipbayev (son-in-law)⁴. The remaining names on the list whose assets were returned were kept secret⁵. Along with property confiscation and a ban on holding top government positions, Kairat Satybaldy⁶ and Kairat Boranbayev⁷ were jailed and faced prison sentences for embezzlement.

Moreover, Toqayev targeted grand corruption and top-level nepotism by making the following amendments to the Constitution, which were adopted on the referendum on June 5, 2022: deleting the constitutional status and powers of the first president that led to the repeal of the Law on the Status of Elbasy (Nazarbayev's Leader of the Nation status) on February 15, 2023⁸; changing the presidential terms to a single non-renewable term of 7 years instead of the previous 2 5-year terms; prohibiting close relatives of the president from holding top government and quasi-public sector entities positions; and restoring the name of the capital Nur-Sultan to Astana.

To ordinary people, criminal prosecutions of senior government officials were nothing new. Previously, under Nazarbayev's administration, from 2001 to 2017, nearly ten thousand individuals were sentenced for corruption (Janenova and Knox 2020, 188). The convicted were two former prime ministers, seven ministers and agency chairs, seven akims (regional governors) and deputy governors, eight heads of national companies, and eight generals from national security, defense, and law enforcement agencies. These prosecutions, however, failed to address the problem of grand corruption under Nazarbayev. Other anti-corruption actions under the first president included enforcing domestic laws and international treaties (Janenova & Knox 2020) and electronic government (Sheryazdanova & Butterfield 2017). According to Janenova and Knox (2020, 118), Nazarbayev's regime handled anti-corruption in three stages

⁴ <https://vlast.kz/jekonomika/56534-nevidimoe-vozvrashenie-bolsih-aktivov.html>

⁵ https://forbes.kz/actual/officially/vozvrat_aktivov_v_kazahstane_zasekretili_spisok_subyektov_oligopolii/

⁶ <https://vlast.kz/novosti/51822-sud-prigovoril-kajrata-satybaldy-k-sesti-godam-lisenia-svobody.html>

⁷ <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/32594337.html>

⁸ <https://vlast.kz/novosti/53942-zakon-o-pervom-prezidente-kazahstana-utratil-silu.html>

throughout 30 years of his rule. The first stage started with the President's Decree on Measures to Enhance the Combat against Organized Crime and Corruption in 1992 to decrease economic wrongdoing and enhance legislation regarding corrupt activities. Then, the second stage began in 1997 with the introduction of the Kazakhstan 2030 Strategy. The Anti-Corruption Law and the Public Service Law were implemented during this phase. In 2005, the government aimed to enhance efforts in combating corruption by implementing financial control measures and conducting mandatory audits on civil servants working in vulnerable areas. One-stop shops were introduced during this phase, which proved to be an effective preventive measure.

The third stage under Nazarbayev, illustrated in the Kazakhstan 2050 strategy unveiled in 2012, combined punitive, preventative, and educational tactics. It addressed corruption within government agencies, the judiciary, and law enforcement organizations. However, despite the government's efforts, according to the OECD assessment of Kazakhstan's Anti-Corruption Strategy (2015-2025), the strategy and corresponding action plans needed a comprehensive examination of the current state of corruption, historical anti-corruption initiatives, and findings from corruption studies.

Furthermore, Janenova and Knox (2020, 188) argue that Kazakhstan still needs to fully meet all of the 19 recommendations outlined in the previous monitoring report of OECD issued in 2014. According to the authors, the government has long preferred paper-based measures against corruption, demonstrating the absence of political will to enforce the legal instruments on the governmental level.

Similarly, on an international level, Pleines and Wöstheinrich (2016, 307) highlight the pattern of the Kazakhstani government formally acknowledging and adopting key aspects of the international anti-corruption framework yet lacking substantive efforts towards its enforcement. Thus, the authors state that the support for these endeavours is largely symbolic and on paper only, with Astana failing to correspond to the norms of treaties it has signed in

the past. On the other hand, despite the effectiveness of electronic government in reducing red tape, it concerns only petty corruption. Thus, Nazarbayev did not target his relatives and other wealthy and well-connected magnates.

As a result, Toqayev's attack against Nazarbayev's relatives shocked the public because the former was expected to be loyal to Nazarbayev. First, from the very 1992 till 2019, he held various top government positions⁹ as state secretary, minister of foreign affairs, prime minister, chairman and speaker of the Senate of the Parliament, chairman of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Indeed, as Nazarbayev himself acknowledged, "he [Toqayev] has been working alongside me since the first days of Kazakhstan's independence"¹⁰. Second, in 2019, when leaving the post of presidency that Nazarbayev was holding for nearly 30 years, he expressed his "belief that Toqayev is the person to whom we can entrust the management of Kazakhstan". Thus, one can observe close relations between Nazarbayev and Toqayev for decades and Nazarbayev's level of trust to suggest a 'safe and loyal' Toqayev for the role of the next president after himself. Third, in his turn, Toqayev responded with unsurprising loyalty, like renaming the capital city from Astana to Nur-Sultan¹¹, to symbolize the first name of his predecessor. Since the start of his presidency term in 2019, he was what people called a 'furniture' or a 'doll president', while Elbasy was largely expected to hold considerable authority through the life-long chairmanship of the Security Council and the country's leading party Nur-Otan. Political scientists define such form of political government as tutelage or tutelary regime (Bünthe 2022, 340). As Higashijima and Shiraito (2023, 3) note, the Kazakhstani government openly showcased to the citizens that they had a joint authority, although they concealed the details of the power agreement.

⁹ <https://www.akorda.kz/en/president/president>

¹⁰ https://www.akorda.kz/en/speeches/internal_political_affairs/in_speeches_and_addresses/address-of-the-head-of-state-nursultan-nazarbayev-to-the-people-of-kazakhstan

¹¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47638619>

As it was well covered in the literature, an essential part of informal politics in post-Soviet Central Asia are clans that govern the country politically and economically (Collins 2004; Schatz 2012). Considering the intimate relations between both presidents and the fact that they are from the same ‘clan’, anti-corruption measures of once loyal Toqayev that acted against the economic and political interests of Nazarbayev and his clan should have caused mixed feelings in the broader public. Yet we do not fully know what came after this public shock. How do citizens perceive this attack: as pure talk/façade and no action or as personal revenge or as a signal of strength to potential rivals (Dariga Nazarbayeva, Nazarbayev’s oldest daughter with presidential ambitions), or as a genuine tackling of grand corruption? This is my empirical research puzzle. My theoretical research question is: how does the public perceive anti-corruption policies targeting elites in autocracies?

Studies on public perception of anti-corruption policies in non-democratic regimes list various factors that shape and influence people’s attitudes towards these policies. Among them are the personal characteristics of the respondents (Melgar et al. 2010; Li et al. 2016; Kang and Zhu 2021), personal experience with corruption (Li and Meng 2020; Kang and Zhu 2021), social media (Hetherington 1996; Eliseev et al. 2020; Li and Meng 2020; Edema et al. 2022; Pan et al. 2022). First, scholars find that the demographics of a person, such as gender, age, education, access to the internet, pre-existing political views, and economic well-being, have an impact on forming an individual’s political opinion on state-initiated anti-corruption efforts. On the other hand, scholars of China argue (Li and Meng 2020; Kang and Zhu 2021) that individuals who have encountered corruption before, tend to trust less anti-corruption measures, hence holding skeptical views and finding such reforms as insufficient. Next, researchers using social information theory suggest (Edema et al. 2022; Eliseev et al. 2020; Hetherington 1996; Li and Meng 2020) that a variety of sources of information, as well as easy

access to diverse content types through the internet combined with framed messages and expert credibility affect public's perception of anti-corruption policies.

Public perception of anti-corruption policies is important because most autocrats care about public opinion. Public approval of their policies can enhance the efficiency of government policies and strengthen public trust in the policy-making procedure (Dowler et al. 2006). Even in authoritarian regimes of Central Asia, Schiek (2022, 268) argues, citing Schatz (2009) and Von Soest et al. (2017), authorities cannot maintain peace and avert a transition of power by patronage, oppression, and welfare policies. Reforms require political legitimacy and popular support. Therefore, positive public perception of anti-corruption policies in the aftermath of the January events is vital not only to securing the ruling status of Toqayev but also for making the rulers accountable in the longer term.

Perception of corruption

Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index serves as an important mark of corruption in the public sector based on citizens' perceptions of it. Scores vary from 100, which indicates the least corruption, to 0, which indicates maximal corruption. The rank shows the order of one state compared to other states in the index.

Table 1. Kazakhstan's CPI for the past 10 years

Year	CPI: score (out of 100)	CPI: rank (out of 180)
2023	39	93
2022	36	101
2021	37	102
2020	38	94
2019	34	113
2018	31	124
2017	31	122
2016	29	131
2015	28	123
2014	29	126

Note: 100 means perception of no corruption.

According to Melgar et al. (2010, 121), the perception of corruption does not necessarily indicate an objective reality but rather is a manifestation of societal norms and beliefs.

The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), compiled by Transparency International, is regarded as the predominant global corruption ranking utilized on an international scale. It assesses the perceived level of corruption within the public sector of each country, as determined by experts and individuals in the business community. The score allocated to each country is derived from a comprehensive analysis of a minimum of three distinct data sources obtained from a selection of thirteen diverse corruption surveys and assessments. These datasets are sourced from a range of prestigious organizations such as the World Bank (staff assessments of 72 countries) and the World Economic Forum (survey among business executives in 110 countries). Scores vary from 100, being corruption-free, to 0, being highly corrupt. Above is the perception of corruption index for the latest years of Nazarbayev's presidency (from 2014 to 2019) and Toqayev's years of presidency (2019 to 2023 (ongoing)). We can see that public corruption perception in Kazakhstan is improving, meaning with each year, businesspeople and experts are finding societal corruption scale less than before. However, in the context of a decade, 10 scores higher is rather a thin result, especially considering that since Toqayev's presidency in 2019, corruption perception has improved only to 5 scores.

Moreover, in the frames of the Global Corruption Barometer, which directly asks ordinary people about their perception of experience with corruption, Transparency International conducted a survey among Kazakhstani individuals in 2016 (Pring 2016). The GCB survey among Kazakhstani individuals (sample size = 1505) was conducted face-to-face in February - May 2016. According to its results, 34 percent of the respondents indicated bribery with corruption as one of the three most important problems facing Kazakhstan that the government should address. Regarding the grand or elite level corruption, 11 percent of the respondents

thought or heard that the President and all or most Cabinet members were involved in corruption. However, 11 percent seems to be a diminishing measure of reality given the social desirability bias in the context of the sensitive topic of grand corruption in the post-Soviet countries. Similarly, 15 percent of respondents were Parliament members; 23 percent of respondents - Government officials; 24 percent of respondents - local government representatives and tax officials; 35 percent of respondents - police; 28 percent of respondents - judges; and 29 percent of respondents - business executives thought or heard that these officials were involved in corruption.

To the question “How is the government handling the fight against corruption?” 15 percent replied ‘very badly’, 31 percent answered fairly badly and 8 percent ‘have not heard enough to say’. Year after, to the same question, the answers in negative tone were the same, while a number of respondents who did not know of such measures grew twice, concluding 16 percent. Thus, we see how during Nazarbayev’s presidency, almost half of the population was not satisfied with anti-corruption policies under the administration of the first president. In my thesis, I explore whether this skepticism persists.

During the same time period, a group of Kazakhstani researchers asked about respondents’ evaluation of anti-corruption policies in 2017 and revealed a wide range of opinions about them. To measure public perception of corruption among Kazakhstanis, these groups of respondents were asked several questions among which the following can be highlighted: “Tell me, please, how do you feel about the fact that the media and social networks very often talk about corruption crimes – giving and receiving multimillion-dollar bribes, high-ranking officials appearing in these crimes?”. According to the results, 34 percent of the respondents, in contrast to 43 percent of entrepreneurs, and 68 percent of state servants evaluated the frequent coverage of corruption offenses in the media and social networks to be “very positive,” seeing it as proof that “the state is fighting corruption and succeeding”, while as reported by

47.7 percent of respondents, compared to 21.8 percent of entrepreneurs, and 24.8 percent of state servants, "corruption crimes, which are mentioned in the media and social networks, are just a small proportion", and finally 15.6 percent of respondents, in comparison with 34.4 percent of entrepreneurs, and 6.2 percent of state servants are critical of it, calling it a "show-off" (Sadvakassova et al. 2017, 71). For the first survey, researchers conducted face-to-face, large-scale surveys with 2000 ordinary respondents of various ages, genders, ethnicities, and education levels from all regions of Kazakhstan. For the second survey, researchers conducted face-to-face large-scale surveys with 1000 ordinary residents, 500 entrepreneurs, 500 state servants, 500 representatives of education, 500 law enforcement agencies, and 500 representatives of the judicial system. For the third survey, researchers conducted face-to-face large-scale surveys with 500 representatives of education, 500 law enforcement agencies, and 500 representations of the judicial system. The division of respondents into groups in accordance with their professional occupation is not explained in the work.

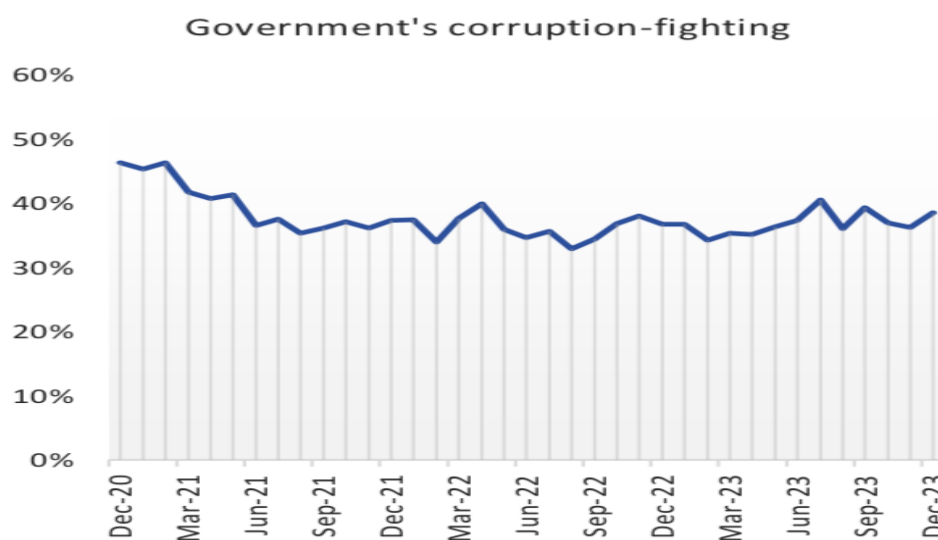
Regarding the perception of anti-corruption policies during the presidency of the current president, Toqayev, the World Bank conducted a "Listening to Kazakhstan" survey in December 2020. Initially, a face-to-face nationwide survey was carried out involving a representative sample of 3,016 households. Individuals who were receiving social protection benefits were intentionally sampled in excess of their proportional representation in the population using national registration data. The research specifically examines individuals who receive social assistance in order to investigate the effects and efficacy of these programs in alleviating poverty. Subsequently, interviewers initiated a routine practice of contacting a randomly chosen panel of 1,500 households via telephone to carry out brief interviews (later expanded to 2,000), adhering to a predetermined monthly timetable mutually established with the engaged households. A monthly telephone panel survey is carried out using a nationally representative sample of 1,500 households drawn randomly from those who took part in the

initial survey. The L2Kaz baseline survey utilized official administrative-territorial classifiers at the lowest administrative unit level in Kazakhstan to select sampling units. Two hundred units were selected at random, with consideration given to size, across various regions (oblasts) and types of settlements (urban or rural). The estimates obtained are indicative of 14 specific regions, in conjunction with their corresponding urban zones, as well as three key cities within the republic (Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent). One of the components of the survey is on population’s trust in anti-corruption measures. Respondents were asked the following question: “In your view, how well is the national government doing at fighting corruption?”

As we can see below, a notable improvement was observed in the initial three months of 2022, coinciding with the introduction of anti-corruption measures after the January events. There is also an increase in trust in July 2023, when the former Minister of Culture and director of the National Museum in Astana Arystanbek Mukhamediuly received eight years in prison on charges of embezzlement of budget funds¹².

In December 2020, the level of public trust was 46 percent, which decreased to 39 percent by the end of 2023. Still, this survey shows that public skepticism towards official anti-corruption policies persists.

Figure 1. “Listening to Kazakhstan” World Bank, 2020 – ongoing



¹² <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/32842515.html>

However, there is no research conducted on the factors that shape people's perception of combatting the grand corruption in Kazakhstan. Therefore, in this thesis, I will seek answers to the questions: How and why does the public perceive the anti-corruption policy implemented after the January events? While it is yet to be answered whether people generally perceive anti-corruption policies positively believe in the sincerity of the measures, or are skeptical about the policies, my central arguments are that individuals' perception of anti-corruption measures is influenced by framing of the source they acquire news from about the policy; and news reports that contain expert opinions impact more people's opinion of the policies in comparison with reports that do not refer to experts. Therefore, I expect the messages with framing and expert opinions to have the strongest positive effect on people's views of Toqayev's policy. This means that Toqayev's administration must invest more in the PR campaign about his anti-corruption efforts and other policies more generally to shrink the gap between the actual effort and the public perception of his reforms.

My thesis consists of six chapters. In the next chapter, I critically review factors that, according to scholars, shape public perception of anti-corruption measures, such as personal characteristics, personal experience, and media. Next, in Chapter 3, I present my theoretical framework that is based on the social information theory. I argue that depending on the type of media (government-controlled or independent) framing of anti-corruption efforts and expert opinions about them, those messages influence the public perception of anti-corruption measures. I discuss my research design, sampling and methodology (two-part online survey with experimental design and focus group interviews) that I used to test my hypotheses about the effects of framing and credibility on public perception of Toqayev's anti-corruption efforts in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I report, analyze, and discuss findings from the survey experiment and focus group interviews. Finally, the concluding chapter reflects the significance of the research findings and provides recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review:

Perception Unveiled: The Effects of Personal Characteristics, Experience, and Social Media on the Anti-Corruption Policies' Perception

Today, everyone, including authoritarian rulers, supports good governance and the rule of law. Autocrats often publicly announce anti-corruption campaigns in hopes of strengthening their legitimacy in the eyes of international donors and ordinary citizens. Yet we know little about how citizens perceive such policies: Do they believe in the sincerity of these anti-corruption campaigns? Do they view them as an intra-elite power struggle? Or do they perceive them as a façade for maintaining the corrupt status quo?

Both existing research and common sense reveal that there is a variation in public perception of anti-corruption campaigns. While some citizens may perceive anti-corruption measures as a proactive and sincere anti-corruption effort, others may doubt the government's genuine motives and the specific strategies employed to curb corruption. For instance, citizens in post-Soviet autocracies learned to be skeptical of any official pronouncements, including anti-corruption campaigns (Nasuti 2016, 849). At the same time, Kang and Zhu's (2021) findings in the context of anti-corruption campaigns in authoritarian China demonstrate that, in general, initiatives to combat corruption tend to raise the level of public trust in government by the citizens.

In contrast, Zhang (2015) argues that in a non-democratic context, the effect of anti-corruption policies is quite different: they lead to an increase in public trust. Having conducted series of surveys among Chinese citizens before the arrest of the first 'tiger' Chen Liangyu in 2006, and after the arrest, Zhang (2015, 3) found out that, the government's fight against elite-level corruption was effective in boosting the institutional trust of Chinese citizens, even among the respondents, who were initially inclined to distrust the state measures. Similar to that, Chen (2004) demonstrates that the public considers anti-corruption initiatives to be a crucial

component when assessing the effectiveness of the government, and such efforts could potentially enhance their overall approval of authoritarian regimes.

Indeed, scholars claim that the anti-corruption campaign of Xi Jinping is the most enduring and powerful corruption control measure since he took power in 2012. Intense criminal prosecutions of both ‘tigers’ (high-ranking officials) and ‘flies’ (grassroot cadres), according to Christopher Carothers, gained popularity among Chinese population. To be precise, the public support for the government’s anti-corruption initiatives rose dramatically under current president’s leadership from a low of 35 percent in 2011 to 71 percent in 2016 (Carothers 2022, 195). Using both conjoint experiments and mediation analysis following two face-to-face surveys among 1212 rural and 1152 urban citizens, Tsai et al. (2022) studied the public perception of anti-corruption campaign in China. The researchers provided participants with descriptions of two fictional township party secretaries and inquired about their preference for the individual they would prefer to see in office in their own township (Tsai et al. 2022, 603). Selected profiles were assigned as the primary experimental condition to display a history of either sanctioning or not sanctioning corruption committed by lower-ranking village officials. Participants were requested to complete six distinct iterations of the conjoint experiment, where the profiles were randomized anew in each round, following a fully crossed design. As a result, Tsai et al. (2022) concluded that Chinese citizens hold a favourable opinion of anti-corruption campaigns at the local government level.

Similarly, a study carried out in 1979 revealed that South Korean anti-corruption policies implemented in the 1970s gained noteworthy popularity among the public (Zhang and Lavena 2015). Approximately 79 percent of survey participants, according to the authors, believed that campaign had successfully decreased corruption in the country. Famous anti-corruption reforms by Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili in the early 2000s received positive sentiments from the Georgian population (Huber 2004, found in Spirova 2008, 80).

Nevertheless, as a result of face-to-face interviews with 1000 respondents conducted in a medium Chinese city in December 2015, Sun and Yuan (2017) discovered that although anti-corruption policies have the potential to increase satisfaction with the central government among the public, these positive impacts did not extend to local governments. Over time, if people continue feeling discontent with the local corruption, it could eventually weaken their overall support for the government.

In a similar manner, the report from Mexico during the first decade of the 2000s indicates that if the general population perceives that all politicians partake in seeking illicit gains and that corruption is pervasive within all institutions, there is little likelihood that individuals will have faith in politicians' statements regarding their intentions to combat corruption (Morris and Klesner 2010, 1276). The authors (2010, 1267) used the Latin American Public Opinion Project's (LAPOP) AB data, which surveyed a total of 1,556 Mexican individuals in March 2004 using a multistage probability sampling method. In their study, Morris and Klesner developed simultaneous equations models (SEM) whereby corruption and trust were considered as endogenous variables within the equations predicting one another. In order to thoroughly examine the connections proposed in the aforementioned statements, the authors (2010, 1269) constructed four structural equation models (SEMs), each consisting of two equations, with the aim of investigating the interconnectedness between (a) interpersonal trust and encounters with corruption, (b) interpersonal trust and perceptions of corruption, (c) institutional trust and instances of corruption, and (d) institutional trust and beliefs about corruption. According to the results of their research (2010, 1278), it was discovered that there were prevalent beliefs of corruption, limited trust in both interpersonal relationships and political institutions, as well as a sense of skepticism towards the government's effectiveness in combating corruption. Regression analysis indicated that while participating in corruption could impact perceptions of corruption, it might not have a significant effect on trust in public

institutions. Morris and Klesner (2010) conclude that if there is low trust in politicians and an expectation of corruption, it is imperative to develop efficient anti-corruption measures in order to challenge and change this established state of affairs. According to the authors, the prevalent perception in Mexico is that politicians are predominantly held responsible for the pervasive corruption, with many individuals feeling hopeless about the possibility of an effective resolution. This perspective, the authors explain, serves to rationalize individual involvement in corrupt practices, leading to a sense of indifference toward taking action to address the issue.

Scholars identify various factors that influence the perception of corruption and anti-corruption policies. In their study of public perception of corruption in China, Sun et al. (2022, 114), divide them into the macro level (external social setting including the political system, partisanship, the judicial system, and social media) and micro level factors (personal experiences with corruption and poor assessments about government leaders). On the other hand, Melgar et al. (2010, 122), after studying the same topic in both democratic (Western Europe, Scandinavia, North America) and non-democratic (Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe) 33 countries of the world using International Social Survey Program, claim that multiple personal characteristics (including age, gender, educational level, marriage status) determine the perception of corruption at the micro level as a result of life-course modifications, personal experiences, and the capacity to analyze data. In line with that, Kovtun and Mileckiy (2022, 42) state that the experience of confronting or combating corruption has an important effect on its perception. According to the authors, at the same time, factors like gender, income level, and professional affiliation are associated with differences in perception of corruption. Due to the shortage of literature on the perception of anti-corruption policies, the authors propose to consider corruption experience and personal characteristics in studying anti-corruption measures, too. In addition, the views about the widespread presence of corruption, particularly among the political elite, reports in the media, public discourse on corruption, and

prior personal experience (or the experience of family members, friends, or acquaintances) detect the assessments of the extent of corruption as severe (2022, 111).

Personal Characteristics of Respondents

This school of thought largely explores correlations between personal characteristics of people and their effect on their attitudes towards anti-corruption policies. Specifically, Melgar et al. (2010, 129), in their study of the perception of corruption, find that females' perception of corruption tends to be higher, meaning the amount of corruption in society is bigger in their view. According to the explanations of Li et al. (2015, 106), males are more likely to be dissatisfied with the government's anti-corruption policies, given the division of labour by gender in the household. Thus, in some societies, males' contact with the government occurs more often, whereas females prefer to take responsibility for household issues. Surprisingly, Melgar et al. (2010, 124), in opposition to many mentioned scholars, state that age is not an essential factor in regard to the perception of corruption. Next, the authors find that married individuals' perception of corruption is lower (2010, 124). Melgar et al. (2010, 125) also argue that people with secondary education or higher are prone to perceive a lesser amount of corruption. Overall, the perception of corruption should be subject to consideration while studying the perception of official anti-corruption initiatives, since a high level of corruption perception (when an individual finds her society/country to be highly corrupted) leads to less public trust towards anti-corruption policies and institutions that initiate them. According to the authors, having access to various information on the level of corruption data along with the capacity to analyze it is important; those with higher education have more knowledge regarding the current state of corruption and greater processing capabilities. One might contest such view since in the context of anti-corruption policies in authoritarian regimes the capacity to analyze information may make person to believe less in the anti-corruption measures of authorities.

Another possibility is that availability of information sources make corruption more evident and widespread in the eyes of the individuals. Thus, even when people believe in the genuineness of leaders' intentions to combat corruption, they may find the measures to be ineffective to handle the depth of corruption in society.

In the context of Kazakhstan, Rico Isaacs' study of Almaty hipsters can serve as a good demonstration. Urban youngsters with Western education and access to English media in the cosmopolitan Almaty, actively oppose autocratic system of Kazakhstan (Isaacs 2023, 5). In his other work, the author states that representatives of this particular subculture hold a negative view towards the government and the president (Burkhanov et al. 2019, 235). However, there are no research conducted on Almaty hipsters' opinion of Toqayev's "Zhańa Kazakhstan" reforms after January events 2022. Similarly, in the latest presidential elections of November 2022¹³, the lowest voter turnout was officially recorded in three biggest cities: in the capital city Astana (48.67 percent), densely populated southern Shymkent (59.79 percent), and the lowest in Almaty city (28.72 percent). In the regions however the minimum was 72 percent (excluding the striking Western regions). This may mean that residents of large urban centers are more skeptical of government-initiated reforms. This seems to be an important factor that existing studies seem to ignore. This is why I plan to explore its effect in my thesis (see next chapter).

Another personal characteristic, in the view of Melgar et al. (2010, 126), individuals holding more positive outlook towards democracy perceive lower amount of corruption. This is paradoxical because pro-democracy respondents should not trust announcements of autocratic leaders. Finally, the authors argue that corruption perception declines with socioeconomic position; both financially and socially better-situated individuals are more likely to perceive their surroundings favourably (2015, 125). On the contrary, Li et al. (2015,

¹³ <https://www.election.gov.kz/rus/news/releases/index.php?ID=8012>

106), having studied the impact of economic well-being on the perception of corruption and state-initiated anti-corruption endeavours based on a nationwide survey conducted in China in 2011, argue that it is not the individuals' objective economic condition that influences their perception of anti-corruption policies, but their subjective sense of well-being. Clearly, this sense of well-being would be different among residents of large cities and small towns in remote areas. This school of thought mainly explores correlations between various personal characteristics of respondents and their perception of corruption and anti-corruption efforts. It is valuable for developing a set of control variables in my study but it does not help with making causal inferences about public perceptions of anti-corruption policies.

Personal experience with Corruption in Authoritarian Regimes

Most studies of this School of Thought come from China. Li and Meng (2020, 438) conducted a nationwide representative survey that was completed by 3513 participants across 24 provinces, as well as 50 urban districts and cities in China. Carried out in 2015, the survey encompassed a range of inquiries pertaining to both direct and indirect indicators of experiences with corruption, the general public's viewpoints on instances of corruption and initiatives to combat them, as well as assessments of the effectiveness of anti-corruption capabilities. With the list experiment, the authors tried to analyze the factor that shapes the public's attitude towards the anti-corruption efforts. They found that individuals who had encountered corruption perceived 0.266 units more corruption, felt 0.211 units less contentment with present anti-corruption measures, and found state capacity to combat corruption 0.214 units less consistently as opposed to those who had not encountered corruption before (2020, 449). The authors explain that the experience of corruption can produce a big disparity between the government's messages and the direct sentiments of citizens in the setting of expanding positive propaganda of combatting corruption

(2020, 435). Such disparity could undermine the public's favourable response to anti-corruption initiatives while rendering them skeptical of the government's anti-corruption policies.

In contrast, Kang and Zhu (2021) who examined the impact of anti-corruption initiatives on public trust in China among different social groups through a nationwide representative survey of 30 thousand respondents and field interviews (no clarification of the number of interviewees), using difference-in-differences (DID) models, propose different meaning of experience: encounters with the officials or with the procedure of related policy enactment. They contend that anti-corruption policies affect public trust via direct experience or media depending on different social groups and contexts. In the words of the authors, anti-corruption policies do not enhance the political trust of insiders, such as civil servants or businessmen, who interact with government bodies because of their direct experience with the procedure of anti-corruption policy enactment or unsuccessful policy outcomes (2021, 435). According to Kang and Zhu, outsiders who acquire knowledge about anti-corruption initiatives from official reports are more inclined to trust as a result of anti-corruption policy. This means that framing of the news about anti-corruption initiatives has an effect of its own. Nevertheless, this enhancing effect was confined to better knowledgeable persons, particularly individuals with higher education or regular Internet users (2021, 435). They tend to be in large cities, again pointing to the importance of the place of residence for exploring the perception of anti-corruption efforts. Another finding of this study is that if anti-corruption policies have a direct impact on individuals' lives, people's political trust increases. For instance, an introduction of reforms such as e-government that make citizens' lives easier or economic reforms (financial assistance, tax regulations, etc) that enhance citizens' level of life allows people to directly see the results of anti-corruption policies. On the contrary, if the policy does not influence people directly, then media reports shape their evaluation of the policy (Kang and Zhu 2021, 436),

which again points to the importance of framing. It is important to note that government efforts in fighting grand corruption have a direct impact only on citizens, who interact frequently with government officials such as businessmen or civil servants. Thus, we may consider the growth of public trust as a result of grand anti-corruption policies only among this social category, while according to the authors, people who have no contact with governmental officials tend to be influenced by social information more regarding anti-corruption drive. Therefore, the growth of public trust in this case depends on the sentiments in media messages and how anti-corruption measures are evaluated, framed, and presented by news outlets.

Despite such emphasis on personal experience with corruption as the main factor that shapes the perception of anti-corruption policies, its main disadvantage, and thus, inapplicability in this study, is the sensitive nature of corruption especially in the authoritarian context. Not many people would be willing to share their encounters with corruption, potentially invalidating the data. It can be illustrated by the findings of research conducted by Sadvakassova et al. (2017, 60), who found that 87.6 percent of 2000 respondents acknowledged the high level of bribery in society. However, 79.9 percent of the respondents answered that they never bribed (2017, 65). Furthermore, the Anti-Corruption Agency of Kazakhstan (2023, 34) reported that in 2022, 1724 corruption crimes were registered, out of which 995 (57 %) were bribery cases. This mismatch demonstrates the unwillingness of respondents to acknowledge their personal experience with corruption. This means that people tend not to share their corruption-related experiences with strangers, like researchers, which makes researching it a challenge for scholars.

Social information: Framing and Credibility of Anti-Corruption Messages

Eliseev et al. (2020, 190) argue that the perception of corruption by the general public is heavily affected by the multiplicity of data sources and content (news portals, special literature,

political essays) on corruption and anti-corruption, specifically how information is delivered, assessments and conclusions are made to form attitudes towards corrupt practices. The authors used a telephone survey of 1100 respondents in 2017 in Saint Petersburg and revealed that in one of the largest Russian cities, the Internet and TV are major providers of information regarding corruption, with the former frequently taking the lead. Traditionally, in authoritarian regimes like Russia, television is heavily controlled by the state. In contrast, media cannot be controlled by one agent, it is a platform for multiple agents to publicize. Thus, such entrance inclusiveness provides more freedom to express a multitude of opinions along with experiences regarding corruption or bribery. In the context of Kazakhstan, scholars argue that the Nazarbayev generation, the youth that was born after 1991, the year of independence, is mainly apolitical (Burkhanov et al. 2019; Junisbai & Junisbai 2020) and well connected to social media (Burkhanov et al. 2019; Bekmagambetov et al. 2023). In fact, the internet penetration level in Kazakhstan is the highest in Central Asia (Bekmagambetov et al. 2023) and according to the latest available data equals 92 percent in 2022 (World Bank¹⁴). Bekmagambetov et al. (2023) state that with the growing presence of the internet, individuals have greater access to political information which has the potential to influence their attitudes towards the government and internal political situations, whether positively or negatively.

Indeed, Kosnazarov (2019, 251) in Burkhanov et al. (2019), argues that citizens regard every new government program with skepticism, believing that these initiatives are designed and implemented primarily to embezzle funds from the public. The youngsters, in the author's view (2019, 250), do not view politicians as examples to aspire to. In particular, senior government officials are commonly believed to engage in corrupt practices. Nevertheless, this was the case before Toqayev's presidency. Having conducted focus group interviews with 62 respondents across Kazakhstan in November 2021 (before the January events after which

¹⁴ https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?most_recent_value_desc=true

Toqayev introduced a set of reforms under the name “New Kazakhstan”), research center Paperlab (2022, 64) found out that in relation to the impact made by the incumbent president, respondents exhibited a range of opinions that span from favorable to uncertain evaluations. The participants indicated that the timeframe for summarizing the results was insufficiently brief. However, the participants were impressed by his academic background, intellect, and professional tenure at the United Nations. Toqayev's critical evaluations stem from the realization that his ascension to a position of authority was primarily facilitated by the backing of the former First President. Overall, it was noted by the authors that as of the conclusion of 2021, Toqayev had yet to establish a clear image within society, as the public’s perception of him was ambivalent. There was anticipation of positive outcomes as he had not yet fully demonstrated his potential. Nevertheless, there still lingered a level of ambiguity surrounding his political and personal attributes.

After the January events, in another study conducted by the same research center, the researchers (2023, 26) found out that 25 percent of the population in Kazakhstan hold skeptical views towards potential changes in the governance of their country. They did not see any changes and did not believe they were possible in the future. From December 2022 to January 2023 Paperlab conducted a telephone survey among 1047 Kazakhstani citizens, a sample of which proved to accurately reflect the demographics of the respondents in terms of gender, age, nationality, and place of residence (urban or rural). According to their findings, a significant portion of the population exhibits skepticism towards official reports on the events of January, reflecting a prevailing distrust in governmental institutions within society.

Li and Meng (2020, 433) state that, according to social information theory, political awareness and the media, both conventional media and new social media, are the two key avenues for delivering information sources to impact public opinion of corruption and the efficacy of anti-corruption policies. Thus, it can be concluded that media frames information

that affects the audience's evaluation of the effectiveness of the current anti-corruption drive and further perception of these anti-corruption measures, meaning to trust it or not. However, the authors do not mention the exact means of the media's influence on public opinion. For information to shape the public's perception of government policies, it is not enough to be published in certain venues (here in online space); it should be formed and presented a certain way.

Hetherington (1996) studied the influence of media on shaping American voters' perceptions of national economic performance in 1992. Having analyzed data from the National Election Study through the usage of OLS regression and logistic regression, the author argues that the media, using agenda-setting and subject-framing, influences the way individuals perceive state initiatives, including the amount of focus they devote to anti-corruption initiatives, the manner in which the efficacy of such actions is appraised, and eventually, the degree of public trust. In this thesis work, I argue that framing and credibility are key factors in shaping people's perceptions of state policies. Edema et al. (2022, 20) argue that media influences and shapes interpretations of messages, texts, or symbols by thinly promoting or discouraging certain viewpoints to the audience. The theory of framing states that the ways through which media presents and describes stories directly influence the perception of individuals of these events.

Next, scholars claim that information's credibility potentially impacts the selection of information, changes in attitude, and behavioral reaction of the audience (Winter et al. 2014; Lupia 2000; Petty et al. 1981; Iyengar et al. 2000). Nonetheless, these studies were conducted in democratic countries such as Germany and the US, which implies the potentially different answers in non-democracies. The expertise factor especially has the lion's share in the evaluation of credibility. Fogg (2003), cited in Choi et al. (2015), defines it as the perceived level of knowledge, skills, and experience possessed by the 'expert.' Concluding parts of

expertise are name, reputation, fame, authoritativeness, and competence of an expert (Cheung 2006; Fogg et al. 2003; Liu et al. 2005; Westerwick 2013; Zhang 2014). Fight against grand corruption as a part of the “New Kazakhstan” reform introduced after the January events in 2022 by Toqayev, caused public shock, and exceeded people’s expectations at the moment (as mentioned earlier, Paperlab (2022) found in focus groups that people were in the mode of great anticipation of new president). Thus, anti-corruption initiatives were covered in both pro-governmental and independent media outlets not only by journalists themselves but also by political scientists.

Regarding grand corruption in autocracies, Huhe et al. (2022) argue that Xi Jinping’s efforts, especially his rigorous enforcement against high-profile corrupt officials, have enhanced public trust in the central government. Nonetheless, the campaign is unsuccessful in reviving the diminishing authority of both the central and local governments in sectors such as economy, education and democracy.

In Indonesia, during the fifth year of its transition from autocracy to democracy, the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) was founded in 2002. According to Schutte 2012 (39), since then, the KPK has successfully charged high-profile authorities, who were previously considered untouchable, to prison. They also managed to retrieve stolen assets and have earned a significantly greater level of trust and support from the Indonesian public. As Diprose et al. (2019, 705) state, the unwavering and steadfast backing from the public has played a pivotal role in empowering Indonesia's KPK to investigate and prosecute influential entities, as well as in safeguarding the institution against attempts to undermine its authority by those it seeks to hold accountable. Moreover, the performance of KPK also raised public support for President Yudhoyono, who served from 2004 to 2014 (Juwono 2016, 271). According to the polls, the government's approval rating with regard to its handling of anti-

corruption efforts experienced a notable increase, reaching its highest point of 80 percent in June 2009.

However, in Russia the perception of combatting grand corruption is different. According to a survey conducted by the Levada Center in 2019, 68 percent of Russians believe that official arrests reflect the overall deteriorating state of the power structure from corruptness. It demonstrates the lack of public trust in the genuineness of the anti-corruption measures and confidence in high levels of corruption among high political establishments. 25 percent of respondents view the high-profile arrest of Arashukovs (former Senator Rauf Arashukov and his father, ex-advisor to the CEO of Gazprom MezRegionGaz) as a significant effort to combat corruption, meanwhile 31 percent of the respondents perceive this arrest as a power struggle among officials aiming to rearrange their areas of control. Similarly, according to a survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre in February 2005 in Ukraine, nearly one in three individuals from a total number of 2012 Ukrainians were optimistic that the then president would actively combat corruption and achieve success. A further one-third showed more skepticism and suggested that the efforts to combat corruption would continue, yet ultimately fail. Another 15 percent of the participants expressed their belief that the current administration merely made statements without any real intentions to take action. Finally, 11 percent of the respondents found that the current anti-corruption drive is a means for the president to purge his political rivals. Thus, we can see how public perception of anti-corruption initiatives varied both regarding intentions and results. There were persistent beliefs in the sincerity of the government policies as well as open skepticism, stating the ‘for show’ character or ‘political game’ nature of the anti-corruption policies. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the survey was conducted following the political transition from semi-authoritarian Kuchma to democratically elected Yushchenko (Kuzio 2005) that occurred in the result of Orange Revolution in Ukraine. The former president Kuchma was a known semi-authoritarian leader.

Finally, taking into consideration the context of Kazakhstan, according to Kurmanov et al. (2023, 2), the autocratic regime of Kazakhstan under Toqayev, in pursuit of stability “during fragile transition stages”, has been implementing the policies that would create a “democratic façade”. One of them was lacking any depth Open Government reform ‘Listening State’ brought into life by Toqayev in 2019. Therefore, some people may view his calls for reducing grand corruption also as lacking any depth. Even the changes to the Constitution and criminal prosecutions may be aimed at fooling people if the corrupt elite retains its power. On the other hand, having gained de facto authority in the aftermath of the January 2022 events, Toqayev may be viewed as having another motive behind implementing current anti-corruption measures: a selective punishment of other key political actors as his tactic in the intra-elite competition in accordance with the argumentation of Zhu and Zhang (2017). The researchers demonstrate that competition for power among politicians can, at times, prompt, thorough investigations into corrupt practices. Furthermore, as it was mentioned, protesters’ grievances were socio-economic inequality and high levels of corruption caused by the oligarchic system established long ago by the first president. Chanting ‘Shal, ket’, people demanded the (real) departure of Nazarbayev from power. Thus, one could also assume that Toqayev sought popular support by punishing some members of Nazarbayev’s clan, a move demanded by the people (Resimić 2024, 3).

In conclusion, social information theory, traditional and social media are the two key avenues for delivering information sources to impact public opinion of corruption and the efficacy of anti-corruption policies. Thus, it can be concluded that media frames information that affects audience’s evaluation of the effectiveness of current anti-corruption drive and further perception of these anti-corruption measures, meaning to trust it or not.

Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework:

The Effect of Framing and Credibility of Anti-Corruption Messages on Their Public Perception

As I explored in the previous chapter, scholars disagree about explanations of public perception of anti-corruption policies. Before I turn to my preferred theoretical explanation, I have to define the key concepts I used in my study: anti-corruption policies, framing of the messages about them in the media, media outlets (pro-government and independent ones), personal experience with corruption, perceived petty and grand corruption, trust in government and in anti-corruption policies, place of residence, and household language use.

Anti-corruption policies

I focus only on anti-corruption policies announced by president Toqayev after Bloody January (*Qandy Qańtar*) because they depart from previous anti-corruption policies during both presidencies of Nazarbayev (December 1991 – March 2019) and Toqayev (March 2019 – December 2021) in terms of their focus on the elite-level corruption. The post-Qantar anti-corruption policies include three policy measures. First, criminal prosecution of family members of former president Nursultan Nazarbayev: Kairat Satybaldy (nephew), Kairat Boranbayev (ex-father-in-law of the grandson Aisultan Nazarbayev) and Samat Abish (nephew). Second, return of the illegally earned financial assets. The list of owners' names was only partially disclosed, revealing only the identities of relatives of the ex-President Nursultan Nazarbayev: Bolat Nazarbayev (brother), Aliya Nazarbayeva (daughter), Kairat Satybaldy (nephew), Timur Kulibayev (son-in-law), Kairat Boranbayev (ex-father-in-law of the grandson) and Kairat Sharipbayev (son-in-law). The Prosecutor General's Office informed that due to ongoing pre-trial investigations, it is unable to disclose the identities of rest of the individuals, who hold ownership of these assets, along with information regarding specific

accounts, businesses, or parcels of land that have been relinquished to the state. Third, constitutional changes that consist of the amendments to the Constitution, which were adopted on the referendum on June 5, 2022, invalidating the constitutional status and powers of the first president that led to repeal of the Law on the status of Elbasy on February 15, 2023¹⁵; changing the presidential terms to a single non-renewable term of 7 years instead of previous 2 times by 5 years; prohibiting close relatives of the president from hold top government and quasi-public sector entities positions; and restoring the name of the capital from Nur-Sultan back to Astana.

Framing of messages about anti-corruption policies in the media

Chong and Druckman (2007, 104) define framing as the process through which individuals create a certain picture of the matter or restructure their opinions on a topic. According to the authors, the core concept of framing theory stipulates that a subject can be examined from several angles and interpreted to have consequences for diverse ideals or concerns. While a framing effect is the process by which frames in politicians' speeches and media outlets' communications impact individuals' opinions (Chong and Druckman 2007, 109).

Wang (2013, 378) refers to a process of framing as the act of interpreting and articulating an individual's personal comprehension of an event or matter within their immediate surroundings. Frames play a decisive role in assigning prominence to certain aspects of a matter, while pushing others to the background, thereby resulting in interpretations that favour one view while impeding the other (Entman, 2003). The term "framing" refers to the deliberate process of highlighting specific elements from a perceived reality within a written or spoken communication, with the intention of promoting a particular understanding of the issue at hand, including problem identification, causal explanation, moral reasoning and recommended course of action for the subject being discussed (Entman 1993, 52). These frames are present

¹⁵ <https://vlast.kz/novosti/53942-zakon-o-pervom-prezidente-kazahstana-utratil-silu.html>

within the text itself and are expressed through the deliberate use or exclusion of specific terms, visuals, and statements that serve to strengthen particular sets of factual information or opinions, as stated by Entman (1993, 52). Chen and Zhang (2016, 5498) summarize that the significance of frame settings lies in their ability to provide guidance to the audience, shaping their understanding, retention, evaluation, and subsequent actions in response to an event. Sellnow and Seeger (2021), found in Edema et al. (2022, 21), argue that journalists often employ various strategies when presenting news stories or articles, resulting in consistent patterns of coverage that can significantly impact how people comprehend the policies.

Thus, I conclude that there can be variety of frames in the articles discussing anti-corruption policies. Some examples of framed messages about anti-corruption policies in the media are as follows:

Independent news outlet Village Kazakhstan published an article “In search of long-term legitimacy: Experts on whether to expect deep reforms during Toqayev's second term” in Russian language on November 30, 2022¹⁶. The total number of views is 9470 as of March 2024. We can see that anti-corruption policies of Toqayev were framed as instrument of populism:

“Sociologist [Serik Beysembayev] believes that the authorities, as now, will say and do what the public will like to play on public sentiment and raise their rating. Political scientist Satpayev holds the same opinion. Instead of real systemic changes, Toqayev will continue to offer the public exactly what it will like, thus strengthening its power in domestic and foreign policy by reacting to existing trends: these are anti-corruption arrests of elites, demonstrations of messages, addressed to the national-patriotic part of the Kazakh audience, regarding the history of Kazakhstan or topics related to the state language, certain statements about Ukraine (non-recognition of the so-called «LPR» and «DPR» etc.) to get into the public trend of support Ukrainians in society and so on.”

¹⁶ <https://vlast.kz/politika/52822-v-poiskah-dolgosrochnoj-legitimnosti.html>

Another article that was published in Village Kazakhstan on June 14, 2022¹⁷ in Russian language “Will Kazakhstan be able to return illegally withdrawn capital abroad? Experts on what the capital return mechanism might look like and what difficulties the country will face in implementing it”. The total number of views is 16692 as of March 2024. We can see that anti-corruption policies of Toqayev were framed as instrument of a political game between two presidents:

“Satpayev drew attention to the fact that the problem of capital withdrawal cannot be considered in isolation from the problem of the personalistic political regime in Kazakhstan. With Nazarbayev ousted from public politics, Toqayev needs to maintain legitimacy among both elites and society. And if in the first case it is important for him to prevent panic, then in the second it is necessary to show the completeness of anti-corruption work, since capital was withdrawn from Kazakhstan not only by members of the Nazarbayev family and people from the Forbes list.

"Still, I think the strikes will be targeted. There is a high risk that this could destabilize the intra-elite situation. Therefore, Toqayev is unlikely to go on a “mass shelling”. The first blow will be aimed at Nazarbayev's relatives and his inner circle in order to deprive them of power and prevent potential clashes between the elites. He will try to negotiate with the rest of the people, and they will return the money quietly or voluntarily," Satpayev admits.”

In contrast, pro-governmental Astana Times portray anti-corruption initiatives as sincere attempt of Toqayev to build new Kazakhstan. The article was published under title “Anti-Corruption Agency Implements Crucial Measures to Reduce Corruption Risks, Return Illegally Withdrawn Assets” on October 19, 2022 in English¹⁸.

“Kazakhstan now undergoes large-scale reforms initiated by President Kassym-Jomart Toqayev. Major amendments have been introduced to the Constitution.

Combating corruption is one of the most important areas of presidential reforms. The country adopted its anti-corruption policy for 2022-2026 on February 2. The concept includes institutional and specific objectives for the development of new anti-corruption mechanisms, and eradication of corruption among state authorities and civil society.”

¹⁷ <https://vlast.kz/jekonomika/50350-smozet-li-kazahstan-vernut-nelegalno-vyvedennye-za-rubez-kapitaly.html>

¹⁸ <https://astanatimes.com/2022/10/anti-corruption-agency-implements-crucial-measures-to-reduce-corruption-risks-return-illegally-withdrawn-assets/>

Credibility of messages with an expert opinion

Next, scholars claim that information's credibility potentially impacts the selection of information, changes in attitude and behavioral reaction of the audience (Winter et al. 2014; Lupia 2000; Petty et al. 1981; Iyengar et al. 2000). Nonetheless, these studies were conducted in democratic countries such as Germany and the US, which implies the potentially different answers in non-democracies. Expertise factor especially has a lion's share in the evaluation of credibility. Fogg (2003), cited in Choi et al. (2015), defines it as the perceived level of knowledge, skills and experience possessed by the 'expert'. Concluding parts of expertise are name, reputation, fame, authoritativeness and competence of an expert (Cheung 2006; Fogg et al. 2003; Liu et al. 2005; Westerwick 2013; Zhang 2014).

Fight against grand corruption as a part of "New Kazakhstan" reform introduced after January events in 2022 by Toqayev, caused public shock, and exceeded people's expectations at the moment (as mentioned earlier, Paperlab (2022) found in focus groups that people were in the mode of great anticipation of new president). Thus, anti-corruption initiatives were covered in both pro governmental and independent media outlets not only by journalists themselves, but also by political scientists. Given that there are no anti-corruption experts in Kazakhstan, who at least was prominent in the public eye, for the purposes of this thesis, I will consider as experts political scientists, journalists, economists and lawyers, who have been writing for media outlets, gave interview, published reports or videos on the topic of Toqayev's reforms after January events. That would include, but not limited to, Dossym Satpayev, Shalkar Nurseit, Serik Beysembayev, Dimash Al'zhanov, Sanzhar Bokayev, Askhat Niyazov and so on.

Media outlets

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF 2023), the media environment in Kazakhstan has become predominantly a tool for disseminating propaganda in support of the government. Only a small number of independent media outlets are still in existence. They encompass *Vlast.kz*, and the *KazTAG* press agency¹⁹ (RSF 2023). Moreover, RSF (2023) points out to the professional journalists that have initiated alternative media projects on platforms like YouTube, Telegram, and Instagram, like *Protenge*, *Za Nami Uzhe Vyekhali*, and *Giperborei*, which offer alternative perspectives that challenge the narrative presented by pro-government media. Other independent media agencies include founded by Aisana Ashim²⁰ *Village Kazakhstan*, *Til Kespek Joq* founded by Assem Zhapisheva²¹, and *Masa Media* that was cofounded by Ashim and Zhapisheva, journalists, activists of the civil rights movement “Oyan, Qazaqstan”, and grantees of the Soros-Kazakhstan Foundation. All three media outlets proclaim themselves as independent and funded by advertisements only. Next independent media agency is *Azattyq*, the Kazakh edition of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, a globally-operating nonprofit media entity supported by the United States government (Respublika Media 2022). In addition, *Ulys media* that was hacked²² can be considered as independent too.

Regarding pro governmental media, according to BBC (2023), *Kazinform* is a government-controlled media²³. *Tengri News*, *Vesti.kz*, *Massaget.kz*, *Zakon.kz*, *Nur.kz*, *Informburo* are also government owned media outlets²⁴. *The Astana Times* - English-language media agency that is also a controlled by the government. All of the aforementioned media are affiliated with individuals, who formerly worked for the government, or receive funding from the government via public procurement for the state ordered materials.

¹⁹ <https://rsf.org/en/country/kazakhstan>

²⁰ <https://qazpolit.org/ru/ashim-aisana>

²¹ <https://qazpolit.org/ru/zhapisheva-asem>

²² <https://mediazona.ca/news/2023/01/19/boreiko>

²³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15482614>

²⁴ <https://respublika.kz.media/archives/76958>

Given that Instagram is the most popular social media platform in the country, I mainly concentrate on the number of followers in Instagram. However, there are certain agencies that mostly operate on YouTube (*Giperborei*) or in internet sites (*The Astana Times*).

Table 2. Pro-governmental and independent media outlets with the number of followers in social media platforms

Pro-governmental	Independent
Kazinform (374k)	Vlast.kz (62.9k)
Tengri News (2.3 m)	Protenge (116k)
Massaget.kz (120k)	Za Nami Uzhe Vyekhali (127k)
Zakon.kz (668k)	Village Kazakhstan (113k)
Nur.kz (1M)	Masa Media (46k)
Informburo (367k)	Til Kespek Joq (28.6k)
The Astana Times (6819)	Azattyq (745k)
	Ulys media (97.1k)
	Giperborei (561k YouTube)

Personal experience with corruption

Li and Meng (2020) found that individuals who have been involved in corrupt activities were found to be less satisfied with the government's anti-corruption measures and had lower faith in the government's ability to effectively reduce corruption compared to those without any personal experience of corruption. Thus, we need to define what is corruption experience. For the purposes of this study, we look at two types of experiences with corruption. First type of corruption experience, as identified by Li and Meng (2020, 432), occurs in countries plagued by corruption, where individuals frequently resort to bribing government officials in order to access fundamental public services. As second type of corruption experience, I define the experience of the privileged group, as stated by Kang and Zhu (2021), that consist of those deeply involved in the state system, such as party members, officials, state-owned enterprise

employees, and businessmen. In their case, a more thorough understanding of how policies are carried out and the results they yield might lead to greater hesitations. In other words, government officials may have less trust in the government compared to those who are not part of the state system.

Trust in government and its anti-corruption policies

Next, I use trust in Toqayev's post-Qantar anti-corruption policies as dependent variable in all my hypotheses. Thus, I conceptualize trust relying on definitions provided by Easton (1975) and Hetherington (1998). According to Hetherington (1998, 791), political trust refers to a fundamental, evaluative stance towards the governing authority that is grounded in the extent to which the government aligns with individuals' normative expectations in terms of its functioning and performance. Scholars observe a correlation between heightened levels of political trust and increased provision of governmental assistance (Dickson 2016; Tang 2016). Easton (1975) identifies two types of political support of public: diffuse and specific. The provision of specific support is exclusively offered to the current governing bodies, whereas diffuse support is aimed at both the institutions themselves and the individuals occupying those positions. Furthermore, Easton (1975) defines diffuse support as the support that encompasses the entire regime and the political society as a whole.

In our case, diffuse support will be in relation to Kazakhstani political regime, while specific support will be towards Toqayev and his anti-corruption policies, news such as criminal prosecution of particular figure, or return of money of certain oligarch and so on. According to the results of the focus group interviews with 62 respondents across Kazakhstan in November 2021, research centre Paperlab (2022, 64) found out that respondents exhibited a range of opinions that span from favorable to uncertain evaluations in relation to the changes introduced by incumbent president before January events. On one hand, the participants were

impressed by his educational background and diplomatic experience. On the other hand, participants shared distrust towards Toqayev given that Nazarbayev handed him over the presidency.

The very fact of awareness of specific anti-corruption policy measures points to person's interest in them. I measure it by asking questions in the two-part online survey: "Which of the following politicians is criminally prosecuted after January events?" and "For what Karim Massimov (Prime Minister of RK 2007-2012; 2014-2015; Chairman of the National Security Committee 2016-2022) was prosecuted?". The reason of asking these specific questions was the level of shock and unexpectedness of these measures. Moreover, I measure support by first informing about these measures and asking whether respondent supports these measures on a five-point Likert scale. It looks as following:

As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, the policy of returning illegally withdrawn assets from involved in corruption big businessmen, shareholders of national companies and banks was presented and enforced.

Do you support the returning the assets from involved in corruption officials and well-connected businessmen?

- a) Absolutely not
- b) Not so much
- c) Neutral
- d) Somewhat
- e) Absolutely yes
- f) I refuse to answer

Moreover, I measure level of trust by first informing about these measures and asking whether they trust each anti-corruption policies' implementation. For instance,

As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, several fundamental changes to Constitution and the Laws regarding political power were introduced. The adopted changes deal with the status of first president, the presidential terms, board of Security Council and local executive organs such as akimat.

Do you trust the introduced legal changes will be actually observed?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) I refuse to answer

As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, there were the criminal prosecution cases of high-ranking officials such as former prime ministers, heads of CNS,

businessmen and heads of police department. As a result of those prosecutions, some are imprisoned, some are deprived of properties and etc.

How do you interpret such events for yourself?

- a) Just for show
- b) Revenge against the leaders of Old Kazakhstan
- c) Power grab by Toqayev
- d) Real fight against corruption
- e) Exact enforcement of anti-corruption laws
- f) Other _____
- g) I do not know
- h) I refuse to answer

Place of residence

Since literature on Kazakhstan mainly concentrates on its largest city and cultural capital Almaty, we decided to focus on the residents of overlooked small town Shu in the south part of the country, and to compare it with the perceptions of anti-corruption policies of residents of capital city Astana in the north. According to the Bureau of National Statistics of Kazakhstan, the population of the country equals to 20 million people as of 1 February, 2024²⁵. There are 3 big cities: capital city Astana (1.4 million) in the north, Almaty (2.2 million) in the south-east, and Shymkent (1.2 million) in the south part of Kazakhstan. In contrast, as of 1 July 2023, 106 thousand people live in Shu region (*raion*) that consists of Shu city (45 thousand) and villages (61 thousand) around it. Shu is famous for its neighbouring large river valley, where wild marijuana is harvested every year generating significant illegal income for those involved in its harvesting and transportation as well as government officials protecting these activities. Astana, as the capital that offers perspectives of a better living conditions attracts hundreds of thousands of migrants from all over the country. Shu, on the contrary, is a small town of 45 thousand people, that is located 241 km from Taraz, center and the most populated city of Zhambyl region (see figure 2). Urban-rural divide and political support is well established in the literature and it will be discussed in hypothesis section.

²⁵ <https://stat.gov.kz/ru/region/>

Figure 2. Map of Kazakhstan



Perception of anti-corruption policies

I chose to define my dependent variable - public perception of anti-corruption policies – by borrowing from Kovtun and Mileckiy (2022, 15), who define it as an array of 1) entrenched personal attitudes toward the ongoing anti-corruption policy, 2) awareness of people about anti-corruption efforts taking place, and 3) personal readiness to contribute in the fight against corruption. Kovtun and Mileckiy (2022, 119) defined social attitudes as a sum of four components: 1) the cognitive component (awareness, knowledge about the level of corruption and anti-corruption measures), 2) the affective component (attitude toward corruption, assessment of the efficacy of anti-corruption initiatives and actions by the officials), and 3) the behavioral component (willingness to take part in corruption and anti-corruption procedures, the participants' incentive), 4) the universal component (a corruption experience that shapes knowledge about corruption practices, emotional attitude towards informal payments, perception of its acceptability, and behavioral reactions in the future corruption cases).

In my two-part survey and focus group interviews, I have asked my respondents about first two components: attitude toward the ongoing anti-corruption measures and awareness of respondents about those measures. As dependent variable in my hypotheses I chose to concentrate on trust to anti-corruption policies given that perception of the policies can be only of two general types: trust or skepticism. Based on that, I have asked my respondents in the two-part online survey whether they trust that those measures will be carried out, since non-implementation of officially declared laws and policies is widespread in Kazakhstan. Moreover, both in two-part online survey and focus group interviews I have asked my respondents about their personal interpretation or explanation of why or what anti-corruption policies are being implemented for. Finally, in two-part online survey I ask participants about their support for post-Qantar anti-corruption measures and test that support level exposing respondents to manipulation messages.

Sense of anti-corruption efficacy

Another related definition to the perception of anti-corruption policy in the literature is the sense of anti-corruption efficacy proposed by Li et al. (2016, 886) as the public's anticipation of the good impact of the governmental anti-corruption effort, which indicates individuals' belief and confidence in the policies of the government. The greater one's expectation for the beneficial consequence of anti-corruption measures, more pronounced one's sense of anti-corruption efficacy; alternatively, the less the expectation, the weaker the sense (Li et al. 2016, 886). Similarly, some scholars tend to rely on the dimension of sincerity vs. skepticism. For instance, Peiffer (2020, 1212) in his research on the influence of political messages about corruption on its perception in Indonesia, finds out that group of respondents that were exposed to petty corruption messages expressed skepticism towards authorities' anti-corruption policy in comparison with the groups that received messages on grand corruption and government

success. According to the author, skepticism was conveyed through the narrative of “all talk but no action” (2020, 1212).

The sense of anti-corruption efficacy proposed by Li et al. (2016) differs from the affective component provided by Kovtun and Mileckiy by the presence of anticipation element that is directly impacted by individual trust towards authorities. Moreover, the authors note that the ‘sense of anti-corruption efficacy’ differs from perception of corruption, because the latter term illustrates the comprehension of corruption in society in general, isolated from authorities’ measures to combat it. However, the higher the perceived level of corruption among the population, the less becomes the public trust towards state initiated anti-corruption measures (Melgar et al. 2010; see Figure 3). Moreover, proposed by Li et al. (2016), sense of anti-corruption efficacy varies from tolerance of corruption, since the latter reflects individuals’ attitude to corruption, but not their perspectives on anti-corruption policies. And yet, the authors emphasize that sense of anti-corruption efficacy is not related to evaluation of specific anti-corruption policy, rather it indicates the public's broad opinion of the governmental anti-corruption efforts and general effectiveness of all anti-corruption endeavors. Thus, the population can be content with state leaders’ attempts to decrease corruption, or people can blame the authorities for not doing enough in its attempts to curb corruption.

Figure 3. Theory of Melgar et al. (2010)

Higher perception of corruption => lower trust towards anti-corruption policies

Taking into account context of Kazakhstan, it is important to select a definition of perception of anti-corruption measures that are currently ongoing, not the related definitions that focus on state anti-corruption efforts in general. That is the rationale behind choosing definition of perception of anti-corruption policies proposed by Kovtun and Mileckiy.

What determines trust or distrust in anti-corruption policies?

Let me unpack my dependent variable further: two main dimensions of public perception of anti-corruption policies are positive sense (citizens' trust in anti-corruption policies) and negative sense (distrust of ongoing anti-corruption policies). Drawing on the social information theory, I argue that belief in sincerity of and skepticism towards anti-corruption messages made by the top government officials shape trust or distrust in anti-corruption policies. Belief in sincerity means the belief in genuineness of politicians' intentions in enforcing measures to combat corruption. Skepticism towards official anti-corruption messages refers to the individuals' interpretation of intentions in initiating anti-corruption policies for other purposes than true attempt in eliminating corruption. Scholars have studied the effects of these dimensions in perceptions of anti-corruption policies in Nigeria (Amannah and Adeyeye (2018, 13), Russia (Eliseev et al. 2020, 191, Levada 2019), and Ukraine (Grodland (2010, 247), and concluded that there is a variation in people's evaluation of the sincerity of the official anti-corruption messages with the significant share of respondents expressing skepticism towards these messages. According to social information theory, beliefs in sincerity of the official anti-corruption messages are shaped by the framing of these messages. Scholars of authoritarian regimes have shown that these regimes invest a lot of resources in this framing.

Source of information about official anti-corruption policies

Autocracies tend to disseminate information about their policies through government-controlled mass media. As a result, one would expect a variation in framing of anti-corruption messages in government-controlled media and independent media.

Pan et al. (2022, 317) note that a substantial body of research has demonstrated the fact that authoritarian regimes employ media under their control as an effective tool to alter public

attitudes, behaviours, and trust (Geddes and Zaller, 1989; Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011; Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014; Adena et al., 2015; Huang, 2015; Bleck and Michelitch, 2017; Szostek, 2017). Kazakhstan was not an exception. Scholars show that Kazakhstani government has exerted surveillance and regulation over traditional media from the very beginning in the early 1990s. Almost all television channels, newspapers, radio stations and media outlets were in the ownership of the oligarchs from the inner circle of the former president, including his daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva, son-in-law Rakhat Aliyev, son-in-law Timur Kulibayev and so on (Junisbai 2011). The authorities try to frame their messages in order to gain public approval. Despite undergoing privatization, the mass media in Kazakhstan, including radio, television, and newspapers, continue to be strictly regulated by the state (Koh and Baek 2022, 99). According to Freedom House, as of 2024, Kazakhstani internet is not free (34 out of 100; 0 being the least free and 100 being the most free). Reporters Without Borders state that Kazakhstani government utilizes various tactics, including arrests of the independent journalists under its soft-authoritarian rule (12 journalists were detained since 2015), and introduction of new laws that serve as a new instrument of censorship²⁶. The government provides financial incentives to private media outlets in order to promote and propagate regime propaganda.

In the meantime, there has been a consistent expansion of internet connectivity and usage of social media platforms throughout the nation. The rate of internet access surged from 50 percent in 2011 to 91 percent by 2021²⁷. The affordability and ease of utilization of social media platforms, combined with the extensive range of topics that can be addressed and the ability for immediate responses to these subjects, render it harder for political elites to exert

²⁶ <https://rsf.org/en/kazakhstan-urged-rescind-draconian-new-fake-news-law>

²⁷ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/769863/internet-penetration-rate-kazakhstan/#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20almost%2091%20percent,had%20access%20to%20the%20internet.>

control over social media (Koh and Baek 2022, 96) in comparison with traditional or mass media like TV, radio, newspapers etc.

There is small amount of independent journalist agencies in Kazakhstan, who provide different perspective than one of state's on grand corruption, which allows one to assume the existence of trust and distrust of perceptions of post-Qantar anti-corruption policies. Thus, Kazakhstani online media has both pro-governmental news outlets (*Tengri News, Zakon.kz, Astana Times, Nur.kz*, etc) as well as independent journalist outlets (*Vlast.kz, The Village Kazakhstan, Masa Media, Azattyq, ProTenge*, etc) and independent YouTube channels (*Za Nami Uzhe Vyekhali, Jurttyn balasy, Obozhayu*).

Framing

Moving on to the independent variables, from social information theory, I look closer into framing and expert credibility in testing their influence in shaping public perception.

According to Pan et al. (2022, 319), numerous academic studies have endeavoured to comprehend and elucidate the mechanisms responsible for framing effects. These studies include works by scholars such as Zaller (1992), Iyengar (1994), Cappella and Jamieson (1997), Price and Tewksbury (1997), Nelson and Oxley (1999), as well as Chong and Druckman (2007). In general, Pan et al. (2019, 319) explain that these research studies commonly establish that when a person is exposed to a stimulus, their opinion regarding that stimulus has the potential to shift, provided that a specific characteristic of the stimulus is (1) retained in the individual's memory, (2) easily obtainable, and (3) considered to be suitable or pertinent when confronted with fresh information. This implies that framing has the potential to influence attitudes through the presentation of novel aspects related to a particular matter and by increasing the prominence and relevance of specific characteristics.

Pan et al. (2022) conducted an online survey across 26 provinces in China, encompassing a total of 830 respondents. The survey involved an experiment wherein carefully crafted short video messages were created, drawing inspiration from authentic state broadcasts and achieving a realistic resemblance to media channels controlled by the Chinese government. According to the findings of their experimental study, Pan et al. propose that in instances where authoritarian regimes seek to alter their stance on a particular matter, they utilize state-controlled media to introduce fresh perspectives on the subject. By generating general agreement among the populace, they can effectively sway public opinion, thus inhibiting the expression of alternative viewpoints and contextual details (Pan et al. 2022, 330). In particular, the researchers discovered that when domestic and international policy matters are presented differently by media under government control, it influences individuals to adopt policy stances that align more closely with the views advocated by the government-controlled media. Most significantly, Pan et al. (2022) found that various frames are effective at least for the first 48 hours irrespective of an individual's pre-existing inclinations. Based on this, I propose the following hypotheses:

H1. Framed messages that doubt the sincerity of the anti-corruption policies of Toqayev are more likely to result in distrust.

Credibility

Moreover, scholars agree that source credibility influences the success of framing effect. People might approve of novel information based on the source's social standing or believed degree of competence (Druckman, 2001). McGinnies and Ward (1980), found in Lachapelle et al. (2014, 676), state that perceived reliability and the degree of competence in a particular field constitute an expert's persuasiveness in public's eye. Indeed, Hanimann et al. (2023, 214) claim

that the veracity of the available information can have an impact on the choices made regarding information selection (Winter & Krämer, 2014), alteration of attitudes (Lupia, 2000; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981), or enactment of behaviours (Iyengar & Valentino, 2000).

Go et al. (2016), found in Hanimann et al. (2023, 215), define credibility as a contextual assessment that necessitates the processing of evidence in some manner. Trilling 2019, cited by the current author, contends that it is no longer appropriate to credit news items to a single, distinct source or medium. Instead, it is more accurate to acknowledge the concept of relationships in journalism. A particular news item can possess multiple relationships with diverse sources, including the newspaper in which it was initially published or the individual who wrote the article. In addition, considering the presence of both experts and authoritative independent journalistic agencies where those experts publish or write for, I propose to look at source credibility in general, that consists of both expert credibility and media credibility. As suggested by Hanimann et al. (2023, 229), media credibility is frequently employed as an evaluative criterion for sources, particularly specific newspapers. On the other hand, Choi and Stvilia (2015, 8), citing Fogg (2003), define expertise as the perceived level of knowledge, skill, and experience possessed by the individual or entity providing information or guidance. Further, referring to the other scholars (Cheung & Lee, 2006; Fogg et al., 2003; Liu & Huang, 2005; Westerwick, 2013; Zhang, 2014), the authors (2015, 13) list the sub-categories of proficiency associated with an expert: identification, standing, prominence, credibility, and skilfulness. Taking it into consideration, I propose the third hypothesis:

H2. Framed messages that include expert opinion are more likely to strengthen the effect of the frame.

To check for the effects of personal characteristics of respondents on their perception of anti-corruption policies, as I discussed in Chapter 2, I developed one more hypothesis about the urban-rural variation.

Urbanization

Modernization theories claim that urbanization is more likely to produce critical thinkers who question government policies. Indeed, the latest presidential elections in 2022 demonstrated the sharp difference in voter turnout between urbanites and residents of regions in Kazakhstan. Three largest cities of Almaty (28.72 percent), Astana (48.67 percent) and (even) Shymkent (59.79 percent) illustrated the lowest voter turnout in the country. In contrast, the Southern regions showed high results (Zhambyl – 79.57 percent; Turkistan 80.37 percent; Kyzylorda – 81.07 percent)²⁸. Surprisingly, such a divide is not limited to authoritarian regimes, similar patterns can be observed in democratic countries too. According to Mettler and Brown (2022, 131), in 2020 approximately two-thirds of individuals residing in rural regions cast their vote to re-elect President Trump, contrasting with the one-third proportion among urban residents.

Tzeng (2020, 634) explain urban rural divide in political participation in China in the following way. The motivation of villagers to participate in elections could be influenced by the patronage resources that are provided by local governments as incentives. According to the analysis provided, there is evidence indicating that individuals residing in rural areas exhibit a greater tendency to vote in elections under state control. In contrast, the rural population does not place significant importance on the democratic value associated with participating in elections. On the other hand, urban voters predominantly possess heightened levels of democratic awareness.

²⁸ <https://www.election.gov.kz/rus/news/releases/index.php?ID=8012>

In the context of Kazakhstan Bokayev et al. (2022) argue that residents of southern regions of Kazakhstan (Zhambyl oblysy, Turkistan oblysy, Kyzylorda oblysy) perceive less corruption than residents of capital Astana. The authors explain it with more traditional values of southern citizens, who were mostly affected by bordering Uzbek culture, while citizens in Astana tend to be more Russified. Thus, certain things that would be considered as corruption in the eyes of Astana residents, such as setting the ‘rich’ table for the bosses, would be considered as a gesture of hospitality and respect in southern residents’ minds. According to the theory of Melgar et al. (2010) (see Figure 3), the more people perceive corruption, the less they trust anti-corruption measures initiated by the government. Therefore, it is assumed that residents of southern regions of Kazakhstan trust Toqayev’s anti-corruption policies more than residents of capital city Astana.

Moreover, Kim et al. (2024, 5) found that when compared to rural areas or small towns, the cities of Astana and Almaty, which have a higher concentration of prominent employers and a more diverse range of employment opportunities, tend to be preferred by graduates of Nazarbayev University and recipients of the Bolashak scholarship. Another factor contributing to the NU and Bolashak program graduates’ reluctance to work in rural areas is the hesitance of older colleagues or individuals living in small towns or rural settings to disrupt the current state of affairs. In Kazakhstan, individuals who are older and reside in rural areas, often not as adept with modern technologies, may opt to uphold existing norms in order to protect their employment opportunities (Kim 2024, 7). In the context of the country, it is largely acknowledged that graduates of Western-style education institutions such as NU or Bolashak program differ from rest of the universities’ alumni with analytical, critical thinking, research capabilities and fluency in English. Thus, the absence of this social layer in rural areas of Kazakhstan can be interpreted as a smaller number of young people that critically address the authoritarian regime of Kazakhstan.

Thus, given Kazakhstan's authoritarian regime, it is presumed that rural residents will support the central government more in comparison with urbanites. Additionally, the shortage of internet in rural areas of Kazakhstan might result in less access to critical information about the government, that are vital in forming political opinion. Considering the above-mentioned information, I propose the following hypothesis:

H3. Residents of remote small towns are more likely to trust Toqayev's anti-corruption policies than residents of the capital city.

These are my working hypotheses. In the following chapter, I explain my research design, including the reduction of the omitted variable bias and seeking causal inference about the effect of framing and credibility of anti-corruption messages on their perception.

Chapter 4. Research Design

In this chapter, I explain the case selection, sampling strategies and research methodology employed to examine the proposed hypotheses. I employed multiple methods to validate my hypotheses, including an online two-part survey with an experiment and three focus group interviews, because perception of anti-corruption policies may be formed individually and/or collectively.

In order to measure public perception of anti-corruption policies scholars use a face-to-face survey and personal interviews with both ordinary citizens and representators of elites. Type of questions found in the literature vary from one another. Li and Meng (2020, 442) in order to find answers to their research question: "Are citizens' attitudes towards government's effort to fight corruption primarily shaped by social information (such as public media and political knowledge) or direct personal experience of corruption?" examined three dimensions of public attitudes toward corruption and anti-corruption: corruption perception, satisfaction with anticorruption enforcement, and evaluation of anticorruption capacity. A six-item question was employed to assess perceived corruption: "How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption?" Participants were requested to rate six government institutions: the federal government, municipal governments, state-owned companies, NPC deputies, police/tax officers, and judges. The responses were given on a 4-point Likert scale starting from 1 (no one is corrupt) to 4 (nearly everyone is corrupt). Next, the authors (2020, 443) used one question to assess public satisfaction with the way government performs in a variety of areas: "Are you satisfied with the performance of the local government in your area in upholding integrity and fighting corruption?". The responses were collected as an ordinal variable on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 4 (very satisfied). Then, the authors (2020, 443) used the following question to assess anti-corruption capacity: "The government should hold various capacities to solve social problems; how strong do you think our

government's capacity of restricting party and government officials?" Respondents were asked to evaluate using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very weak) to 4 (very strong).

However, there is no published research exists on the factors that shape people's perception of grand corruption fight in Kazakhstan. Therefore, in this thesis, I will seek answers of the questions: How and why public perceive anti-corruption policy implemented after January events? In order to answer this question, I will need other research methods.

Given that my study focuses on public perception among the residents of northern urban Astana and southern rural Shu, first method that was the most suitable was anonymous online two-part survey. Target sample size of the two-part online survey was 300 respondents from Astana and 200 respondents from Shu. Only individuals who were 18 years old and above were allowed to take the two-part survey. As a result, 564 participants completed the two-part survey. Control variables included age, gender, education, income level and employment. Despite my attempts to ensure representativeness by gender and age, the two-part survey results are not generalizable to the whole population. Due to convenience sampling and snow ball sampling strategies, 39 percent of the respondents are in age group 21-30; 19 percent are in age group 41-50; 13 percent are in age group 31-40 and so on. Two-part survey was constructed and available in Qualtrics platform in Kazakh and Russian languages.

Two-part survey questionnaire allows to conduct research on a mass scale. The online mode of it is convenient both for researcher and the respondents: researcher saves time and resources; the respondents can take the survey any place and any time they wish so. It consists of 30 questions (see Appendix A.): starting from respondents' news sources, demographics, political knowledge; to the level of support of anti-corruption policies, trust towards their implementation and self-explanation of the measures.

An important element of the two-part survey was experiment. I chose it in order to make causal inferences about the effect of framing. After political knowledge questions, a respondent

randomly receives one of six short manipulative messages that present anti-corruption initiatives within one of three frames (populism, political game, sincerity), with or without reference to an expert. Before the exposure to the manipulation, questions 5, 9, 13 ask respondents level of trust on a Likert scale towards each anti-corruption policy (criminal prosecution, return of assets, legal changes). After being exposed to experiment, respondent is asked the same three questions. Total number of respondents that completed the two-part survey is 564. The rationale behind is to test whether exposure to framed message with or without expert opinion impact a person's level of support towards anti-corruption measures. The challenge was the recruitment process. Since the two-part survey was online, respondents had to go through the link to take the two-part survey. Some individuals did not trust me or were suspicious of me, referring to scamming schemes using the link. Other individuals, predominantly in Shu and age group 30 and higher, refused to take the two-part survey being reluctant to take part due to sensitive nature of the topic. It was anticipated that KGB trauma is in minds of citizens of former Soviet Union, combined with current living under the corrupt authoritarian regime.

However, the online two-part survey captures individual viewpoints only. In society, political news is discussed as a group. So, in order to see how opinions are formed collectively, I conducted three in-person focus group interviews. In the end of the online survey there was a voluntary question to leave the contact information or contact the researcher, in case if a respondent was interested in further research. Some respondents were recruited through this way. Other respondents were recruited using convenience sampling. The focus group participants represent various age groups, and equal gender distribution. However, regarding the language, in Shu group there were mostly Kazakh-speaking respondents. Mostly respondents hold a university degree and were employed, although the number of former or

current state servants was higher than any other occupation. Focus groups were moderated by the researcher and conducted both in Kazakh and Russian.

This research method allowed me to explore opinion formation of a person in interaction with other people. Person can change her views, when they hear other points of view to certain matters, which means that the effect of framing may be filtered through discussions with others. With that in mind, I have conducted three focus group interviews: one in Shu with Shu residents (10 participants), one in Astana with Astana residents (6 participants), and the final in Astana with individuals who moved from South to North of Kazakhstan (8 participants). Questions in focus group interviews helped me to identify two main perception of anti-corruption policies: sincerity and skepticism, as it allows to ask additional questions if needed face-to-face. Incentives such as tea, soft drinks, pirozhki, bliny and sweets were offered to the participants. Below is the table with the demographics of respondents:

Table 3. Description of Focus Group Participants

Focus group	Gender	Age	Education	Language	Employ	Fin
1 (Shu)	Female	18-20	higher (obtaining)	Russian	Student	average
1	Female	21-30	higher	Kazakh	employed	average
1	Male	21-30	higher	Bilingual	unemployed	Lower than average
1	Female	31-40	higher	Kazakh	employed	average
1	Female	41-50	higher	Kazakh	employed	average
1	Male	41-50	higher	Kazakh	employed	average
1	Male	51-60	higher	Russian	Self-employed	average
1	Female	51-60	higher	Russian	Employed	average
1	Male	61+	higher	Kazakh	Employed	average
1	Male	61+	higher	Kazakh	Employed	average
2 (Astana)	Female	18-20	higher (obtaining)	Kazakh	Student	average
2	Female	21-30	higher (obtaining master's)	Bilingual	Student, self-employed	average
2	Male	21-30	higher	Kazakh	Employed	average

2	Female	31-40	higher (obtaining PhD)	Russian	NA	average
2	Male	41-50	NA	Russian	NA	Lower than average
2	Male	51-60	NA	Kazakh	NA	Average
3 (Southern towns- >Astana)	Female	21-30	higher (obtaining master's)	Bilingual (ethnic minority)	student	Higher than Average
3	Female	21-30	higher (master's)	Bilingual	Employed	Higher than Average
3	Male	31-40	higher	Russian	Employed	Lower than average
3	Male	41-50	higher	Russian	Employed	Average
3	Female	41-50	secondary special	Kazakh	Unemployed	Average
3	Male	51-60	higher	Kazakh	Employed	Average
3	Female	51-60	higher	Russian	Employed	Average
3	Female	61+	higher	Kazakh	Retired	Average

Research ethics

Data collection and data analysis were approved by Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee on November 21, 2023. Online two-part survey was conducted only after receiving informed consent of the respondent. Face-to-face interview with focus group participants were conducted only after receiving verbal consent.

Reflection on Data Collection

Scholars state that researcher's positionality such as gender, age, language, education institution and many other sociodemographic factors have an impact on data collection process. I think that the fact that I am a young woman in her early 20s, especially in the context of patriarchal and somewhat conservative Kazakh society, was an unthreatening factor to my respondents (Cohn 2006; Linn 2000). Considering the sensitive nature of the topic of perception of grand anti-corruption policies in the authoritarian context, I believe that

respondents may have been more disclosed near an unthreatening female in her 20s. Moreover, across the focus groups, I received some endorsing comments from participants, who were glad that the younger generation 'cares about Kazakhstan'. I think such positive sentiments may also have contributed to the disclosed position of the respondents.

Another important constituting factor of positionality in my case was fluency in Kazakh language. Researcher's respective ethnicity and language mastery can generate access to the participants in research situations (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 67). When Kazakh-speaking respondents were ensured that I, as a researcher, was 'native', probably they perceived me as 'one of them', thus trusting me more. Such symbolism carries a shared meaning that the researcher and participants have experienced the same events, hold similar views of the world, and hence understand each other better than if a researcher was an 'outsider'.

Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, it was convenience sampling. Given that my parents' social environment was wider than mine, I asked my parents to contact their friends and acquaintances, who reside in Shu and Astana, who would potentially be interested in the topic and willing to share their opinions on it. Snowball sampling also was present, and acquaintances of my parents asked their colleagues and relatives as well. As a result, most respondents, especially in Shu, knew me beforehand. Due to their established social relations with my parents, the participants were eager to trust me and share their views freely.

Next, as it was focus groups, there were power relations not only between respondents and a researcher but also among the participants themselves. In each group, there were from six to ten individuals of various age groups, genders, professions, languages, and sometimes ethnicities. It impacted the extent to which each participant felt comfortable to share. My general observation was that in all three focus groups, representatives of senior generations felt more entitled to speak up. It probably is the social protocol inherent to Kazakh culture, where the elderly must be speaking, not the younger people. Additionally, as observed by Allina-

Pisano (2009, 65), in villages and small towns, due to the small size of the residents, inhabitants know each other well. Accordingly, I found that some respondents of a focus group in Shu knew each other, even if not directly, but they 'heard something' of some of the respondents. Therefore, it is assumed that participants were not as disclosed and free in expression as if it was vis-a-vis in-depth interview due to the peer pressure and cautiousness as a consequence it.

Unfortunately, I have made some mistakes due to a lack of experience conducting focus groups. My initial understanding was that a researcher should limit her interference to the minimum, and just observe focus group dynamics. However, it resulted in distraction with unrelated topics among participants that increased the discussion time and made other respondents tired, which of course had an impact on the gathered data. In addition, I have noticed in myself the inability to remain neutral whenever the participants were expressing views opposite to mine. Cohn (2006, 105) stated that it was painful for her to be powerless in the face of 'morally reprehensible' responses and actions. Morality is not universal, it is relative. People have different backgrounds and life experiences. Hence, what one as a researcher finds immoral, can be acceptable to the participants. In such moments, it was hard for me to remain neutral and hold my emotions. Even though I thought that I handled it well, my participant friend said that it was observable that I tried to ignore the respondent, who in my view, hurt the feelings of religious people. Therefore, my behaviour and reactions might have been perceived by the participants as a certain signal and led toward social desirability bias.

Chapter 5. Data analysis

Before reporting my findings, I would like to describe the process of data collection first. The online two-part survey was conducted in Qualtrics platform from the end of November 2023 to the end of January 2024. Snowball sampling and convenience sampling methods were used. 926 individuals have started taking the survey, but only 564 answered all questions.

My findings partially support my hypotheses. The descriptive statistics from the two-part survey are reported in Table 4 below. 58 percent of respondents were female and 40 percent were males. Given the sampling methods, 35 percent of the respondents were from age group 21-30. The second prevalent age groups were the respondents in their 40s: 17 percent. 65 percent of the respondents were employed. 65 percent of the participants hold higher education. 40 percent of the respondents reported having average income, 40 percent of the respondents reported having higher than average income. According to the initial goal of the sampling (200 respondents from Shu, 300 respondents from Astana), 40 percent of the respondents are from South. Due to convenience sampling, sample is not generalizable to the whole population.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Control Variables

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Education	533	1.734	0.588	0	2
South	511	0.399	0.490	0	1
Income	563	2.858	1.291	1	6
Employed	484	0.653	0.477	0	1
Female	533	0.580	0.494	0	1
Age	547	2.974	1.441	1	6
Pol. Knowledge	530	1.909	1.072	0	3
Kazakh Lang.	563	0.174	0.380	0	1
Social Media	560	0.859	0.348	0	1

Next step before introducing the experimental findings would be randomization checks (see Appendix C). All six message groups were equally distributed by sociodemographic variables, illustrating the successful randomization.

Effect of framing

H1. Exposure to framed messages that doubt the sincerity of the anti-corruption policies of Toqayev is more likely to result in distrust.

Results of the survey experiment

As I described in the previous chapter, I chose to analyse the effects of three frames: populism, political game and sincerity. Sincerity frame will be dismissed and not included into the regressions as a control group. Table 5 below displays the estimates of equation with Multivariate Regression models. First, I look at the effects of each skepticism framing in comparison with sincerity framing on the support level for each anti-corruption policies. Political game framing increases the support level by 0.047 units, which is equal to 1 percent, in criminal prosecution of Nazarbayev's circle; as well as by 4 percent in the asset return policy; and by 0.4 percent in constitutional reforms policy in comparison with sincerity framing. Next, the populism frame in comparison with sincerity frame raises the support level of criminal prosecution measure by 5.6 percent, which is statistically significant. The populism frame increases respondents' support level of return of assets policy by 6 percent, which is also statistically significant. Nevertheless, the populism frame affects respondents' support level for constitutional reforms by 4.2 percent, but it is not statistically significant.

Thus, table 5 demonstrates two statistically significant results of populism frame only: for the criminal prosecution policy populism frame increases the support level by 5.6 percent, while populism frame increases respondents' support level for return of the assets by 6 percent. Support for criminal prosecution of corrupt elite figures and return of their assets from abroad

risers when the respondents receive the messages that doubt the sincerity of these policies, and interpret them as populist instrument. It means that regardless of the skeptical interpretations of the purposes of these anti-corruption policies, people still support criminal prosecution (5.6 percent increase under populism frame) and asset seizure policies (6 percent increase under populism frame). Thus, findings from table 5 does not support hypothesis 1.

Table 5. Experimental Multivariate Regression

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Criminal Prosecution	Asset Seizure	Legal Change	Criminal Prosecution	Asset Seizure	Legal Change
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Expert	0.142 (0.127)	0.214* (0.113)	0.157 (0.120)	0.156 (0.219)	0.101 (0.195)	0.045 (0.208)
Pol. Game	0.047 (0.152)	0.206 (0.135)	0.018 (0.144)	0.162 (0.209)	0.055 (0.186)	-0.079 (0.198)
Populism	0.282* (0.158)	0.298** (0.140)	0.210 (0.149)	0.174 (0.217)	0.296 (0.193)	0.148 (0.205)
Expert : Pol. Game				-0.253 (0.306)	0.325 (0.272)	0.207 (0.290)
Expert : Populism				0.234 (0.313)	-0.003 (0.278)	0.127 (0.297)
Education	0.246** (0.120)	0.264** (0.107)	0.236** (0.114)	0.251** (0.121)	0.266** (0.107)	0.241** (0.114)
South	0.085 (0.132)	0.244** (0.118)	0.171 (0.125)	0.106 (0.133)	0.230* (0.118)	0.167 (0.126)
Income	0.124** (0.060)	0.182*** (0.054)	0.140** (0.057)	0.132** (0.061)	0.175*** (0.054)	0.136** (0.057)
Employed	0.212 (0.139)	0.085 (0.123)	0.171 (0.131)	0.201 (0.139)	0.090 (0.123)	0.170 (0.131)
Female	0.168 (0.129)	0.258** (0.115)	0.421*** (0.122)	0.164 (0.129)	0.261** (0.115)	0.421*** (0.122)
Age	-0.127*** (0.046)	-0.127*** (0.041)	-0.030 (0.044)	-0.129*** (0.046)	-0.125*** (0.041)	-0.029 (0.044)

Pol. Knowledge	0.283*** (0.063)	0.327*** (0.056)	0.045 (0.059)	0.284*** (0.063)	0.322*** (0.056)	0.041 (0.060)
Kazakh Lang.	-0.0001 (0.169)	0.165 (0.150)	0.222 (0.160)	0.005 (0.169)	0.159 (0.150)	0.218 (0.160)
Social Media	0.188 (0.176)	0.214 (0.156)	-0.055 (0.166)	0.197 (0.176)	0.206 (0.156)	-0.058 (0.166)
Constant	2.620*** (0.378)	2.360*** (0.336)	2.741*** (0.357)	2.579*** (0.390)	2.443*** (0.347)	2.807*** (0.370)
Observations	432	432	432	432	432	432
R ²	0.096	0.153	0.075	0.101	0.157	0.077
Adjusted R ²	0.070	0.129	0.049	0.071	0.129	0.046
Residual Std. Error	1.295 (df = 419)	1.150 (df = 419)	1.223 (df = 419)	1.294 (df = 417)	1.150 (df = 417)	1.225 (df = 417)
F Statistic	3.712*** (df = 12; 419)	6.308*** (df = 12; 419)	2.848*** (df = 12; 419)	3.363*** (df = 14; 417)	5.543*** (df = 14; 417)	2.469*** (df = 14; 417)

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Baseline framing group is 'Sincerity' frame

Table 6 below displays the estimates of equation with Multivariate Regression models. Here, I look at the change in support levels before and after exposure to manipulation messages under skepticism frames in comparison with sincerity frame. First, when comparing the support levels for criminal prosecutions before and after the exposure to the message with political game frame, we find that support level decreases by 3.2 percent in comparison with sincerity frame. In contrast, comparison of before-after support levels for criminal prosecution policies reveals that exposure to the populism frame increases the support level by 1.2 percent in comparison with sincerity frame. For asset return policies, there is increase by 1.5 percent in support level under political game frame in comparison with sincerity frame. The effect of populism frame on support level for the same policy increases by 3.2 percent. For the constitutional reforms, the exposure to both frames leads to decrease in support level by 2.6 percent (political game) and 2 percent (populism).

Even if the effects of all skepticism framings are statistically insignificant, it can be concluded that exposure to frames that interpret constitutional reforms (such as one presidential term for 7 years; ban on the president's relatives to hold top state positions) skeptically as populism and political game tools, results in decrease of the initial support level by 2 percent on average. However small, it still demonstrates impact of framing effect of the manipulation messages on the support level of the respondents towards anti-corruption measures. This framing reinforces the habit of Kazakhstanis of hearing the official pronouncements, which, in turn, lack proper enforcement and remain on paper only, thus, making little difference on the ground (Janenova and Knox 2020).

Table 6. Experimental Multivariate Regression (before-after contrast)

	Before-After contrast					
	Criminal Prosecution (1)	Asset Seizure (2)	Legal Change (3)	Criminal Prosecution (4)	Asset Seizure (5)	Legal Change (6)
Expert	0.260* (0.151)	0.245** (0.114)	0.267* (0.138)	-0.039 (0.262)	0.353* (0.198)	0.285 (0.239)
Pol. Game	-0.162 (0.182)	0.075 (0.138)	-0.127 (0.166)	-0.361 (0.250)	0.116 (0.189)	-0.132 (0.228)
Populism	0.059 (0.188)	0.163 (0.142)	-0.104 (0.171)	-0.169 (0.259)	0.279 (0.196)	-0.070 (0.236)
Expert : Pol. Game				0.420 (0.366)	-0.083 (0.277)	0.012 (0.334)
Expert : Populism				0.477 (0.374)	-0.246 (0.283)	-0.072 (0.342)
Education	-0.031 (0.144)	-0.035 (0.109)	-0.315** (0.131)	-0.016 (0.144)	-0.042 (0.109)	-0.317** (0.132)
South	-0.157 (0.158)	0.052 (0.120)	-0.158 (0.144)	-0.156 (0.159)	0.045 (0.120)	-0.162 (0.145)
Income	-0.025 (0.072)	0.126** (0.054)	-0.058 (0.066)	-0.031 (0.072)	0.126** (0.055)	-0.059 (0.066)

Employed	0.262 (0.165)	-0.009 (0.125)	0.226 (0.151)	0.255 (0.166)	-0.004 (0.126)	0.228 (0.151)
Female	0.321** (0.154)	0.112 (0.117)	0.015 (0.141)	0.319** (0.154)	0.114 (0.117)	0.016 (0.141)
Age	-0.042 (0.055)	0.014 (0.042)	0.034 (0.051)	-0.041 (0.055)	0.014 (0.042)	0.034 (0.051)
Pol. Knowledge	-0.004 (0.075)	0.057 (0.057)	-0.059 (0.068)	-0.013 (0.075)	0.060 (0.057)	-0.059 (0.069)
Kazakh Lang.	-0.093 (0.202)	-0.216 (0.153)	-0.073 (0.184)	-0.100 (0.202)	-0.215 (0.153)	-0.073 (0.185)
Social Media	0.266 (0.210)	0.127 (0.159)	0.019 (0.191)	0.262 (0.210)	0.126 (0.159)	0.018 (0.192)
Constant	-0.247 (0.451)	-0.737** (0.341)	0.830** (0.411)	-0.089 (0.466)	-0.783** (0.353)	0.825* (0.426)
Observations	432	432	432	432	432	432
R ²	0.033	0.036	0.033	0.038	0.038	0.033
Adjusted R ²	0.006	0.009	0.005	0.006	0.006	0.0004
Residual Std. Error	1.545 (df = 419)	1.169 (df = 419)	1.408 (df = 419)	1.545 (df = 417)	1.170 (df = 417)	1.411 (df = 417)
F Statistic	1.205 (df = 12; 419)	1.310 (df = 12; 419)	1.182 (df = 12; 419)	1.174 (df = 14; 417)	1.175 (df = 14; 417)	1.014 (df = 14; 417)

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Baseline framing group is 'Sincerity' frame

Survey results

To further examine the effects, if any, of framing on the perception of anti-corruption policies, I checked the effects of the social media usage. Traditional media in Kazakhstan belongs to affiliated-with-state oligarchs (Junisbai 2011). In contrast, the easier entrance to social media paves the way for outlets with various agenda and framing. As mentioned before, there are several independent news outlets and journalists in Kazakhstan that post on various platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and so on. Given that, it is assumed that social media provides messages under both framings: skepticism and sincerity. That is the rationale behind checking the effect of social media on the perception of anti-corruption policies.

Table 7 below displays the estimates of the equation with Multivariate Regression models. Here, I look at the effect of social media usage on trust in post-Qantar anti-corruption policies' implementation, interpretation of the policy's purpose and support level before the experiment. First, social media usage decreases respondents' trust in criminal prosecution policy's genuine enforcement by almost 20 percent, which is the statistically significant result. With regards to other policies, the effect of social media usage seems to be less: social media usage causes 8 percent decrease in trust to successful implementation of the return of the assets; and 3 percent decrease in trust to successful implementation of the constitutional reforms.

Following that, social media usage among respondents leads to 3 percent more skepticism in their interpretation of criminal prosecutions. In contrast, social media users interpret return of the assets by 26 percent more skeptically, which is statistically significant. Social media usage enhances skepticism in interpretation of constitutional reforms by 20 percent.

Finally, social media usage decreases initial level of support: for criminal prosecutions by 4 percent; for constitutional reforms by 3 percent. Nevertheless, social media usage increases level of initial support for return of the assets by 10 percent.

One of the most striking results is the effect of social media usage on decrease of trust (by 20 percent) for criminal prosecution policy. Those respondents, who primarily receive news from social media, tend to interpret the return of the assets by almost 27 percent, constitutional reforms by 20 percent more skeptically. Moreover, social media usage increases support for asset return policy by 10 percent. Thus, social media usage decreases trust in successful implementation of the post-Qantar anti-corruption policies, increases skepticism in interpretation and to the less extent, decreases support level for anti-corruption policies except for the return of the assets policy, whereby the support level is enhanced. Considering that social media offers more critical-of-government content by having more independent viewpoints, decrease in trust and increase in skeptic interpretations of the reforms supports

Hypothesis 1. However, similar to the findings from Table 5, more skeptical content from social media does not hinder the support level for anti-corruption policies. Instead, support level increases, which is contrary to Hypothesis 1. Therefore, findings summarized in Table 7 only partially support Hypothesis 1.

Table 7. Non-Experimental Multivariate regression

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>								
	Trust Criminal Prosecution	Trust Asset Seizure	Trust Legal Change	Skepticism Criminal Prosecution	Skepticism Asset Seizure	Skepticism Legal Change	Support Criminal Prosecution	Support Asset Seizure	Support Legal Change
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
South	0.036 (0.053)	0.073 (0.055)	0.099* (0.056)	-0.016 (0.100)	-0.061 (0.092)	-0.058 (0.102)	0.237* (0.135)	0.187 (0.116)	0.328** (0.129)
Social Media	-0.199*** (0.069)	- 0.082 (0.073)	- 0.033 (0.073)	0.032 (0.128)	0.268** (0.116)	0.201 (0.131)	-0.043 (0.179)	0.106 (0.154)	-0.030 (0.171)
Education	-0.028 (0.048)	- 0.012 (0.050)	0.013 (0.049)	-0.083 (0.088)	-0.059 (0.081)	-0.194** (0.088)	0.268** (0.123)	0.296*** (0.106)	0.542*** (0.118)
Income	-0.030 (0.024)	- 0.019 (0.026)	- 0.001 (0.026)	-0.096* (0.049)	-0.089** (0.044)	-0.010 (0.051)	0.139** (0.061)	0.051 (0.053)	0.185*** (0.059)
Employed	0.031 (0.055)	0.067 (0.058)	- 0.014 (0.059)	-0.228** (0.105)	0.016 (0.096)	-0.079 (0.103)	-0.048 (0.142)	0.096 (0.122)	-0.063 (0.135)
Female	-0.049 (0.052)	- 0.048 (0.054)	0.013 (0.055)	-0.075 (0.098)	-0.228** (0.092)	-0.239** (0.100)	-0.151 (0.132)	0.145 (0.114)	0.408*** (0.126)

Age	0.007 (0.018)	- 0.021 (0.019)	- 0.053*** (0.020)	0.020 (0.036)	0.011 (0.032)	0.035 (0.035)	-0.089* (0.047)	-0.143*** (0.041)	-0.072 (0.045)
Kazakh Lang.	0.205*** (0.066)	- 0.014 (0.068)	- 0.029 (0.071)	0.002 (0.122)	0.014 (0.109)	-0.017 (0.123)	0.078 (0.172)	0.378** (0.148)	0.291* (0.164)
Pol. Knowledge	0.005 (0.027)	0.049* (0.027)	0.023 (0.027)	0.089* (0.053)	-0.038 (0.047)	-0.042 (0.051)	0.287*** (0.064)	0.271*** (0.056)	0.104* (0.062)
Constant	0.617*** (0.149)	0.536*** (0.158)	0.683*** (0.157)	2.190*** (0.275)	2.061*** (0.251)	2.275*** (0.278)	2.985*** (0.370)	3.183*** (0.319)	2.055*** (0.354)
Observations	374	371	345	291	318	297	432	432	432
R ²	0.072	0.030	0.034	0.048	0.050	0.050	0.081	0.104	0.112
Adjusted R ²	0.049	0.006	0.008	0.018	0.022	0.020	0.061	0.085	0.093
Residual Std. Error	0.478 (df = 364)	0.498 (df = 361)	0.490 (df = 335)	0.793 (df = 281)	0.768 (df = 308)	0.823 (df = 287)	1.325 (df = 422)	1.142 (df = 422)	1.267 (df = 422)
F Statistic	3.138*** (df = 9; 364)	1.259 (df = 9; 361)	1.324 (df = 9; 335)	1.579 (df = 9; 281)	1.798* (df = 9; 308)	1.675* (df = 9; 287)	4.113*** (df = 9; 422)	5.455*** (df = 9; 422)	5.910*** (df = 9; 422)

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Baseline framing group is 'Sincerity' frame

Focus group findings

Before starting to report my findings from focus groups, I would like to describe the process of data collection. Snowball and convenience sampling techniques were applied. 24 individuals out of 44 individuals, whom I reached initially gave their consent to participate in focus groups.

The survey findings are useful for learning about the effects of framing on individual perceptions of public policies. However, these perceptions, particularly in the aftermath of shocking events, are rarely formed by isolated individuals. More often, people construct them collectively by discussing them with others in person or online. This is why evidence from focus group interviews is valuable for understanding how people perceive policies targeting previously untouchable elites. Here, I present findings from three focus group interviews.

Generally, the emotional discussions across all three focus groups illustrated the importance of the January events and reforms aftermath to the respondents. The expectations of great changes from Toqayev's administration both in 2019, when Nazarbayev left his position of a president and in 2022, after January events were mentioned frequently with bitter emotions. As expected, in focus groups, the perceptions of Toqayev's anti-corruption reforms were varied. Skepticism was a prevalent feeling, but genuine belief in the reforms was found, too. First, skepticism was illustrated by the dissatisfaction with current reforms that did not match the expectations of big changes after January events from President Toqayev's government. Most respondents expressed their discontent with criminal prosecutions and return of the assets by pointing out that only few individuals were prosecuted, and only several people's money is being returned to the state coffers. In participants' view, it was a tip of the iceberg, with many people and assets remaining 'untouchable'. Across the focus groups, participants interpreted these anti-corruption measures as façade - just to create an image of vibrant activity and demonstrate it to the citizens:

“It is just a show. It's like giving a small child a candy and telling them to go play. There are no changes, the current changes are very small, they don't count. He [Toqayev] did not keep his promises as the head of state. All his initiatives are just 2 percent or 3 percent [of what needs to be done], the rest wasn't returned. Everyone is walking free. This is eyewash, we are not satisfied.” (Shu focus group, December 23, 2023).

Moreover, across all three focus groups, many participants linked their dissatisfaction and skepticism with lack of transparency and detailed information. According to them, the government reported only about the amount of money being returned. The absence of other details, as well as visible results created grounds for disbelief in the return of assets and criminal prosecution of former VIPs:

“All those in high power are somehow connected to corruption. There’s no one who doesn’t take money. What Toqayev is doing seems selective, and for showing a carrot to the people: “see I am doing something!”. But we don’t know where that money is going, there’s no transparency.” (Astana focus group, January 27, 2024).

“I wanted to mention Karim Massimov. His trial was held in closed session. We don’t know the details, why he was imprisoned. They held it quickly in closed session and then just imprisoned him. It should have been open, stating what he did. Since it was closed, you understand there must be some benefit to it.” (Astana focus group, January 27, 2024).

In comparison with the criminal prosecution of Nazarbayev’s cronies and return of the assets, constitutional changes and reforms were discussed significantly less. Most participants shared distrusting opinion towards Toqayev’s imposition of a single 7-year presidential term on himself:

“The funny thing here is they choose for themselves how long to stay. How do you know if he [Toqayev] wants to extend like Nazarbayev by changing the Constitution? Then from 7 years it becomes maybe 10 years.” (Astana focus group, January 27, 2024).

Some participants interpreted the anti-corruption measures as Toqayev’s concentration of power:

“It seems like changes are being made for show, but in reality, they wanted to extend the president's term to 7 years. They're thinking of their own situation. But real reforms beneficial to the citizens don't seem to be working.” (Astana focus group, January 27, 2024);

Other participants disagreed and viewed constitutional reforms as positive and trustworthy. They mentioned a ban on president’s relatives to hold high state positions, and establishment of Constitutional Court:

“Toqayev passed a law that family members [of the president] can't hold [high state] positions. Then, those anti-corruption changes were made to many laws. I don't know how strictly they are being enforced, but changes were made to the law. That's also a plus.” (Focus group with respondents that moved from smaller southern villages and towns to Astana, January 27, 2024).

Return of the assets were frequently mentioned too. Respondents explain that regardless of the reasons of its initiation, return of the assets is a valuable measure. Some respondents compared Toqayev to Nazarbayev, and praised Toqayev for directly addressing the issue of grand corruption:

“Under the first president, there was no talk of returning assets. Now at least some progress. Openly the president himself says that we need to return, it means something.” (Focus group with respondents that moved from smaller southern villages and towns to Astana, January 27, 2024).

Similar to the results of the online survey, social media was the major source of news among participants. In all three focus groups respondents were referring to the materials and news received from social media platforms as an evidence to strengthen their arguments. Therefore, similar to survey results, social media usage affects focus group respondents’ opinion as well. Across all three focus groups, participants mentioned Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Telegram the most. To the lesser degree, YouTube and Twitter were mentioned too. The list of the mentioned media outlets was as following:

Table 8. Media outlets mentioned in focus groups.

Name of the outlets	Number of	Language of the outlet	Pro-government /	Popularity level

	mention s		Independen t	
Radio Azattyq	12	Bilingual	Independent	743K followers in Instagram
ProTenge	3	Russian	Independent	114K followers in Instagram
Tengri News	3	Russian	Pro-government	2.2M followers in Instagram
Akorda News	1	Kazakh	Pro-government	98K followers in Instagram
Airan	1	Russian	Independent	593K followers in YouTube
Yedilov online	1	Russian	Pro-government	95K followers in Telegram
Euro News	1	English	Foreign	622K followers in Instagram
Forbes	1	Russian	Pro-government	219K followers in Instagram
Guiperbore i	1	Russian	Independent	471K followers in YouTube
Jurttýń Balasy	1	Russian	Independent	372K followers in YouTube
Masa media	2	Russian	Independent	46K followers in Instagram
Orda Kz	1	Russian	Independent	258K followers in Instagram

KazTAG	1	Russian	Pro-government	41K followers in Instagram
Village.kz	1	Russian	Independent	112K followers in Instagram
Til kespek joq	1	Kazakh	Independent	111K followers in YouTube
Ulys media	1	Kazakh	Independent	200K followers in YouTube
Vlast'	1	Russian	Independent	61K followers in Instagram
Zakon Kz	1	Russian	Pro-government	668K followers in Instagram
Za Nami Uzhe Vyehali	2	Russian	Independent	337K followers in Instagram

Another interesting finding from the focus groups confirm the findings from the survey. People mostly do not watch television anymore; watching TV was mentioned by the participants only two times. Moreover, the distrust towards state channel Khabar was prevalent among the respondents:

“We initially don't believe in “Khabar”. The reason why I don't watch, because Khabar lies and all that.” (Focus group with respondents that moved from smaller southern villages and towns to Astana, January 27, 2024).

Effect of expert opinion

H2. Framed messages that include expert opinion are more likely to strengthen the effect of the frame.

Regression results

Table 9 below displays the estimates of equation with Bivariate Regression models. I look at the change in the mean values of support level after manipulation messages for each policy depending on the presence of experts' opinion. First, support for criminal prosecution increases by 1 percent in the presence of expert opinion in the manipulative message with the populism frame, which is statistically significant. Among the messages with political game frame, the presence of expert raises support level for criminal prosecution by 0.3 percent. Similarly, in the sincerity frame, the expert effect raises the support level for the prosecution policy by 0.3 percent.

Next, the support level for assets return policy increases by 1 percent in the presence of expert opinion in populism framed message, which is statistically significant. Similarly, among the messages with political game frame, the presence of expert raises support level for assets return by 1 percent. In the sincerity frame, the expert effect raises the support level for the asset return policy by 0.6 percent.

Then, the support level for constitutional reforms policy increases by 0.2 percent in the presence of expert opinion in populism framed message. Similarly, among the messages with political game frame, the presence of expert raises support level for constitutional reforms by 0.2 percent. However, in the sincerity frame, the expert presence decreases the support level for constitutional reforms policy by 0.3 percent.

Considering that eight cases out of nine, in which support level for three policies under three frames with or without expert opinion, indicate the increase in support for the policies in the presence of the expert opinion, it can be concluded that hypothesis two is partially supported

by the findings from table 9. Moreover, the effect of expert opinion is statistically significant only under populism framing.

Table 9. Bivariate Regression

	Criminal	Asset	Legal
Populism	0.45** (0.191)	0.437** (0.169)	0.111 (0.215)
Pol. Game	0.171 (0.184)	0.437 (0.169)	0.13 (0.202)
Sincerity	0.189 (0.2)	0.294 (0.193)	-0.16 (0.201)

Next, we observed that in Table 5 above that displays the estimates of equation with Multivariate Regression models, having an expert opinion raises the support for return of the assets policy by 4.2 percent increase in support level, which is statistically significant. Regarding other policies, the presence of expert opinion in the manipulative message that respondents were exposed to, increases the support level by 3 percent on average.

Now, second part of the table 5 describes multivariate model estimations with added interaction terms of frames and expert opinion. The presence of expert opinion on the manipulative message that was framed as political game decreases the respondents' support level of the criminal prosecution policy by 5 percent. It can be interpreted as supportive of current hypothesis that skeptically framed message that refers to expert opinion decreases participants' support for criminal prosecution policy. On the other hand, interaction effect of expert opinion and political game frame enhances the support level for asset return policy by

6.4 percent. Similarly, the interaction of expert opinion and political game frame increases the support level of constitutional reforms by 4 percent.

Then, interaction effect of expert opinion and populism frame increases the respondents' support level of the criminal prosecution policy by 4.6 percent. The same interaction effect decreases the support level for assets return policy by 0.06 percent. Finally, the interaction of populism frame and expert opinion raises the support level for constitutional reforms policy by 2.5 percent.

Taking into account that there is no statistically significant result found, it can be concluded that findings from table 8 does not support hypothesis two.

Table 10 below displays the estimates of equation with Bivariate Regression models. I look at the change in the mean values of support level before and after manipulation messages for each policy considering the presence of experts' opinion. The results demonstrate that the statistically significant effect of expert opinion is observed under the frame of populism for criminal prosecutions policy and constitutional reforms (both by 1 percent).

Nevertheless, interestingly enough, when exposed to the sincerity frame, the presence of expert opinion decreases the support for constitutional reforms by 0.4 percent, which contradicts the general pattern, in which exposure to a message with an expert opinion increases the support level for any policy.

Considering that eight cases out of nine, where support level for three policies compared before and after manipulation messages with three frames that refer or do not refer to expert opinion, indicate the increase in support for the policies in the presence of the expert opinion, it can be concluded that hypothesis two is partially supported by the findings from table 10.

Table 10. Bivariate regression (before-after contrast)

	Criminal	Asset	Legal
Populism	0.446** (0.26)	0.314** (0.196)	-0.019 (0.259)
Pol. Game	0.14 (0.176)	0.21 (0.156)	0.155 (0.193)
Sincerity	0.302 (0.221)	0.247 (0.199)	0.155 (0.217)

Next, Table 6 above displays the estimates of equation with Multivariate Regression models. Here, I look at the change in support levels for each policy before and after exposure to manipulation messages under skepticism frames with and without reference to expert opinions in comparison with sincerity frame. First and foremost, in assessing the difference between support levels for all three policies before and after experiment, we observe the increase by 5 percent on average in the presence of expert, which is statistically significant.

Second part of the table 6 describes multivariate model estimations with added interaction terms of frames and expert opinion in changes in support level for each policy before and after exposure to manipulation messages. Again, no statistically significant result of interaction effect is found.

Considering that Table 6 findings indicate consistent statistically significant effect of expert opinion for all anti-corruption policies, but no statistically significant effect of interaction, it can be concluded that hypothesis 2 is partially supported.

Focus group findings

Focus group findings suggest that respondents tend to believe an expert's comments under certain conditions only. Such requirements are educational background of the expert; authority

of the expert; analytical content of the message; and to the lesser degree conformity to pre-existing opinions. This shows that individuals critically evaluate information related to anti-corruption policies coming from the government or from experts. First of all, across all groups education level of the expert was important before finding her frame convincing. According to the participants, with the availability of the internet technologies, many amateurs can call themselves an expert:

“If it is an expert opinion, then it [trust] does increase. <...> Exactly, you can nominally call everyone an expert. Everyone declares themselves as experts on TikTok. If it's really an expert, with a master's degree confirmed abroad, with a red diploma, a PhD, why not [to trust]?” (Shu focus group, December 23, 2023)

“If previously a journalist was a person who studied for 5 years at a journalism faculty and to release any information studied, but now...” (Focus group with respondents that moved from smaller southern villages and towns to Astana, January 27, 2024).

The next important marker of the expert, across all focus groups, is her authority and popularity. The respondents mentioned that in order for them to find expert's shared viewpoints on certain matter convincing, her name should be familiar, and she herself should be authority in her field. Dossym Satpayev was the most mentioned expert, who was called trustworthy. Other mentioned experts were as follows:

Table 11. Experts mentioned in focus groups

Name	Description
Aidos Sarym	Bilingual Member of Parliament from the ruling party
Aisana Ashim	Bilingual journalist from Almaty
Askhat Niyazov	Russian-speaking journalist from Astana
Assel' Zhapisheva	Bilingual journalist from Almaty
Il'ya Varlamov	Russian journalist, who visited Kazakhstan

Some respondents across all three focus groups, mainly representatives of the younger generation, mentioned that conformity to respondents' pre-existing beliefs and views increases their trust in the expert's opinion. For instance, as one female participant said:

“I can't remember something specific, but I generally read the news from “Village Kz”, because I trust them in general and agree with many of their positions, and the positions of the chief editor Aysana Ashim, whom I follow.” (Focus group with respondents that moved from smaller southern villages and towns to Astana, January 27, 2024).

Moreover, according to the participants' view, another requirement is the message itself – it should contain ‘hard’ facts, numbers, and statistics. The respondents share that they find it more convincing when the message contains solid research and background history. In other words, experts who simply paraphrase information, do not strengthen the framing effect. For instance, as one young female young female participant said:

“I will trust those sources, where there are more facts, more numbers, and more historical data. For instance, they write ‘X amount of money was returned’ and then write ‘If you remember, in Y year, Z was stolen’ and ‘where's the rest?’. Like that, so there are facts. Only then it's clear that this article is worked on by a person, who studied the past and looked at the present, and a little bit predicted the future.” (Focus group with respondents that moved from smaller southern villages and towns to Astana, January 27, 2024).

Finally, in all three focus groups, some participants mentioned examples where a person heard stories, explanations, and opinions of her acquaintances, close people, friends, and family and found them convincing. In fact, some respondents shared how they built skepticism toward certain policies because of such grapevine news. If this can be identified as a passive form of news received and further opinion formation, there are also participants who reach out to their acquaintances, family members, and friends to hear their analysis of the events. They shared that their opinions and viewpoints are shaped during discussions with their acquaintances. Furthermore, during focus groups there were few discussions of how respondents searched for

explanations online in foreign media, like BBC. It demonstrates the distrust among participants towards official narratives and government interpretations of certain events and policies.

Regional variance

H3. Residents of remote southern small towns are more likely to trust Toqayev's anti-corruption policies than residents of the capital city.

Regression results

Table 10 displays the estimates of the equation with Multivariate Regression models. Here, I look at the effect of residence on trust in policy implementation, interpretation of the policy, and support level before the experiment. First, generally, southern residence increases respondents' trust in all anti-corruption policies, but to constitutional reforms effect of southern residence is statistically significant, which is equal to almost a 10 percent increase.

Following that, southern residents decreased skeptical interpretation, but no statistically significant result was found.

Finally, southern residence increases the initial level of support for criminal prosecutions by 23 percent, which is statistically significant; for constitutional reforms by 32 percent, which is also statistically significant; and by 18 percent increase in support for the return of the assets policy.

Even if only three of the nine findings are statistically significant, all nine findings support hypothesis three: southern residence increases the trust level, decreases the degree of skeptical interpretation, and increases the support level for the policies. Therefore, it can be concluded that regression results support Hypothesis 3.

Focus group findings

Shu focus group

It was expected that residents of Shu would be more supportive of the reforms, more trusting of the government initiatives, and less skeptical in perception than residents of Astana. The findings from the focus groups suggest the opposite. Respondents from the Shu focus group were prevalingly skeptical of Toqayev's anti-corruption policies. Participants discussed their unfulfilled expectations of great changes from Toqayev and their dissatisfaction with the state of the current anti-corruption measures. According to Shu residents, post-Qantar anti-corruption reforms are 'just for a show', and there are only a few people who were criminally prosecuted for corruption and whose illegally obtained money was returned. Both younger and senior generations hold the same feelings:

“Unfortunately, these changes are incomplete, they are not enough. <...> Now, governmental authorities created a commission for the return of money. But still, we are not satisfied with this. They only talk about a few people who returned [the assets]. Before, it was stated about 162 [rich] people, however, they are only talking about three or four, prosecuting two or three, and all others still remain without any prosecution. If they really return [the wealth] to the needy layers of the population, to those with a low-income status, we all would cherish the government. But, this is not happening. <...> After the January events, there should have been significant changes, but so far, only halfway.” (Shu focus group, December 23, 2023)

“Many [people] thought that after the January events, some changes would occur. But while we were all waiting for these changes, the same story continued. Activists were repressed. The state, instead of introducing some changes, worked on Toqayev's image in the media to show him in the best light and district young people's attention to this. <...> As we saw, only 2-3 people from the Nazarbayev dynasty were convicted, only 2-3 began to return money. But everything else remains in the same place.” (Shu focus group, December 23, 2023)

In comparison with the other two groups, participants in the Shu focus group expressed the fewest positive sentiments regarding genuine belief in the anti-corruption reforms and government activities. Only a few participants shared in two sentences that the change process has started, and it is already a good sign.

Furthermore, it is interesting to look at the participants' opinions of Toqayev (specific support) and of the general political regime (diffuse support). There is a common pattern of respecting Toqayev given all his merits such as affluent diplomatic experience and ability to speak in many languages. However, it strangely coincides with the disappointment that he did not bring any significant changes to the country:

“Sure, he is a polyglot, for example, he has studied in Moscow, worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and seen many countries; He speaks on many languages. And yet, he was unable to make any changes. <...> As long as Toqayev is president - yes, there won't be [any changes].” (Shu focus group, December 23, 2023)

However, diffuse support among the respondents is not so well-shaped. The respondents blame the first president, Nazarbayev, for establishing *sistema* (Ledeneva 2013), the corrupted system of governance. According to participants' opinions, *sistema* still exists under Toqayev's regime too:

“Nazarbayev is our first leader. And, his merits are also very great, up to him we became known abroad, he established this system. But the main issue is his surroundings, which consisted of relatives, and this was his mistake. <...> We still have the old system; the current government cannot get out of it.” (Shu focus group, December 23, 2023).

From southern small-towns to Astana

In comparison, focus group participants who moved from small southern villages and towns to the capital city, Astana, reported a greater belief in the benign nature of the anti-corruption reforms. Here, respondents comparing former president Nazarbayev and current president Toqayev, praised the latter for addressing the grand corruption, initiating the return of the assets and constitutional reforms that directly concerned elite level corruption:

“I am optimistic by myself, there was no such talk during the first president's time. “Assets left illegally” were said during Toqayev's time. He said to give that money to the people.” (Focus group with respondents that moved from smaller southern villages and towns to Astana, January 27, 2024).

Concerning the skepticism, respondents of this group have briefly mentioned some degree of uncertainty due to the absence of any display of the results by the government.

Regarding the general political support in this focus group, in comparison to the Shu focus group, in addition to mass corruption, participants discussed the absence of rule of law, arrests of the activists, and law enforcement organs' ineffectiveness. Moreover, there was no reference to *sistema*. Diffuse support for Toqayev was briefly mentioned a few times.

Astana focus group

In contrast, participants from the Astana focus group had a balanced view of both skepticism and sincerity. Most respondents interpreted anti-corruption policies as ‘for a show to calm people down’ or as a demonstration that President Toqayev was ‘doing something.’ They were referring to lack of transparency, and any display of factual results of the return of the assets policy. As for the constitutional reforms, on the one hand, some respondents interpreted the prolongation of the presidential term as insurance for political survival. On the other hand, some respondents argue that seven years is the right term because ‘in shorter terms a president can complete no good reforms.’ Moreover, the restorage of the Constitutional Court was highly assessed by the others.

Regarding the general support for the political regime, this theme was mentioned least of all in the Astana focus group in comparison with other focus groups. Similar to the remaining

two focus groups, it was mainly skeptical views and distrust towards the state. There was no mentioned specific support, trust, or respect for the figure of Toqayev at all.

To conclude, focus group findings demonstrate the high level of skepticism and low level of belief among Shu residents. In contrast, a focus group conducted with respondents who moved from smaller southern villages and towns revealed a high degree of trust and support for post-Qantar anti-corruption reforms. Finally, Astana residents had more balanced views towards anti-corruption measures. Despite the prevailing amount of skepticism, the level of trust and support for the policies was decent, too. Therefore, hypothesis three was partially supported by the findings of the focus groups.

Chapter 6. Conclusion:

Framing Has Its Limits

This study examined the effect of framing and expert opinion on Kazakhstanis' perception of President Toqayev's policy against elite-level corruption after the January events of 2022. The literature on public perception of anti-corruption reforms provides three main theories: personal characteristics of the individuals, previous experience of corruption, and social information theory. The first school argues that personal characteristics of individuals, such as gender, age, education, income level, occupation, political knowledge, and others, shape the way people perceive anti-corruption reforms in their society. The second school claims that personal past experiences with corruption, especially bribing, as well as work experience of civil servants and businesspeople that allowed them to look at the reforms from the 'inside,' shape people's perception of anti-corruption reforms more skeptically. The third school states that information received from both traditional and social media forms people's perception of anti-corruption measures. In line with social information theory, I look at the effect of framing and expert opinion in the messages on trust, the support level for, and interpretation of the post-Qantar anti-corruption reforms. Moreover, considering the lack of studies on rural areas of Kazakhstan, I compared the perception of anti-corruption reforms of residents of the capital city, Astana, and small-town Shu, located in the southern part of the country.

For the purposes of this study, I have conducted an anonymous online survey among residents of Astana (n=300) and Shu (n=200). It consisted of 30 questions (see Appendix A) and asked for the respondents' news sources, demographics, political knowledge, support level for the anti-corruption policies, trust towards their successful implementation, and self-explanation of these measures. Another method, which was part of the survey was experiment. After political knowledge questions, a respondent randomly received one of six short manipulative messages that present anti-corruption initiatives within one of three frames

(populism, political game, sincerity), with or without reference to an expert. Both before and after the exposure to the manipulation, respondents were asked to choose the level of their support on a Likert scale towards each anti-corruption policy (criminal prosecution, return of assets, constitutional reforms). The rationale behind this was to test whether exposure to framed messages with or without expert opinion impacts a person's level of support towards anti-corruption measures. In addition, in order to see how opinions are formed collectively, I conducted three in-person focus group interviews: one in Shu with Shu residents (10 participants), one in Astana with Astana residents (6 participants), and one in Astana with individuals, who moved from small southern villages and towns to Astana (8 participants).

The findings of this study partially support all three hypotheses. First, experiment results partially confirm the effect of framing on support, trust for, and interpretation of the three anti-corruption policies. The effect of the populism frame was stronger than the effects of the political game and sincerity frames on support for criminal prosecutions and return of assets policies. We explain it by long-standing normalized Soviet legacy of window dressing culture, so-called Potemkin villages (Allina-Pisano 2006), which include faking statistics in reports to the government and staged events for the visitors (Astapova 2017). Furthermore, Constitutional reforms were the least affected by any frame. We explain it by the mentioned façade institutions that became the norm and on paper only character of the laws in Kazakhstan (Janenova and Knox 2020). The weaker effect of the political game frame is explained by the mentioned in Chapter 1, belonging of both presidents to the same clan, as well as tutelage or dual presidency established from 2019 till the January events of 2022.

Being exposed to skepticism frames did not hinder participants' level of support for the anti-corruption measures. Moreover, it was found that social media usage decreases trust in the successful implementation of anti-corruption policies, increases skepticism in interpretation, and enhances the support level for the policies. Across all three focus groups skepticism

sentiments were prevalent in comparison to participants' belief in sincerity. Participants interpreted the state-initiated anti-corruption measures as a façade - just to create an image of vibrant activity and demonstrate it to the citizens. Moreover, they were dissatisfied with the lack of transparency and detailed information on the return of the assets. In comparison with the criminal prosecution of Nazarbayev's cronies and the return of the assets, constitutional changes were discussed significantly less. Second, experiment and survey results partially confirm the effect of expert opinion on support, trust for, and interpretation of the three anti-corruption policies. Focus group findings suggest that respondents tend to believe an expert's comments under certain conditions only. Such requirements are the educational background of the expert, authority of the expert, analytical content of the message, and, to a lesser degree, conformity to pre-existing opinions. Third, survey results support that southern rural residents increase their trust level, decrease the degree of skeptical interpretation, and increase the support level for the policies. However, against the hypothesis, focus group results demonstrate that respondents from the Shu focus group were prevalently skeptical of the anti-corruption policies, while those participants who moved from small southern villages and towns to the capital city Astana reported a greater belief in the benign nature of the anti-corruption reforms. In the latter group, respondents comparing former president Nazarbayev and current president Toqayev praised the latter for addressing the grand corruption, initiating the return of the assets and constitutional reforms that directly concern elite-level corruption. Astana residents reported a more balanced perception, holding skepticism and genuine belief in the anti-corruption measures as well as the government itself.

Limitations of this study are the non-generalizable nature of the findings due to convenience sampling. Moreover, there is a high possibility of the presence of social desirability bias, namely because of the sensitive nature of the grand corruption topic in authoritarian Kazakhstan with its inheritance of KGB trauma. Future research could conduct

nationwide surveys with a larger sample size that would be representative of the whole population, as well as limit social desirability bias as much as possible by providing a safer environment for the respondents.

Moreover, both according to literature and insider experience, it was expected during focus groups to have more pro-governmental senior generation, especially in Shu. However, results showed that perceptions among senior citizens of Shu were predominantly negative, while in the other two groups that reside in Astana, older generation representatives were pro-government. Future research can look into this interesting finding and try to find an explanation for it.

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Appendix A.
Online Survey Questionnaire

1. Where do you most often get news about events in the country?
 - a) TV
 - b) Radio
 - c) Newspapers
 - d) Social media
 - e) Messengers like WhatsApp
 - f) Internet websites
 - g) YouTube channels
 - h) Closest circle (family, friends, relatives etc)
 - i) I refuse to answer

[Questions about the respondent's knowledge of anti-corruption policy]

2. How well are you informed of the anti-corruption policy by the authorities after the January protest?
 - a) I know less than average Kazakhstani citizen
 - b) I know a bit less than Kazakhstani citizen
 - c) I know just the same as average Kazakhstani citizen
 - d) I know a bit more than average Kazakhstani citizen
 - e) I know more than average Kazakhstani citizen
 - f) I refuse to answer

[Quiz questions about the anti-corruption policies]

3. Which of the following politicians is criminally prosecuted after January events?
 - a) Askar Mamin
 - b) Kairat Boranbayev
 - c) Imangali Tasmagambetov
 - d) Nurali Aliyev
 - e) I refuse to answer

4. For what Karim Massimov was prosecuted?
- A) Raid
 - B) Espionage
 - C) State treason
 - D) Embezzlement
 - E) I refuse to answer

[Questions about prosecutions of major political figures]

As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, there were the criminal prosecution cases of high-ranking officials such as former prime ministers, heads of CNS, businessmen and heads of police department. As a result of those prosecutions, some are imprisoned, some are deprived of properties and etc.

5. As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, there were the criminal prosecution cases of high-ranking officials such as former prime ministers, heads of CNS, businessmen and heads of police department. As a result of those prosecutions, some are imprisoned, some are deprived of properties and etc.

Do you support criminally prosecuting those officials and well-connected businessmen for the corruption?

- a) Absolutely not
- b) Not so much
- c) Neutral
- d) Somewhat
- e) Absolutely yes
- f) I refuse to answer

6. As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, there were the criminal prosecution cases of high-ranking officials such as former prime ministers, heads of CNS, businessmen and heads of police department. As a result of those prosecutions, some are imprisoned, some are deprived of properties and etc.

Do you trust that those officials and well-connected businessmen will be actually punished?

- a) Yes
- b) No

c) I refuse to answer

7. Why you trust / do not trust?

8. As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, there were the criminal prosecution cases of high-ranking officials such as former prime ministers, heads of CNS, businessmen and heads of police department. As a result of those prosecutions, some are imprisoned, some are deprived of properties and etc.

How do you interpret such events for yourself?

i) Just for show

j) Revenge against the leaders of Old Kazakhstan

k) Power grab by Toqayev

l) Real fight against corruption

m) Exact enforcement of anti-corruption laws

n) Other _____

o) I do not know

p) I refuse to answer

[Questions about returning assets]

As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, the policy of returning illegally withdrawn assets from involved in corruption big businessmen, shareholders of national companies and banks was presented and enforced.

9. As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, the policy of returning illegally withdrawn assets from involved in corruption big businessmen, shareholders of national companies and banks was presented and enforced.

Do you support the returning the assets from involved in corruption officials and well-connected businessmen?

g) Absolutely not

h) Not so much

i) Neutral

j) Somewhat

k) Absolutely yes

l) I refuse to answer

10. As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, the policy of returning illegally withdrawn assets from involved in corruption big businessmen, shareholders of national companies and banks was presented and enforced.

Do you trust that the mentioned assets will be actually returned?

a) Yes

b) No

c) I refuse to answer

11. Why you trust / do not trust?

12. As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, the policy of returning illegally withdrawn assets from involved in corruption big businessmen, shareholders of national companies and banks was presented and enforced.

How do you interpret it for yourself?

a) Just for show

b) Revenge against the leaders of Old Kazakhstan

c) Power grab by Toqayev

d) Real fight against corruption

e) Exact enforcement of anti-corruption laws

f) Other _____

g) I do not know

h) I refuse to answer

[Questions about constitutional changes]

As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, several fundamental changes to Constitution and the Laws regarding political power were introduced. The enforced changes deal with the status of first president, the presidential terms, board of Security Council and local executive organs such as akimat.

13. As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, several fundamental changes to Constitution and the Laws regarding political power were introduced. The enforced changes

deal with the status of first president, the presidential terms, board of Security Council and local executive organs such as akimat.

Do you support the legal changes regarding political power of the state?

- a) Not at all
- b) Not so much
- c) Neutral
- d) Somewhat
- e) Absolutely
- f) I refuse to answer

14. As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, several fundamental changes to Constitution and the Laws regarding political power were introduced. The enforced changes deal with the status of first president, the presidential terms, board of Security Council and local executive organs such as akimat.

Do you trust the introduced legal changes will be actually enforced?

- A) Yes
- B) No
- C) I refuse to answer

15. Why you trust / do not trust?

16. As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, several fundamental changes to Constitution and the Laws regarding political power were introduced. The enforced changes deal with the status of first president, the presidential terms, board of Security Council and local executive organs such as akimat.

How do you interpret it to yourself?

- A) Just for show
- B) Revenge against the leaders of Old Kazakhstan
- C) Power grab by Toqayev
- D) Real fight against corruption
- E) Exact enforcement of anti-corruption laws
- F) Other _____
- G) I do not know
- H) I refuse to answer

[Demographics]

17. Gender of the respondent:

- a) Female
- b) Male
- c) I refuse to answer

18. Your age:

- a) Less than 20 years
- b) from 21 to 30 years
- c) from 31 to 40 years
- d) from 41 to 50 years
- e) from 51 to 60 years
- f) over 61 years
- g) I refuse to answer

19. Your education:

- a) incomplete average or lower
- b) secondary general (school)
- c) initial professional (vocational school, college, lyceum, etc.)
- d) secondary special (secondary school, technical school, medical school, etc.)
- e) incomplete higher education (studying at a university without obtaining a diploma)
- f) higher (diploma of specialist, bachelor, master, etc.)
- g) postgraduate studies, academic degree, title
- h) I refuse to answer

20. In which part of Kazakhstan do you live?

- a) In the southern part of the country
- b) In the northern part of the country
- c) I refuse to answer

21. How do you evaluate your financial situation?

- a) high, there are no financial difficulties

- b) Comparatively high, although some purchases are not affordable
- c) medium, money is enough only for basic purchases
- d) below average, there is not enough money for a lot of things
- e) Very low, living in extreme need
- f) I refuse to answer

22. What is your current occupation?

- a) Working
- b) Self-employed
- c) Student
- d) Retired
- e) Other
- f) I refuse to answer

[political knowledge questions]

23. Who is the current Prime Minister of RK?

- a) Askar Mamin
- b) Alikhan Smailov
- c) Bakhytzhan Sagyntayev
- d) Imangali Tasmagambetov
- e) I do not know
- f) I refuse to answer

24. What is the term of President under the current Constitution?

- a) 4 years
- b) 5 years
- c) 6 years
- d) 7 years
- e) I do not know
- f) I refuse to answer

25. What is the name of the leading party in Parliament?

- a) Respublica

- b) Nur-Otan
- c) Ak Zhol
- d) AuyI
- e) Amanat
- f) I do not know
- g) I refuse to answer

Before we end this survey, I would like to introduce you with short description of anti-corruption policies following the January event. The description appeared in a reliable news source. Please read them carefully.

(Respondent will be randomly assigned with one of the following messages)

* Experts agree that the recent reforms of Toqayev in relation to Nazarbayev's personal and political status and his corrupt relatives and cronies are populist in nature because they aim to make Toqayev popular both inside the country and abroad and distract public attention from many real socio-economic and political problems that Kazakhstan faces.

* The recent reforms of Toqayev in relation to Nazarbayev's personal and political status and his corrupt relatives and cronies are populist in nature because they aim to make Toqayev popular both inside the country and abroad and distract public attention from many real socio-economic and political problems that Kazakhstan faces.

* Experts agree that even though January protests expressed people's discontent, the chaos was the result of a desperate struggle for power between feuding political clans, namely people loyal to President Toqayev and those loyal to ex-President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Thus, they explain the arrest of Karim Masimov for state treason, the deprivation of Nazarbayev from his Constitutional privileges and dismissals of Nazarbayev family members.

* Even though January protests expressed people's discontent, the chaos was the result of a desperate struggle for power between feuding political clans, namely people loyal to President Toqayev and those loyal to ex-President Nursultan Nazarbayev. It explains the arrest of Karim Masimov for state treason, the deprivation of Nazarbayev from his Constitutional privileges and dismissals of Nazarbayev family members.

* Experts believe in the genuineness of Toqayev's reforms saying that Toqayev is focusing now on building a "new Kazakhstan", an opportunity for a quality reloading of the country, in which past mistakes can be assessed. In particular, according to the experts, introduction of rules restricting the president's family from profiting from his power is a step towards Western standards.

* President Toqayev is focusing now on building a "new Kazakhstan", an opportunity for a quality reloading of the country, in which past mistakes can be assessed. In particular, introduction of rules restricting the president's family from profiting from his power is a step towards Western standards. It proves the genuineness of president Toqayev's reforms.

[The following two questions are to be used for a manipulation check]

26. Recall the message that you read please. Did the message mention expert opinion?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) I refuse to answer

27. What was the message about?

- a) It was mainly describing anti-corruption policy as popularity tool of president Toqayev
- b) It was mainly describing anti-corruption policy as power struggle between ex-president Nazarbayev and president Toqayev
- c) It was mainly describing anti-corruption policy as president Toqayev's attempt to build new Kazakhstan
- d) I refuse to answer

28. As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, there were the criminal prosecution cases of high-ranking officials such as former prime ministers, heads of CNS, businessmen and heads of police department. As a result of those prosecutions, some are imprisoned, some are deprived of properties and etc.

Do you support criminally prosecuting those officials and well-connected businessmen for the corruption?

- a) Absolutely not

- b) Not so much
- c) Neutral
- d) Somewhat
- e) Absolutely yes
- f) I refuse to answer

29. As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, the policy of returning illegally withdrawn assets from involved in corruption big businessmen, shareholders of national companies and banks was presented and enforced.

Do you support the returning the assets from involved in corruption officials and well-connected businessmen?

- a) Absolutely not
- b) Not so much
- c) Neutral
- d) Somewhat
- e) Absolutely yes
- f) I refuse to answer

30. As a measure of anti-corruption policies after January events, several fundamental changes to Constitution and the Laws regarding political power were introduced. The enforced changes deal with the status of first president, the presidential terms, board of Security Council and local executive organs such as akimat.

Do you support the legal changes regarding political power of the state?

- a) Absolutely not
- b) Not so much
- c) Neutral
- d) Somewhat
- e) Absolutely yes
- f) I refuse to answer

That is the end of survey. Thank you for participating in this research.

I am also interested in your more detailed answers. You can leave your contact information for additional interviews or contact me via email aruzhan.ashimkhan@nu.edu.kz or phone number 8-700-244-87-27. The transportation fee will be covered by me as a way of thanking you.

Appendix B.
Focus Group Questionnaire

Researcher: “I give you a topic, and you can discuss it with each other, you do not have to answer to me. Everything that is being said, will be left in this room. Confidentiality is guaranteed. The access to the materials will be to me only and I will destroy the audiotapes after transcribing the interview.”

1. Could you please share with your thoughts, feelings and general experience with January events?
2. Can you recall seeing, hearing or reading anything interesting or unusual about January events in any type of media?

After January events, president Toqayev addressed the issue of grand corruption. In March 2022, the Commission on the recovery of stolen assets was created. As a result of state effort, 860 billion tenge was returned to Kazakhstan. Some of the people, who were involved in grand corruption, were prosecuted. Moreover, president Toqayev made significant changes to the Constitution.

3. Could you please share with your thoughts on these policies? For example, your evaluations of these policies; why they are being implemented in your opinion?
4. Can you recall any media reports, news, videos discussing these policies? Could you please share with your experience on that if you have any?
5. When you have encountered these reports and videos, did you find it convincing? Why yes? Why not?
6. How and why do you decide whether to trust certain news, reports and videos about government policies or not to trust?
7. If these news, reports and videos include expert comments, do you trust it more?

8. *(If the majority of sources being mentioned is only one platform)* Are there any platforms where you might have heard, read or watched about these policies?

9. As you have mentioned, you have encountered variety of things: TV news, YouTube videos, social media posts. Did you feel any differences between them? Could you share with your experience on that?

**Appendix C.
Balance Chart**

Message Group	Expert: Pop., N = 90 ^l	No Expert: Pop., N = 98 ^l	Expert: Pol. Game, N = 90 ^l	No Expert: Pol. Game, N = 100 ^l	Expert: Sinc, N = 88 ^l	No Expert: Sinc., N = 97 ^l
Education						
0	9 (11%)	6 (6.4%)	5 (5.9%)	4 (4.1%)	5 (6.2%)	11 (12%)
1	11 (13%)	9 (9.6%)	9 (11%)	15 (15%)	7 (8.6%)	11 (12%)
2	63 (76%)	79 (84%)	71 (84%)	79 (81%)	69 (85%)	70 (76%)
Unknown	7	4	5	2	7	5
South						
North	51 (68%)	50 (56%)	50 (60%)	62 (66%)	44 (56%)	50 (56%)
South	24 (32%)	39 (44%)	34 (40%)	32 (34%)	35 (44%)	40 (44%)
Unknown	15	9	6	6	9	7
Income						
1	16 (18%)	11 (11%)	10 (11%)	14 (14%)	8 (9.1%)	8 (8.2%)

Message Group	Expert: Pop., N = 90 ^I	No Expert: Pop., N = 98 ^I	Expert: Pol. Game, N = 90 ^I	No Expert: Pol. Game, N = 100 ^I	Expert: Sinc., N = 88 ^I	No Expert: Sinc., N = 97 ^I
2	20 (22%)	30 (31%)	20 (22%)	32 (32%)	27 (31%)	29 (30%)
3	37 (41%)	42 (43%)	42 (47%)	37 (37%)	34 (39%)	40 (41%)
4	6 (6.7%)	11 (11%)	9 (10%)	7 (7.0%)	6 (6.8%)	10 (10%)
5	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.1%)	2 (2.0%)	3 (3.4%)	2 (2.1%)
6	11 (12%)	4 (4.1%)	8 (8.9%)	8 (8.0%)	10 (11%)	8 (8.2%)
Employed						
Unemployed	29 (39%)	36 (41%)	20 (27%)	28 (31%)	28 (36%)	27 (34%)
Employed	45 (61%)	51 (59%)	54 (73%)	63 (69%)	50 (64%)	53 (66%)
Unknown	16	11	16	9	10	17
Female						
Male	39 (48%)	37 (41%)	39 (45%)	39 (40%)	36 (44%)	34 (36%)

Message Group	Expert: Pop., N = 90 ^I	No Expert: Pop., N = 98 ^I	Expert: Pol. Game, N = 90 ^I	No Expert: Pol. Game, N = 100 ^I	Expert: Sinc., N = 88 ^I	No Expert: Sinc., N = 97 ^I
Female	43 (52%)	54 (59%)	47 (55%)	59 (60%)	46 (56%)	60 (64%)
Unknown	8	7	4	2	6	3
Age						
1	11 (13%)	13 (14%)	7 (8.0%)	10 (10%)	4 (4.7%)	11 (12%)
2	37 (43%)	44 (47%)	36 (41%)	42 (42%)	43 (51%)	26 (28%)
3	13 (15%)	9 (9.6%)	10 (11%)	12 (12%)	8 (9.4%)	18 (19%)
4	11 (13%)	18 (19%)	20 (23%)	17 (17%)	16 (19%)	23 (24%)
5	8 (9.3%)	3 (3.2%)	8 (9.1%)	10 (10%)	3 (3.5%)	11 (12%)
6	6 (7.0%)	7 (7.4%)	7 (8.0%)	9 (9.0%)	11 (13%)	5 (5.3%)
Unknown	4	4	2	0	3	3
Pol. Knowledge						

Message Group	Expert: Pop., N = 90^I	No Expert: Pop., N = 98^I	Expert: Pol. Game, N = 90^I	No Expert: Pol. Game, N = 100^I	Expert: Sinc., N = 88^I	No Expert: Sinc., N = 97^I
0	9 (11%)	19 (21%)	6 (7.0%)	14 (15%)	14 (17%)	13 (14%)
1	17 (21%)	22 (24%)	16 (19%)	16 (17%)	17 (20%)	17 (18%)
2	25 (31%)	20 (22%)	27 (31%)	29 (30%)	20 (24%)	22 (24%)
3	29 (36%)	31 (34%)	37 (43%)	37 (39%)	32 (39%)	41 (44%)
Unknown	10	6	4	4	5	4
Kazakh Lang.						
Russian	73 (81%)	79 (81%)	72 (80%)	88 (88%)	71 (81%)	82 (85%)
Kazakh	17 (19%)	19 (19%)	18 (20%)	12 (12%)	17 (19%)	15 (15%)
Social Media	80 (90%)	91 (93%)	78 (87%)	86 (87%)	67 (77%)	79 (81%)
Unknown	1	0	0	1	1	0

^I n (%)