

Beyond believability: Factors driving media trust in Uganda

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**Abstract**

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Trust in news is of persistent concern to newsrooms and research programs alike. However, seemingly less consensus exists around basic issues like how to define relevant terms and operationalize them across contexts. In response to these tensions, this mixed-method study explores situated understandings of media trust and their antecedents in a non-Western context, using Uganda as a case study. Uganda, like many countries around the world, has experienced democratic backsliding in recent years. Access to trustworthy information in such environments is vital, and journalism and journalists are often thought to fulfill this normative function. However, little is known about how individuals perceive journalists or evaluate the news beyond Euro-American contexts, with implications for how we measure and understand

levels of media trust globally. Put simply, what are we measuring when we measure media trust in Uganda and how does this shape our understanding of media trust in this context and beyond? The first phase of the project draws on 28 in-depth interviews and explores respondents' expectations of journalists and news organizations in Uganda. I find that although individuals aspire for media professionals to expose political corruption, serve the public, and even provide social support to communities, their expectations in practice are much different, including expectations that journalists accept bribes and produce government-leaning content. Despite this seeming gap between desired and anticipated practices, respondents express generally positive perceptions of journalists, often contrasting their good will for journalists with frustration toward political elites and government agencies. I then surveyed a nationally representative sample of Ugandan adults to further examine how expectations relate to reported media trust, as well as to identify relevant covariates. The questionnaire asked participants about their media habits and perceptions related to journalists and politics in Uganda. Results from OLS regressions indicate that operationalized expectations from the first phase of the project predicted levels of media trust, though individuals' trust in news media was also notably driven by their political perceptions, particularly trust in government and political interest. From the combination of qualitative and quantitative findings, I therefore advance an understanding of media trust that is relative in two ways: Individuals trust news professionals to achieve some practices over others and they generally trust journalists and news organizations relative to other social institutions, like politics. I conclude with a discussion of key findings, directions for future research, and recommendations for media practitioners.

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## Chapter 1: What's Trust Got to Do With It?

Media trust has long been of interest to scholars and media practitioners alike. Numerous research projects and philanthropic efforts have endeavored to measure and predict reported levels of trust in news with scores of inferred impacts on news consumption, democratic attitudes, and even civic participation (Fletcher & Park, 2017; Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019; Knight Foundation, 2020). However, decades of scholarship seeking to explain driving factors of media trust have culminated in a refrain familiar to many research questions circulating the social sciences: It depends.

The general consensus appears to be that some people trust some news some of the time. We know, for instance, that individuals' media trust depends on the news topic, news organization, the medium by which they receive content, as well as one's personal political ideology and media use. Moreover, the ways we interpret reported levels of media trust depend in no small part on how researchers operationalize the concept. Media trust, for instance, may refer to trust in individual journalists, trust in news organizations, trust in news content, or trust in the broader journalism industry; individuals' propensity to trust depends in part on which of these referents they have in mind (Strömbäck et al., 2020).

Such nuances in research approaches and findings have rendered investigations of media trust mundane, if not futile, to some onlookers. Whereas the advent of cable television and the explosion of digital platforms decades ago once made the prospect of measuring public trust in journalism imperative, if not noble, today the sub-area has been called "pointless" and a "useless metric of [journalistic] work" (Beckett, 2023). On this trajectory, some may soon go

so far as to retire notions of media trust entirely, as has been suggested for other communication concepts (Katz & Fialkoff, 2017).

This dissertation tempers these criticisms in part by complicating our conventional conceptualizations of media trust. Specifically, it adopts a straightforward and admittedly basic question in the sub-area—what are the most important factors driving media trust in a population?—and applies it to a non-Western context, namely Uganda. Using an inductive approach and shedding many of the assumptions typically made about media trust and its correlates, the project centers the perspectives of audiences to understand how trust in journalism is shaped by situated contexts. In doing so, I argue that we should not only stay the course of media-trust research but extend this research to diverse sociopolitical environments beyond European and North American case studies as one way to revitalize scholarship and, more importantly, bring it closer to the lived experiences of individuals.

The sociopolitical stakes associated with understanding media trust in the Global South generally, and Uganda in particular, should not be underestimated. More than half of the world's population growth until 2050 is expected to occur in Africa (United Nations, 2019), and a majority of these individuals reside in relatively nascent (semi)democratic political environments, many of which have experienced democratic backsliding in recent years (Campbell & Quinn, 2021; Fisher, 2022; Schultz, 2019). In even the strongest democracies, normative democratic theory underscores the importance of public trust in journalism, where a central function of news is to hold power to account (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021). Uganda serves as an important case study for this work, as it is characterized by select social and political attributes that are shared across many countries on the African continent, as well as

the Global South more broadly, such as post-conflict reconstruction, a diverse media market, and extralegal censorship of journalists (Marchant & Stremlau, 2020). Thus, the costs of misunderstanding media-trust trends in a place like Uganda is not only of practical interest to media practitioners and those studying international public opinion but also to policymakers around the world who are interested in the state of democracy in the Global South.

To illustrate the limits of our current knowledge base using an empirical example, a number of forecasts suggest that international trust in journalism is low and decreasing with time (Newman et al., 2022; Ritter, 2019). However, while declines in media trust are well documented in the United States and western Europe, evidence of this remains mixed in many other parts of the world where trust has remained stable or even increased in recent years (Hanitzsch et al., 2018; McIntyre & Sobel Cohen, 2021). Perhaps surprisingly, such contexts include countries like China, India, and Rwanda, all of which receive routinely poor press-freedom scores. Without a full understanding of the mechanisms that lead people to be more or less trusting of news, such results are difficult to square. Moreover, unintuitive findings without explanation open the door to a variety of criticisms, particularly from ill-intentioned actors and political elites who may be incentivized to delegitimize polling methodology, journalism-studies research, or the press writ large (Nielsen, 2023; Poynter, 2023).

As a point of departure, this dissertation also begins from predominant understandings of media trust. Specifically, I assume that audiences extend trust to news media when they expect that “interactions [with these groups] will lead to gains rather than losses” (Strömbäck et al., 2020, p. 141). But before using this definition to interpret levels of trust in news, as most investigations are apt to do, I first step back to examine exactly what individuals expect from

journalists and news organizations in Uganda to begin with. A large share of extant research, for instance, would suggest that audiences expect accuracy, fairness, and facticity from media professionals, or what some have summarized as one's perception of the "believability" of news (Meyer, 1988). However, aspects of Uganda's social and political environment—a restrictive political climate, low press freedom, poor social protections for individuals—diverge from the contexts in which many of the existing conceptualizations and measurement tools were developed (i.e., industrialized middle- to high-income liberal democracies). Thus, it is possible that driving factors of media trust—factors that may help explain unexpectedly high or low levels of trust across contexts—are masked when a presumed conceptual interpretation of media trust is applied across diverse sociopolitical contexts.

To study this phenomenon, the present dissertation comprises a two-phased study that jointly addresses salient factors driving media trust in Uganda as well as the relationship between these factors and existing conceptualizations of trust in news, as developed in the growing corpus of literature on the topic. The first inductive phase of the project explores individuals' expectations of news and news workers, including normative expectations, with the goal of understanding dominant evaluative frameworks ostensibly used to judge trustworthiness in the Ugandan context. The second phase of the project then examines the extent to which these actual and normative expectations correspond with reported levels of media trust using data from a nationally representative telephone survey of Ugandan adults.

The project's key findings underscore the importance of situated sociopolitical realities in shaping audiences' expectations of journalists and media-trust evaluations. For instance, interview findings revealed that individuals may aspire for journalists and news organizations to

fulfill certain functions (e.g., investigate political wrongdoing and provide social support to communities) even while they expect journalists to yield to political influences in a variety of ways, including expectations that media professionals will accept bribes for positive political coverage. Even so, one's tendency to trust news media may not be a simple calculation of expected "gains" and "losses" but rather a reflection of relative trust in news media compared to other social institutions, like government agencies.

Survey results lend additional credence to these findings, illustrating the significant, but not exclusive, impact of situated expectations and individuals' reported levels of media trust. Political perceptions, namely trust in government, were also notable drivers of trust in news. Together, these insights support the proposition that media trust is driven by factors beyond the believability of news in Uganda; they also invite researchers to consider situated sociopolitical realities and incorporate their presence into measurements and interpretations of media trust into the future for a full understanding of these phenomena.

Apart from the specific case of Uganda, this work remains important for at least three reasons. First, despite its many manifestations, media trust has long been associated with a host of social processes thought to facilitate and shape democratic civic engagement. For example, trust in news may impact media use with implications for political knowledge; it may also influence perceptions of mis- and disinformation, leading some to turn to more nefarious sources of information (Damstra et al., 2023; Fink, 2019; Hameleers et al., 2022). Trust in news has also been shown to shape political perceptions more directly, such as one's support for democracy, as well as certain kinds of political participation (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2018; Tsfatì & Cohen, 2005). These outcomes have further normative implications in democratic societies,

where a central function of news media is to “monitor power” by holding elected political officials accountable for their actions (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021).

Secondly, trust in news may have important impacts on social life beyond the parameters associated with liberal democratic societies. For example, news media are thought to play an important role in the preservation and promotion of human rights worldwide, particularly when governments fail to represent these interests (Price & Thompson, 2002). Empirically, citizen access to media and levels of press freedom correlate negatively with human-rights violations, and news coverage of human-rights abuses has been shown to increase the threat and imposition of sanctions (Apodaca, 2007; Peksen et al., 2014). In fact, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights specifically states that citizens have the right to “receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (United Nations, 1948). However, such optimistic outcomes implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, assume that citizens, policymakers, and those working in human-rights organizations use and trust news media to fulfill these normative goals.

Finally, and beyond normative ideals, media trust remains of practical concern to media companies and polling organizations. For news industries, media practitioners are likely to use trust metrics to identify and respond to consumer demands, as suggested by existing research findings that journalists try to do what they perceive audiences want (Coleman et al., 2012). This interest in audiences’ preferences and perceived trustworthiness is compounded by increasingly commercialized funding models under which many media organizations operate. In such environments, trustworthiness may be a prerequisite for a variety of revenue-generating

activities, including content engagement and subscriptions, ultimately impacting the financial viability of news companies (Schranz et al., 2018; Vos et al., 2019).

Similar implications emerge for polling firms and organizations involved in public-opinion research. For example, many clients, from government agencies to pharmaceutical companies to humanitarian aid organizations, rely on polling data to develop and adjust their respective activities. While some of these clients may be interested in substantive levels of media trust in and of themselves, most are more likely to understand levels of media trust as a proxy for how positive (or negative) press coverage may impact their work. After all, good (or bad) press is moot if audiences do not trust the content therein. Thus, overlooking or misunderstanding measures of media trust may impact not only the interpretation of data and their quality but also long-term trust in polling results and survey methodology more broadly if clients feel as though their results lack external validity.

Conceptually, this dissertation joins the audience turn in journalism studies, responding to calls for increased study of audience perceptions of journalism and journalists (Lecheler, 2020; Swart et al., 2022; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). This research goes beyond individual opinions and behaviors to examine shared experiences of news, including public-opinion formation and, more broadly, “how individuals and the groups they belong to make sense of the world” (Lecheler, 2020, p. 289). Such an approach has been notably absent in media-trust scholarship, which has tended to focus primarily on quantifying the crisis of declining trust in news and most often from a media-centric perspective (Fisher et al., 2021; Swart et al., 2022).

The project also develops and advances an innovative methodological approach to the study of trust in news that is responsive to situated realities while remaining integrated with

extant scholarship. In particular, the sequential mixed-method design—in-depth interviews followed by a nationally representative survey—harnesses the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data; semi-structured interviews invite participants to suggest alternative or surprising perceptions of news that may fall outside collective wisdom gleaned in other contexts, while quantitative survey data and analyses are useful in relating such perceptions back to existing trends. Some precedent for this work exists in that similar research designs have been deployed in other cross-national investigations (see, for example, the Reuters Institute’s Trust in News Project), though the present examination is unique in that it is designed to examine—perhaps even challenge—the suitability of prevailing definitions of media trust across contexts.

In conclusion of this introductory chapter, I have argued that trust in news—as both a site of scholarly inquiry and industry metric—should not be ignored. Where questions remain with respect to driving mechanisms or disparate referent categories, there seems to be some agreement that trust in journalism is likely tied to a variety of normative and practical outcomes that make any attempt to circumvent its presence unwise, if not impossible. Instead, these stakes demand deeper engagement with the many manifestations and consequences of media trust, particularly as it is constructed and experienced by audiences. Such situated meanings of media trust are not only critical to understanding perceptions of journalism in any one place but also to interpreting levels of trust globally; in the end, any measure of trust in news is ambiguous, if not meaningless, when treated as an undifferentiated act reflecting the same values across otherwise diverse contexts. This project therefore aims to elucidate the media-trust landscape in a specific context, with the hope that its findings and broader theoretical and

methodological approach may be usefully applied and extended to other contexts into the future.

The structure of this dissertation is as follows: Chapter 2 reviews extant literature on media trust, outlining important empirical and theoretical contributions from across the social sciences as well as areas for further conceptual development. Chapter 3 introduces the project's theoretical framework, drawing on expectancy theory as it has been applied in journalism studies and work on shared experiences of news. This is followed by presentation of the project's guiding research questions. Chapter 4 describes the mixed-method research design, including case selection, interview and survey methodologies, and specific survey measures. Chapter 5 presents findings from the interview-based study and answers RQ1 regarding individuals' expectations of journalists and news organizations in Uganda. Using operationalized measures for salient expectations, Chapter 6 then presents and interprets the results of OLS regressions with reported trust in news media as the outcome variable of interest. Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes key findings from both studies, including inferences that can be gleaned from the combination of qualitative and quantitative data, and concludes with directions for future research and recommendations for media practitioners.

## Chapter 2: Defining and Measuring Media Trust

As an object of study, “trust” has a long history of research across the social sciences. Perhaps unsurprisingly, such interdisciplinary interest has resulted in a barrage of conceptual definitions. In interpersonal contexts, for example, trust has been referred to as an individual’s expectation that the word, promise, or written statement of another can be relied on (Rotter, 1967). In sociology, trust has been described as a “generalized situation-independent expectation” (Bauer & Freitag, 2017, p. 3). Still others have asserted that “no single psychological or social element—besides the notion that trust emerges under conditions of unknown outcomes—is shared by the various conceptualizations” (Robbins, 2016, p. 973).

Media trust, of course, has experienced its own share of conceptual development over time and is usually understood as an individual’s generalized attitudes toward the news media. This is reflected in predominant conceptualizations of media trust, which define the concept as an uncertain relationship between news consumers and the news media in which the trustor (i.e., news consumer) places confidence in a trustee (i.e., news media) under the expectation that “interactions will lead to gains rather than losses” (Strömbäck, 2020, p. 141). Some have narrowed this definition further, describing media trust as “the willingness of the audience to be vulnerable to news content based on the expectation that the media will perform in a satisfactory manner” (Hanitzsch et al., 2018, p. 5). Inherent to both definitions, however, is some level of uncertainty and expectation on behalf of the news consumer (Tsfati et al., 2022).

Media trust is therefore characteristically anticipatory in nature, at least as it is studied most commonly today. This is in contrast to definitions of media credibility, which refer to “clues that people use to evaluate their trust in media” (Strömbäck et al., 2020, p. 141). Said

another way, news consumers do not typically have the tools to fully evaluate or verify information provided by the media and thus must “find clues to legitimate their trust and to compensate for this inevitable risk” (Kohring, 2019, p. 1). Measures of news credibility are typically based on past or current evaluation of a particular object, such as when individuals are asked about the credibility of a specific news item or piece of information (Prochazka & Schweiger, 2019). Credibility therefore represents an important “clue” that consumers use to justify trust in news media even while it may not be the only consideration. Still, this helps to explain why news credibility is so often discussed interchangeably with media trust, both colloquially and within research on these topics. The present literature review does not escape this issue, where examinations of both news credibility and media trust have contributed to contemporary understandings of trust in news.

Despite their subtle differences, both credibility and trust are considered multidimensional constructs by most accounts (Strömbäck et al., 2020). While specific factor groups vary, prevailing conceptualizations privilege what Meyer (1988) calls the “believability” dimension of news credibility. In this context, believability is broadly concerned with issues of fairness, bias, completeness, and accuracy. This is reflected in popular measurement tools, including the News Credibility Scale’s 12-item index (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986) as well as Meyer’s (1988) News Credibility Index, consisting of a five-item index, both of which are often used to assess levels of media trust.

Believability is conceptually distinct from a second recognized dimension of credibility in media-trust studies, identified by some as “social affiliation” (Meyer, 1988) or “social concerns” (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Social considerations refer to audiences’ perceptions that news

media and/or news workers contribute to societal well-being, collective morality, efforts toward avoiding sensationalism, or “maintaining harmony and leadership status within a community” (Meyer, 1988, p. 567). While these considerations grouped together in early studies, later cross-validation found a social-concerns factor to be unreliable (West, 1994). Given this finding and early predominance of the “believability” dimension of credibility—and, by extension, trust in news—social considerations are often overlooked across discussions in this sub-area, even while interdisciplinary understandings of trust include more affective sentiments and evaluations.

Specifically, scholarship out of sociology and organizational studies cast trust as both a cognitive and affective outcome on behalf of the trustor (Legood et al., 2022; Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Specifically, cognition-based trust describes an evaluation process based on reason and past experience, whereas affect-based trust is rooted in emotional attachment or a sense of “mutual care and concern” (Legood et al., 2022, p. 2). In other words, an individual’s inclination to trust—or not—may reflect both rational and concerted assessment as well as “gut checks” or more social reactions, which have generally received less attention in media-trust research. Thus, and apart from a second but less common conceptual approach in media-trust studies that equates media trust with trust in journalists’ selectivity and presentation of topics (Kohring & Mattes, 2007), what has followed are decades of media-trust scholarship that by and large operationalize media trust as an indexed measure of believability.

This matters because while there seems to be agreement that media trust is multidimensional and that issues like fairness and accuracy are important, it is not clear that these are the only—or in some contexts, even the most important—considerations. Notably,

the samples used to conduct the foundational studies detailed above, which again span examinations of both credibility and trust, come exclusively from U.S. contexts and primarily from university campuses. In many ways, these groups are unique with respect to their basic social, political, and cultural orientations toward the world. Thus, it is possible, if not likely, that the evaluative criteria by which they judge trust in news is based on driving values that differ from other contexts, which are necessarily shaped by their own social, political, and cultural environments.

Such a perspective highlights the limits of our understanding of media trust to date. While the widely accepted definition posited above—media trust as derived from audience expectations that engaging with news media will lead to more positive, rather than negative, outcomes—is sufficiently broad, it is not necessarily meaningful in and of itself. Instead, understanding and responding to levels of media trust across diverse contexts demands deeper understanding of the precise “gains” and “losses” presumed by individuals. The project therefore assumes that trust is a differentiated act in which driving factors of media trust may be more or less salient across contexts and situations, therefore leaving room for different definitions and influential factors to emerge (O’Neill, 2002).

The suitability of media-trust measures and conceptualizations to travel across contexts is increasingly important to consider for practitioners and scholars alike. First, doing so challenges media-centrist assumptions that industry-specific changes to address low levels of audience trust in journalism are alone sufficient and instead redirects attention to the social environments in which audiences experience news. Furthermore, as interest in the relationship between media and democracy grows, particularly in many low- and middle-income countries,

efforts to understand the attitudes of citizens residing in these areas are inherently limited if researchers and practitioners do not have a full picture of the concepts they are measuring. Thus, this study theoretically assumes that social and political concerns are not only important, but critical, to understanding perceptions of media in Uganda as a case study, with implications for understanding conceptual dimensions and antecedents of media trust in this context and beyond.

## **2.1 Antecedents of media trust**

Definitional and measurement issues notwithstanding, what shapes how individuals evaluate the news? Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to account for all factors that may shape how individuals gauge trust in news media, existing literature identifies several antecedents that are particularly important in guiding these processes. These include attributes of individual audience members, characteristics of the message source, and interpersonal and socio-cultural determinants.

**2.1.1 Individual-level attributes.** Beginning with attributes of individual audience members, numerous individual-level factors are likely to impact trust evaluations. These include basic socio-demographics, like age or education, as well as one's media-use habits and perceptions of politics. Regarding the latter, political ideology has received the lion's share of scholarly attention with respect to its associations with media trust. Political ideology refers to a set of beliefs that forms the basis of how an individual views the world, including how it is and should be structured (Jost et al., 2009). In the context of media trust, work examining the influence of political ideology primarily addresses direction of affect, as work on the hostile

media phenomenon most aptly demonstrates. The hostile media phenomenon refers to the tendency of individuals with strong preexisting attitudes about an issue to perceive media coverage as biased against their side (Vallone et al., 1985).

Beyond simply the direction of affect, other important considerations related to political ideology include intensity of affect and ideological involvement, or the extent to which individuals perceive they are affected by some issue (Stamm & Dube, 1994). In an experimental study, intensity of level of partisanship was shown to moderate perceptions of media bias, with highly partisan participants perceiving less bias in news with which they were predisposed to agree (Feldman et al., 2017). Regarding political involvement, perceptions of media distrust may be associated with both high- and low-involvement, suggesting a curvilinear relationship between political ideology and media trust (Gunther, 1988). In this case, people high in ideological involvement are likely to distrust a large range of information that diverges from their own opinions, while those with low ideological involvement may be more skeptical out of general disinterest and preoccupation with source aesthetics rather than the source message.

Other important individual-level factors that have arguably received relatively less research, but may be equally important in shaping levels of trust, include one's interest in politics or media use. Research on the relationship between media use and trust in news, for instance, typically finds positive correlations between media use and media trust (Hopmann et al., 2015; Schranz et al., 2018). In other words, as individuals consume more news media, they also tend to report higher trust in information provided across both mainstream and alternative sources (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019). On the other hand, political interest has been shown to be positively associated (Lee, 2010; Strömbäck et al., 2013) as well as not associated with media

trust (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). Such results may be stratified by age group, with political interest being positively associated with media trust in younger individuals but not associated in older generations (Brosius et al., 2022).

To this point, media trust levels may also vary by basic socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and education, and place of residence. For instance, age predicted the perceived credibility of television and internet news among American students, with younger students rating these as more credible than older students, presumably resulting from more personal experience with those technologies (Bucy, 2003). Some studies find males to be more skeptical of media than females (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014), though this is not always the case (Cassidy, 2007; Yamamoto & Nah, 2018). Education, on the other hand, tends to be negatively correlated to media trust, typically attributed to greater awareness of public affairs and media deficiencies (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014; Xu, 2013; Yamamoto & Nah, 2018). Finally, individuals residing in homogeneous communities—characteristic of small, rural areas—report higher perceptions of newspaper credibility than those in larger communities, perhaps explained by the fact that more pluralistic groups experience a wider range of social phenomena and thereby perceive more discrepancies between media depictions and their own encounters (Yamamoto & Nah, 2018). Together, the variables represent important individual-level considerations in the study of media trust.

**2.1.2. Source characteristics.** In addition to attributes of individual audience members, preconceived attitudes toward a news information provider may shape perceptions of credibility irrespective of the informational content provided therein. This can include biased perceptions of particular media outlets or even a news medium, such as television. While

findings suggest that evaluations of message quality are distinct from evaluations of the news outlet itself (Austin & Dong, 1994), especially with respect to low-involvement issues (Slater & Rouner, 1996), other scholarship suggests that type of medium may have a significant impact on trust evaluations. For example, many studies find television to be rated higher in perceived credibility compared to other medium types. This theoretically occurs because the added visual element of television allows viewers to see elements of news events for themselves (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). This is corroborated, in part, by similar investigations that find the use of television to be associated with more positive perceptions in general (Moy & Pfau, 2000). Still, other studies find that individuals rate print news as more credible than television, perhaps as a result of the merging of entertainment and television news programming (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Kioussis, 2001).

In addition to medium, news story topic may also shape reported levels of trust. For example, individuals' personal experiences with different topics are likely to differ, and dissonance between perceived events and how news media depict these same topics have been shown to predict trust evaluations (Livio & Cohen, 2018; Palmer, 2017). Additionally, some topics are more politically divisive than others, therefore impacting media-trust levels. This was indeed the case in a survey of Swedish adults, in which more politicized topics in that context (e.g., immigration and crime) were deemed less trustworthy than other topics, particularly among politically interested respondents (Tsfati et al., 2022). A nationally representative survey of Americans produced similar results, namely that news media trust varied depending on whether respondents were seeking news about politics versus topics related to lifestyle or weather (American Press Institute, 2016).

Beyond medium and topic, a third consideration includes the organizational structure of media outlets. For example, survey research suggests that local news organizations (e.g., smaller, community-oriented outlets) attract higher levels of trust than news outlets in general (Gallup, 2019). Similarly, some have suggested that consumers may be more trusting of non-profit news organizations, as opposed to commercial outlets, which generally favor official voices and are at times perceived to prioritize revenue at the expense of community interests (Konieczna & Robinson, 2014). Such considerations extend to ownership structure, such as whether information providers are private or state-operated organizations, particularly in contexts beyond the United States where state-sponsored outlets are relatively commonplace. For instance, data from focus groups in Rwanda reveal that individuals tend to have higher trust in state-run news media compared to private outlets (McIntyre & Sobel Cohen, 2021). According to Afrobarometer survey data, similar realities emerge across Africa more broadly, though these results were moderated by levels of press freedom (Moehler & Singh, 2011). Data collected by the World Values Survey further substantiate these findings in that levels of democracy were found to moderate trust in public versus private media in a sample of 44 countries (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014).

One possible explanation for these divergent findings across medium types and ownership is that individuals hold different evaluative criteria for different types of sources. For example, research suggests that individuals are more likely to evaluate televised news with a focus on individual broadcasters, while newspapers are evaluated as organizational units (Newhagen & Nass, 1989). Thus, asking about trust in both television and print in the same frame of reference may be confounding evaluation processes, asking respondents to essentially

choose between differential criteria. Moreover, these implications extend to question-order effects, whereby individuals may be primed to activate some criteria before and above others, thus potentially leading to contradictory findings in otherwise similar study designs. These findings support those who advocate for a multi-dimensional conception of media source credibility, such as measuring source competence, character, and sociability (McCroskey & Jenson, 1975).

**2.1.3 Sociotropic, interpersonal, and cultural determinants.** Beyond studies that attempt to understand media trust vis-à-vis individual-level attributes or source characteristics, sociotropic, interpersonal, and cultural determinants may also shape how individuals evaluate news media. Examples of such foci include perceptions of the public opinion climate and one's group status, personal experience with the news industry and news workers, and sociopolitical context. With respect to sociotropic influences, or the extent to which one is invested in relationships or the opinions of others, perceptions of public opinion can have indirect effects on evaluations of media bias. Responses to an online survey, for example, demonstrated that individuals attributed less bias to news stories when they perceived public attitudes matched their own views, particularly when individuals were highly involved (Lee, 2012).

News audiences may also judge news content relative to perceived public opinion when extreme attitudes are involved. Results from an online experiment revealed that participants attributed more credibility to news content that was physically adjacent to ideologically extreme or uncivil content (e.g., a particularly opinionated blog post or uncivil comment section). Results suggested a cognitive link between news content and the proximate uncivil commentary, from which participants judged the news content more credible as the perceived

credibility of public commentary decreased (Thorson et al., 2010). Such findings suggest that perceptions of public opinion may moderate hostile media perceptions.

Likewise, interpersonal associations and perceptions of like-mindedness may also qualify perceptions of media trust. More specifically, partisans on both sides of the abortion debate perceived identical news articles to be biased, though these effects were stronger the more individuals identified with their in-group and believed the status of their group to be low (Hartmann & Tanis, 2013). Closer, more personal interactions suggest similar effects, including a correlation between perceptions of media bias and conversations with ideologically like-minded individuals (Eveland & Shah, 2003; Kioussis, 2001). This is consistent with longitudinal survey data in which trust scores of online and offline social contacts predicted respondents' media trust, especially when social contacts interacted frequently (Ognyanova, 2019).

Related to interpersonal factors, individuals' personal experiences with the news industry and news workers may influence their levels of media trust. Though there is relatively less empirical research in this domain, some have argued for such an "emotional turn" in journalism studies, which foregrounds audiences' affective evaluations of the news industry to better understand what constitutes an "intimate and trustful relationship with the audience" (Lecheler, 2002, p. 287). For example, a survey of Israeli adults revealed that the strongest predictor of media trust, operationalized as trust in journalists, was perceived correspondence between news reports and respondents' direct personal experience with those same news events (Livio & Cohen, 2018). In other words, levels of media trust declined when respondents perceived news reports to inaccurately reflect events they witnessed personally. This would

suggest that negative experiences with the news industry, broadly defined, may have negative repercussions for media trust beyond the isolated incident.

Regarding personal experiences with journalists, existing literature suggests that audiences tend to accept and reject messages based on source credibility (Slater & Rouner, 1996) and that perceived trust violations can harm trust seriously and sometimes irreparably, as demonstrated by research on interpersonal trust (Schweitzer et al., 2006; Slovic, 1993). It then follows logically that one may judge news more positively when it is produced by an individual that one views positively. Moreover, and in the context of media-trust research, findings reveal that individuals report higher trust in journalists, news items, and news organizations when respondents are provided information about the journalist, such as a photo and explanation for why they covered the story (Johnson & St. John III, 2021). In some cases, audiences are even willing to overlook errors if they feel that journalists care (Palmer, 2017). Such findings further demonstrate that personal experiences with news workers and news media more generally, or perhaps even secondhand experiences through close others, may shape individuals' (dis)trust in the news industry and its products.

Finally, the broader sociopolitical and cultural environment may shape individuals' media-trust evaluations. While numerous social, political, and cultural forces exist and differ across contexts, Hofstede's cultural dimension theory (2010) advances six key dimensions by which national cultures can be distinct. Of particular interest to the present study's focus on social and political influences is the notion of collectivism. As a societal characteristic, collectivism refers to the "degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups" (Hofstede, 2010, p. 11). Collectivism is often discussed in relation to its opposite, individualism,

in which ties between individuals are loose, tasks prevail over relationships, and caretaking beyond oneself and immediate family is neither expected nor necessarily rewarded.

Decades of research out of communication-adjacent disciplines like cross-cultural psychology and organizational science have produced mixed results with respect to the relationship between collectivism and trust. Some studies find that collectivist cultures have lower propensity for interpersonal and organizational trust than individualist cultures, given their paramount focus on loyalty and belonging to one's in-group (van Hoorn, 2015). Other investigations find the best predictors of trust to be social norms and societal sanctioning, two phenomena typically associated closely with collectivism (Gelfand et al., 2006). A third competing perspective suggests that collectivism and individualism can each have their own distinct positive effects on trust, depending on the cognitive processes that individuals use to construct these evaluations (Doney et al., 1998). While such cultural approaches are not commonly applied to media-trust research, the impact of cultural context is nonetheless important to consider, particularly as most media-trust research has historically been conducted in more individualist cultural contexts, such as the United States and countries in Western Europe.

Beyond the individualist-collectivist cultural dichotomy, media-trust evaluations may also be shaped by state-press relations and a society's security situation more broadly. With respect to the latter, news media are often considered the primary facilitator of information between political leaders and audiences, and this function becomes ever more important during periods of political conflict or violence (Baum & Zhukov, 2019). This is supported by studies suggesting that individuals turn to traditional media for educational purposes during

times of crisis (Austin et al., 2012). Connecting this to media trust, surveys fielded in Turkey indeed revealed that exposure to violence correlated with citizens' trust in news (Dal et al., 2022).

Similarly, state-press relations—and levels of press freedom, in particular—have been shown to correlate with individual-level measures of media trust. In some cases, press freedom serves as a moderator for media trust extended under specific circumstances, such as confidence in public versus private outlets (e.g., Moehler & Singh, 2011) or varying levels of trust based on high versus low government ownership in media markets (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). In other cases, media credibility has been shown to correlate positively with press freedom (e.g., Bucy et al., 2014), including positive perceptions of press freedom (Ahmed, 2021). While some studies find no correlation between press freedom and media trust (e.g., Johnson & Fahmy, 2008), the association between the two, as well as social and political forces more generally, remain important considerations when working to understand individual levels of media trust.

## **2.2 Journalism and media trust in East African countries**

In the case of East Africa, media trust remains a relatively underexplored topic. However, what research does exist reinforces the aforementioned importance of social and political factors in shaping perceptions of news media. More specifically, the African media landscape reflects—to varying degrees by country—legacies of European colonialism and 21st-century independence. Colonization in the early 20th century primed modern press systems in the region as tools for authoritarian control, with many countries opting to follow European

examples in establishing state monopolies over media broadcasting following independence (Ochilo, 1993). Today, while most African countries now host myriad news sources, including diverse private media markets (Moehler & Singh, 2011), press freedom remains somewhat limited due to extralegal intimidation practices and forms of soft censorship (Kamau, 2018; Mukhongo, 2015). Moreover, and like many other areas of the world, media accountability is increasingly hampered by commercial values and logics (Obuya, 2021). In such instances, lengthy investigative reporting in the public interest is disincentivized given its inherent costs, while opportunities to drive revenue are deemed paramount, therefore threatening public confidence in news industries.

It is perhaps unsurprising then that a number of media-trust studies conducted in African contexts have focused on relative differences in trust between public and private media. For instance, analysis of Afrobarometer data revealed that citizens across sixteen African democracies held higher levels of trust in government-owned broadcast media than private outlets, this conditioned on levels of press freedom and corruption (Moehler & Singh, 2011). Findings from Rwanda corroborate this regional trend, where focus group participants expressed strong trust in media houses that are government-run, particularly as they were associated with “government regulation, ownership structure, and commitment to nation building” (McIntyre & Sobel Cohen, 2021, p. 820). Some evidence suggests that this trending confidence in government media may vary, however, under tense political strife or conflict conditions (Kalyango & Vultee, 2012).

In addition to examining public versus private outlets, others have examined media trust in African countries alongside new media and misinformation. In particular, a survey study of

citizens in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa found a significant negative relationship between trust in media and perceived exposure to disinformation, suggesting that increases in “fake news” and social media use may affect trust in African audiences (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019). Furthermore, amid heightened mis/disinformation online, research finds that individuals are apt to engage in media literacy behaviors and trust “mainstream” news media over other information sources, as found in the Kenyan context (Tully, 2022). Such findings give credence to proponents of media dependency theory, or the idea that news media become increasingly important to individuals the more that they rely on news to fulfill specific needs (Jung, 2017), and further illustrate how conflictual environments, in this case environments characterized by nefarious disinformation, can shape trust evaluations.

Realities appear similar in the specific case of Uganda, though certainly not without particularities. For instance, Ugandan media operate in a unique political environment, in which the 1995 Constitutional guarantees freedom of the press while persistent political threats and intermittent media shutdowns endure (Maractho, 2015). Despite these challenges to a free and fair press, journalists in Uganda reportedly remain committed to norms and role conceptions associated with informing the public, investigating official claims, elevating citizen voices, and setting the political agenda (Mwesige, 2004). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that a narrow majority of Ugandan citizens likewise believe that the media are professional, reliable and accurate, and tell the truth even when it upsets powerful people (Kasozi, 2020).

Findings from these investigations and others detailed above clarify objects of trust (e.g., public versus private outlets) as well as important antecedents of trust (e.g., exposure to online disinformation) in specific African contexts. However, the nature of trust and motivating

factors, in particular, remain undertheorized in African societies and in many societies beyond North America and Europe. Furthermore, undergirding existing scholarship in this space is the implicit assumption that believability remains the paramount consideration in media-trust evaluations. Instead, it is reasonable to assume and necessary to consider that the sociopolitical contexts in which prevailing understandings of media trust have developed (i.e., largely Western, Euro-American populations) are distinctive. After all, and as others have argued, “trust is part of the culture of a polity, not simply a citizen’s judgment on how well news media are doing” (McIntyre & Sobel Cohen, 2021). In concert with this perspective, the present investigation examines the factors driving media trust in Uganda, with potential implications for how trust in news is understood beyond so-called WEIRD (i.e., Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) countries more broadly (Henrich et al., 2010).

Thus, the project explores how media trust is conceptualized by individuals, with particular attention paid to social and political determinants, as well as how these conceptualizations relate to other known antecedents of media trust, such as source characteristics and individual attributes. This approach joins existing efforts to complicate an academic tendency that examines correlates and outcomes of media trust without necessarily explicating how trust is understood or motivated by situated audiences. This charge has been led by scholars who examine media trust beyond the accuracy of news reports to include other factors like the role of political (Tsfati & Ariely, 2014), sociotechnical (Aharoni et al., 2022), and professional environments (Usher, 2017) in shaping trust evaluations.

Building on this existing work, this project is therefore concerned with not only the relative importance of sociopolitical context in shaping levels of media trust, but also how those

same sociopolitical environments relate to basic definitions and salient dimensions of trust in news. Theoretically, this research is supported by two bodies of literature that together center individuals' expectations of news media, a core component of existing media-trust definitions, while tying these individual-level perceptions to shared experiences of news within populations. These two areas of scholarship—expectancy theory in journalism studies and work on cultures of news consumption—are further explicated and integrated in the subsequent chapter.

### Chapter 3: Expectations of Journalism and Shared Experiences of News

As presented in the preceding chapter, individual-level expectations serve as the cornerstone for prevailing definitions of trust, including trust in news. Accordingly, nearly all existing research on the topic begins from a similar, if not shared, conceptualization of media trust—the expectation that engaging with news will lead to more gains than losses—and extends forward to studying relevant antecedents and outcomes. While such an approach is generally advantageous for theory building and parsimony within the sub-area, it also masks a fundamental question undergirding all associated findings, particularly across diverse populations. Namely, what exactly *do* news consumers expect from journalists and journalism?

In other words, to fully understand trust in news in any one context, one must first ascertain precisely what is (or isn't) expected of journalists and news organizations as well as how situated audiences ultimately weigh these expected “gains” and “losses” when constructing their personal trust evaluations. After all, misunderstanding individuals' expectations of news has the potential to render any substantive measure of media trust meaningless, insofar as researchers may understand *how much* people trust the news without knowing what these same individuals actually trust the journalism and journalists to do.

The following chapter therefore reviews and advances extant theorizing in journalism expectancy research. Drawing on a cultures-of-news consumption perspective, I argue that individuals' expectations of journalists and journalism—and, by extension, reported levels of media trust—can be examined alongside distinct sociopolitical forces and shared experiences of news across diverse societies. The chapter concludes by applying this lens to the Ugandan case study and introduces the project's principal research questions.

### 3.1 Expectations of journalism and journalists

Expectations refer to “stable patterns of anticipated behavior” (Wilhelm et al., 2021, p. 1011) and are shaped by a range of factors. These may include the communication context (e.g., time of day), relationships between individuals (e.g., coworkers versus family members), and characteristics of the communicator themselves, such as aspects of personality (Burgoon, 1993; Burgoon & Walther, 1990). When direct experience or individual-level information is scarce, expectations may also develop out of social norms or group attributes, such as those associated with cultural context or gender (Burgoon, 1995).

As an object of study, expectations have perhaps been most thoroughly explored through a social-psychological lens and in the context of role theory. Role theory is the study of “behaviors that are characteristic of persons within contexts,” including processes that are thought to produce or explain such behaviors (Biddle, 1979, p. 4). One explanation for how roles are induced, for instance, is through the mutual sharing of behavioral expectations. Even within this realm, however, expectations can be descriptive, prescriptive, or cathectic (Biddle, 1979). Whereas descriptive expectations refer to opinions, cognitions, or beliefs (e.g., journalists are good people), prescriptive expectations convey norms or requests (e.g., journalists should tell the truth) and cathectic expectations communicate preferences, evaluations, or feelings (e.g., I like when journalists are transparent). In other words, if descriptive expectations refer to one’s expectation of how something *is* done, prescriptive expectations refer to how it *should* be done, and cathectic expectations indicate how one *feels* about how it is or should be done.

To date, much of the work on expectations of journalism and journalists has developed out of the adjacent field of interpersonal communication and, in particular, research on expectancy violation theory. According to expectation violation theory, one's expectations are violated when another individual acts in a way that is not anticipated or typical (Levine et al., 2000). Research on expectancy violation also accounts for expectation confirmations, or incidents in which expectations are confirmed, and does not presuppose the outcomes of either process. Said another way, both expectancy violations and confirmations can lead to either negative or positive outcomes, such as increased (or decreased) likability, credibility, or persuasion (Burgoon et al., 2016). In the context of journalism, for example, expectancy violation theory has been used to explore audiences' perceptions of journalists' interactions on social media (Lee, 2015). Some call for increased use of this perspective when examining journalist-audience relationships (Wilhelm et al., 2021).

Beyond expectancy violation theory, however, there is also broader examination of expectations in journalism-studies research. For example, Wilhelm and Detel (2023) propose a taxonomy for journalism expectancy research in which studies differ with respect to seven related concepts. These include considerations such as the perspective of expectation (e.g., journalist's expectation versus consumer's expectation), the object of expectation (e.g., expectation of journalists versus expectation of news content), as well as the expectation mode (e.g., descriptive versus prescribe expectations). The taxonomy responds in part to what the authors perceived as disorder in journalism-expectancy research, including a lack of clarity around whether expectations referred to actors' norms, experiences, or needs. They therefore

also distinguish between norm-based expectations and expectations that develop out of individual experiences (Wilhelm & Detel, 2023).

With respect to normative expectations of journalism, research in this area primarily examines how audiences perceive “the value of journalists and journalism in society” (Banjac & Hanusch, 2022, p. 707). Austrian focus groups, for instance, revealed that audience members expected journalists to adhere to established democratic journalistic values, such as relying on facts and verifiable sources, producing in-depth texts, and acting autonomously, objectively, and with detachment (Banjac & Hanusch, 2022). Research conducted in Amsterdam produced similar findings, in which audiences expected local television stations to foster social integration, ensure representation of residents, and create civic memory, among other normative roles (Costera Meijer, 2010).

Journalism expectancy research also compares and contrasts audience members’ expectations with journalists’ perceptions of audience expectations. For example, a study of a German television newscast found that that journalists and audience members generally held shared expectations of journalists’ roles as disseminators of facts, but these groups differed in their expectations with respect to users’ motivations to engage with online content (Heise et al., 2014). Other work has found that audiences expect journalists to take consumer interests to heart, while journalists put more emphasis on factual reporting (Tsfati et al., 2006). Finally, a smaller sub-set of research compares news consumers’ expectations of professional journalists versus nonprofessional citizen journalists or content creators, with results suggesting that professional journalists are expected to adhere to more traditional roles (Banjac & Hanusch, 2022; Nah & Chung, 2011).

Despite this growing corpus of journalism expectancy research, particularly around normative expectations, “we know surprisingly little about what the audience actually expects” of news media (Riedl & Eberl, 2022, p. 1683). Moreover, even less work seeks to explain such expectations. From what does exist, individuals’ expectations of journalism may be shaped by sociodemographic indicators, as demonstrated through a survey of Austrian adults in which older and more educated audience members expected more traditional watchdog and political reporting (Riedl & Eberl, 2022). Similarly, focus groups in South Africa revealed that individuals with intersectional and minoritized identities (based on race, class, gender, etc.) held expectations that fell outside of conventional findings from journalism expectancy research, including expectations related to inaccessibility and unaffordability of news (Banjac, 2022).

One might reasonably wonder how or why individual expectations of journalists and journalism (normative or experience-based) are relevant beyond simple personal preferences. The reasons are twofold. At the more gestalt level, a discursive-institutionalist perspective suggests that understanding audience members’ expectations of journalism is germane to understanding the state of journalism more broadly. More specifically, journalism “exists because we talk about it” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, p. 129) and is therefore shaped in part by how news consumers define and discuss the field. Aligned with this view, news audiences have been called an “institutional force” (Craft et al., 2016, p. 680) in which consumers mold and construct the essence of journalism through public discourse on the topic.

Secondly, and from a more pragmatic angle, existing research demonstrates that journalists try to do what they perceive audiences want (Coleman et al., 2012). Thus, understanding audiences’ expectations helps to contextualize journalistic decision-making and

strategies taken by news organizations to obtain public legitimacy. This is particularly noteworthy given the relationship between audience approval and revenue, making audience expectations a fundamental dimension of many news organizations' economic viability (Vos et al., 2019). This is, of course, closely connected to other attitudes toward news media, such as media trust, the primary conceptual interest of this project.

Following from this, understanding the nature of audience expectations, how they are shaped, and when they are violated are all essential dimensions of prevailing conceptualizations of trust in news. However, and as demonstrated above, much of the existing research in this area has stopped short of investigating what actually shapes expectations, let alone how shared contextual factors (as opposed to, say, individual demographics) contribute to these processes (but see Riedl & Eberl, 2022). Thus, the following section integrates a cultures-of-news-consumption perspective to advance journalism expectancy research—and work on media trust, by extension—to include expectations shaped by characteristics of a shared sociopolitical environment.

### **3.2 Cultures of news consumption**

Given the project's conceptual interest in the relationship between individual-level perceptions (i.e., expectations, media trust) and sociopolitical context, its theoretical framework must contend with the challenges associated with connecting individual-level outcomes with group-level phenomena. One lens through which to examine the relationship between individual-level perceptions and sociopolitical factors is with what Toff and Kalogeropoulos (2020) call "cultures of news consumption" or "group-level social, cultural, or

political forces that pertain to the supply of available media choices, perceptions about their accuracy and utility, as well as norms about the value of news consumption as a civic duty” (p. 370). In contrast to much of the existing media-trust literature, which tends to oscillate between relative influence of audience attributes and the influence of journalistic practice in constructing trust evaluations, a culture-of-news-consumptions perspective examines how group-level forces manifest at the individual level. In other words, it begins with an assumption that characteristics of the social environment guide how individuals experience and perceive the news media as much, and in some cases perhaps more, than predisposed individual attributes or characteristics of the news content itself. Examples of such forces include levels of press freedom, political freedom, political culture, news socialization, or other cultural norms.

Notably, the project’s use of a cultures-of-news-consumption perspective is not to paint over or ignore individual-level differences in perceptions of news. On the contrary, this theoretical orientation takes seriously the premise that individual-level variation exists and proposes such variation may be patterned based on shared factors that characterize a given group, such as those associated with different political or civic cultures (Almond & Verba, 1963). Moreover, I assume that perceptions of news inevitably vary based on individual attributes, such as age or education, but that these are insufficient in explaining perceptions of journalists and journalism across contexts. Instead, there are also social and political forces, which are ostensibly felt by entire populations to different degrees, that shape individuals’ relationships to news media. For purposes of this study, the purchase power of a cultures-of-news-consumption perspective is therefore that it directs attention from seemingly isolated

individual attributes (e.g., media use, age, political identity) to how perceptions of larger group-level forces, such as press freedom or political culture, shape media-trust evaluations.

Operationally, group-level forces can be linked to individual attitudes in several ways, including through reported media folk theories and perceptions of journalistic roles. Regarding the former, media folk theories refer to “culturally available symbolic resources that people use to make sense of news consumption practices” (Pasitselska, 2022, p. 181). In other words, folk theories allow individuals to narrate their experience with and generate meaning from otherwise complex and seemingly abstract institutions like the news media. As part of these processes, audiences form their ideas about the media in part based on how they perceive those around them to understand the media, making social context a key factor in individuals’ information orientation. Investigations of media folk theories have examined how individuals perceive their own news consumption (Toff & Nielsen, 2018), the role of journalism within communities (Nielsen, 2016), and even the use of algorithms in news making (Siles et al., 2020; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). In the specific context of journalism, folk theories refer to the “beliefs and understandings about how journalism does and should work” (Palmer, 2017, p. 5). Thus, folk theories include individual narrations of grounded experiences of news media as well as normative expectations, or opinions about how news ought to operate in society.

Beyond media folk theories, the influence of social context may also be revealed in how individuals perceive the normative role(s) of journalists. A large corpus of literature examines journalistic role conceptions, or how journalists perceive and make meaning from their own contributions to society (Hanitzsch et al, 2019; Weaver & Willnat, 2012). Well-known typologies include roles like journalists as disseminators of information, adversaries to power, interpreters

of events, and mobilizers of populist publics (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986) with disseminator, analyst, and watchdog roles most highly valued outside of the United States (Weaver & Willnat, 2012). As previously described, a subset of work in this area has also begun to compare perceptions of journalistic roles held by media professionals compared to those held by audiences, deriving from the idea that audiences can be characterized by “certain expectations and conceptions of what functions journalism and its practitioners should fulfill” (Loosen et al., 2020, p. 1745). Therefore, how individuals describe normative journalistic roles reflects, in part, the criteria by which news and news workers may be deemed credible and ultimately provides clues as to larger cultures of news consumption.

Empirically, scholars have harnessed a cultures-of-news-consumption framework to examine a range of phenomena in which social context shapes individual perceptions or behavior. Examples include quantitative investigations of how press freedom and political freedom influence individuals’ reported news avoidance (Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020) as well as qualitative explorations of media folk theories amid conflict in Ukraine (Pasitselska, 2022). In both examples, and other studies adopting similar approaches, group-level sociopolitical contextual factors are used as a lens through which to examine various individual-level perceptions of news.

The current investigation builds on this previous work by expanding its conceptual framework to understand expectations of journalism and perceptions of media trust. Within this theoretical perspective, one would expect individuals within a shared sociopolitical environment to have shared expectations of journalism and ultimately some common evaluative criteria by which to judge media trustworthiness. The project advances theorizing in

this area by extending its framework to societies characterized by collectivist worldviews and strong-state political environments, using Uganda as a case study.

### **3.3 Cultures of news consumption: Uganda as a case study**

Within work on cultures of news consumption, a core theoretical assumption is that social and political context play some role in perceptions of news everywhere. However, relatively less work has explored how cultures of news consumption operate in culturally collectivist, low-income, strong-state political environments. There is reason to believe that experiences of news—and ultimately expectations of journalism and media trust—would differ in notable ways from European and North American cases.

Beginning with collectivist cultural values, many societies in sub-Saharan Africa share a broad cultural orientation toward *ubuntuism*, a term derived from several Bantu Nguni languages, which promotes communal values and social affiliation. As others have argued, these “contingent social relationships and worldviews... permeate the context in which journalism is practiced” (Mabweazara, 2018). In other words, *ubuntu* philosophy would suggest that cultures of news consumption in the region, including perceptions of credibility and trust, are necessarily shaped by a public perception of community well-being “as a vital, if not essential, source for media norms” (Skjerdal, 2012, p. 645). This has implications both for journalism practice (e.g., the extent to which journalists prioritize community harmony and unity in reporting) as well as professional norms (e.g., news may be produced by more than professionally trained journalists based instead on social affiliation or proximity).

Beyond sub-Saharan Africa, *ubuntu* philosophy is consistent with popular sociological notions of collectivism (Malunga, 2009). Collectivism is said to characterize societies in which “people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 225). In contrast, those residing in individualist societies tend to have loose social ties and self-cognitions that refer to themselves as autonomous and distinct from any particular social milieu (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Increasingly, work on the individualist-collectivist spectrum is studied at the individual level, at which point it becomes commonly examined as a dimension of personality as opposed to society as a whole (Hofstede, 2011). However, insights from Moral Foundations Theory (MFT), as well as decades of social science research, suggest that individuals’ perceptions and moral values are shaped during development within particular cultures (Graham et al., 2018). It is therefore possible, if not likely, based on a cultures-of-news-consumption perspective that audiences’ expectations of news may well be shaped by these same social tendencies.

Building on this and given existing research to suggest that news media tend to be evaluated alongside other social institutions, the present study considers several other social and political factors that may be especially important to how individuals construct their expectations of journalism and media trust evaluations in Uganda. For example, Uganda’s political landscape is overwhelmingly controlled by current President Yoweri Museveni’s National Resistance Movement (NRM) party, which has retained power for more than three decades. Though Uganda has technically held a series of elections since Museveni’s tenure began in 1986, domestic and international observers alike insist they have not been fully free nor fair (Abrahamsen & Bareebe, 2021; Freedom House, 2024). These realities correspond to

increasing widespread public political dissatisfaction and disengagement Uganda in recent decades (Afrobarometer, 2021b).

Moreover, neoliberal reform policies initiated by Uganda's central government in the 1990s under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank have led to large inequalities in social services and social security across the country (Nystrad & Tamm, 2018). Recent data suggest that that about 20 percent of Ugandans live below the national poverty line and about 40 percent of the population lives on less than \$2.15 USD per day (World Bank, 2019). These social conditions are compounded by what some characterize as political clientelism, in which political officials allocate material resources to select groups of constituents in return for political support (Khisa, 2024; Stokes, 2013). This state of political affairs perhaps unsurprisingly exists alongside low levels of press freedom, which Uganda citizens likewise perceive with just 23% reporting news media as "completely free" (Afrobarometer, 2023). Again, one could reasonably assume that Ugandans' expectations of and experiences with news media may be influenced by these phenomena.

Of course, perceptions of the media are not only shaped by sociopolitical context, and the assertion that social context shapes individuals' perceptions of news is not necessarily new. Instead, this project's primary contribution is toward better understanding the ways in which sociopolitical forces shape individuals' basic definitions of media trust and the factors driving these evaluations. Such findings are made more meaningful when explored vis-a-vis other common individual- and content-level considerations in trust-evaluation processes. Thus, this project examines not only the most important factors shaping media trust in Uganda but also

how these forces relate to commonly considered antecedents of media trust at the individual level, such as media use or demographic characteristics.

While a small number of other studies have investigated the simultaneous effects of individual- and community-level factors on trust evaluations (see Yamamoto et al., 2016), this work has been largely conducted using deductive, quantitative approaches. Alone, such investigations provide an incomplete understanding of the interaction between individual and community-level effects on trust, as the very nature of the object of interest—media trust—is assumed. Thus, this dissertation’s objective is twofold. First, the project aims to identify salient expectations of media trust in the Ugandan context, guided by extant theorizing to suggest that social and political factors may be particularly important. Secondly, the dissertation will use themes generated through this process to examine how situated expectations of news media relate to reported levels of media trust as well as commonly studied antecedents, such as individuals’ media use and political trust. Together, these two investigations will ultimately illuminate my overarching research question—what are the most important factors driving media trust in Uganda? To structure this examination further, I formulate two specific research questions with relevant sub-parts:

### **3.4 Research questions**

**RQ:** What are the most important factors driving media trust in Uganda?

**RQ1:** What are the primary expectations of news media and journalists in Uganda?

**RQ2a:** To what extent are the primary expectations from RQ1 associated with higher reported media trust?

**RQ2b:** How do the primary expectations from RQ1 correlate with commonly studied antecedents of media trust, including individuals' media use, political trust, political interest, and perceptions of press freedom?

## **Chapter 4: Research Design**

The preceding chapters introduced and explicated work on media trust as well as the theoretical perspectives advanced by journalism expectancy research and cultures of news consumption, culminating in the presentation of one overarching research question with three relevant sub-parts. To answer these questions, I conduct a two-phase, multi-method project using in-depth interviews and a nationally representative telephone survey in Uganda. The present chapter overviews this research design. Specifically, I begin by motivating Uganda as a useful case study for exploring expectations of news media and media trust. I then provide rationale for using a mixed-method methodological approach, followed by an introduction to both qualitative and quantitative datasets and analyses.

### **4.1 Case selection**

The decision to situate this study in Uganda reflects both theoretical and practical considerations. With respect to the former, the history of media development in Uganda is a story familiar to many African countries and parts of the Global South more broadly. A landlocked nation located in the East African region, Uganda was a colony of the British Empire from 1894 to 1962, during which time few media houses existed, and those that did generally concentrated on colonial affairs and missionary church news (Isoba, 1980). Following independence in 1962, the Ugandan government retained a monopoly over broadcast media until liberalization in the 1990s, when a proliferation of radio and television stations began operating alongside state-sponsored channels (Goretti Nassanga, 2008).

Today, Uganda's democratic constitution protects freedom of expression, though the reality of these protections is more complex. Since declaring his presidency in 1986, President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni has often been credited with improving the press-freedom landscape, yet the country routinely receives poor press-freedom scores. For example, Uganda recently ranked 133rd out of 180 countries for "intimidation and violence" toward journalists "on a nearly daily basis" (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). Thus, while the Ugandan media market remains diverse in terms of number and range of outlets—multiple English-language dailies alongside more than 30 television channels and more than 290 radio stations—ongoing legal and extralegal censorship continues, a common experience for many countries across the African continent (BBC Media Action, 2019; Marchant & Stremlau, 2020).

It terms of its service as a case study, Uganda is an advantageous context to explore audience evaluations of news for a couple of reasons. First, and as detailed above, Uganda's sociopolitical landscape is markedly different from the majority of Western European and North American cases from which extant understandings of media trust are based. As others have argued, grand theories of communication and media studies are problematic when generalized to diverse contexts without careful consideration of situated realities (Amin et al., 2000; Waisbord, 2015). Thus, Uganda presents one environment in which to critically re-examine factors driving media trust that may otherwise be taken for granted. Secondly, and within contexts seemingly similar to Uganda, such as other countries in the East Africa region, Uganda represents a sort of middle ground with respect to adversarial relationships between politics and journalism. Specifically, Uganda is thought to be less politically restrictive than its neighbor to the south, Rwanda, while more restrictive than Kenya, to the east (McIntyre & Sobel Cohen,

2022). Uganda therefore represents a rough average of state-press relations in the East African region, as opposed to being an outlier on either side of this spectrum.

Additionally, and beyond East Africa, several characteristics shaping Uganda's sociopolitical context—European colonial legacy, widespread English-language use, post-conflict reconstruction, and transition to a more open press environment—are shared among countries across the Global South more broadly. These include nations with particularly large media markets, such as India, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa. Thus, this research provides information beyond the particular case of Uganda insofar as it uncovers mechanisms that may be explored in a variety of other global contexts.

In addition to these theoretical implications, Uganda has undergone rapid urbanization in recent decades (United Nations, 2018), particularly in its metropolitan capital city Kampala. This has resulted in the creation of many NGOs and civic groups, several of which became critical resources in the project's multi-pronged recruitments efforts, described in more detail in later sections of this chapter. Strong public transportation in and around the city helped facilitate relevant meetings, an important consideration, though not always guaranteed, when conducting international fieldwork. Finally, my previous professional experience in Uganda as well as the country's designation of English as an official language—corresponding with relatively high levels of fluency, particularly in urban areas—made Uganda not only a theoretically attractive case study but also a feasible location for me to conduct this research.

## 4.2 Mixed-method approach

This dissertation adopts a mixed-methods approach, relying on the combination of in-depth, face-to-face interviews as well as a nationally representative computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) survey. Although mixed-methods research can take a variety of tacks, many proponents characterize mixed methods as both a methodology, or set of guiding philosophical assumptions, as well as a method in which both a quantitative and qualitative strand of data interact at some point in the research process (Creamer, 2017; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Philosophically, a mixed-methods perspective advances the idea that reliance on any single qualitative or quantitative research approach limits our understanding of complex social processes, for which multiple types of evidence may be valuable, if not required (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

In practice, a mixed-methods approach assumes that qualitative and quantitative approaches are not only compatible but that their combination produces findings that are more robust, enhance research validity, and offset the weaknesses inherent to any one method. In the case of qualitative methods, such weaknesses generally include nonrepresentative and small sample sizes, while quantitative methods often lack the ability to explain why studies produce particular results as well as variation across those findings (Creamer, 2017). In essence, the underlying assumption when adopting a mixed-method approach is that some research questions invite multiple theoretical stances and epistemological perspectives necessary to “provide a credible and valid picture of reality” (Du Plessis & Majam, 2010, p. 461).

As there is little empirical understanding of the mechanisms undergirding media trust in low-income, strong-state environments, and given the exploratory nature of the project, I

adopt a sequential mixed-methods design, which is well-suited to exploring new phenomena (Creswell, 2015). In exploratory sequential mixed-methods research, a research question is commonly examined through qualitative data collection and analysis, followed by a quantitative phase to further explore associations between qualitative results (Creamer, 2017). In the context of this project, the first phase identified salient expectations of news media using in-depth interviews, while the second phase examined these expectations alongside measures of trust and its correlates using a nationally representative telephone survey. Both project phases together illuminate the overarching research question. Namely, what are the most important factors driving media trust in Uganda?

My motivation for adopting a mixed-method research design is twofold. First, and drawing from Creamer's (2017) typology of purposes of mixed-method research, the initial qualitative phase allows for the *development* of a subsequent research tool, namely the survey questionnaire. A number of key findings from the interviews were later operationalized as ordinal questions included in the telephone survey. This included a 5-point matrix question comprised of 12 items that asked about survey participants' expectations of journalists. The 12 items were randomized between participants and derived from interview findings, with each of the six identified expectations (actual and normative; See Chapter 5 for full details) conceptually represented by two items. For example, interview respondents held a normative expectation that journalists would monitor government malfeasance. To measure this in the survey, I included two questions that asked, respectively, "How often do you think journalist in Uganda provide information that exposes corruption [holds powerful people accountable]?"

This project design can also be associated with the *complementarity* purpose of mixed-method research, which refers to attaining more holistic understandings of a social phenomenon through use of a mixed-method approach (Creamer, 2017). The project achieves complementarity by not only producing substantive levels of media trust in Uganda, as is often done using quantitative surveys, but by contextualizing these trust evaluations with in-depth interviews, which help to illuminate the conditions under which individuals may be more or less trusting of news. Thus, the project involves “mixing” at both the design phase (i.e., telephone survey) as well as the interpretation phase (see Chapter 7), in which I present meta-inferences that integrate qualitative and quantitative insights together (Creamer, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008).

More specifically, the first inductive phase involved semi-structured interviews to identify expectations of news media and news workers (RQ1). Interviews are well suited to develop detailed descriptions of social processes, such as media-trust evaluations. Analyses of interview data also allow researchers to integrate multiple perspectives, insights that can then be used to identify variables and frame hypotheses in quantitative research (Weiss, 1995). Using the salient themes identified from the qualitative analysis, the quantitative phase of this study utilizes a nationally representative telephone survey to examine how interview themes relate to reported levels of media trust (RQ2a), with the goal of comparing effect sizes of these themes against other common antecedents of media trust while controlling for important covariates (RQ2b). The following sections describe the methodological approaches for both qualitative and quantitative phases of the project, respectively.

### 4.3 Qualitative interview data and analysis

Data for the first phase of the project come from semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with a stratified sample of Ugandan adults in and around the Kampala metropolitan area. This approach is supported theoretically by the growing corpus of work on media folk theories, or individuals' narrated understandings of how journalism works based on personal experience or culturally available symbols (Pasitselska, 2022), as well as work on conceptions of journalists' roles, in which normative perceptions of news and news workers may be revealed in how individuals describe their respective functions and value (or lack thereof). To explore such perceptions, interviews provide a window into the cognitive processes of individuals and the ways in which they make sense of the world around them, including their relationships to news media (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010).

Moreover, face-to-face interviews allow for dynamic interpersonal interactions, including vocal (e.g., paralanguage like tone, volume, and pauses) and nonverbal (e.g., body language and eye contact) cues, that are muted, if not lost, using videoconferencing methods. Such cues are particularly important in cross-cultural research, where additional follow-up clarifications are often required (Pugh, 2013). Furthermore, conducting interviews in person and spending physical time in the field allowed me to cultivate rapport and mutual respect in a cultural context different from my own (Moore, 2018).

English is the official language of Uganda and is the language of instruction at all levels of education, except primary education in rural areas where it is taught as a subject. Thus, most ( $N = 22$ ) of the interviews were conducted in English. However, in an effort to capture perspectives from a range of educational experiences, a subset ( $N = 6$ ) of interviews required

translation from Luganda, a major Bantu language spoken in central Uganda, to English. In such cases, I worked with a local translator who accompanied me to the interviews, translated questions and responses during the interview, and assisted with post-interview clarifications, as needed. All participants provided verbal consent to be interviewed, and all but one respondent consented to being recorded. Pseudonyms were assigned to each respondent at the time of the interview, so as to ensure full anonymity across research documentation.

The open-ended questions included in the interview guide (see Appendix B) correspond to the project's aforementioned theoretical interests. Specifically, protocol themes included prompts formulated to assess respondents' general experiences with news, personal experiences with news and news workers, perceptions of journalists' roles, individuals' media folk theories, and perceptions of media trustworthiness. In all cases, questions were designed to encourage individuals to reflect on their personal experiences with the news industry in the contexts in which they are situated without an assumption that respondents engage with news or news workers to the same degree or to any degree at all.

Moreover, while I eventually asked interview respondents to offer personal reflections about what drives media trust from their perspectives, I do not take for granted that individuals can reliably account for what drives personal (dis)trust. In fact, the majority of time spent in conversation with respondents involved personal descriptions of how they get information about public affairs, their news consumption habits, and their perceptions of journalists and news media generally speaking. From these reflections, my theoretical commitments allow me to draw broader conclusions about driving factors of media trust; specifically, I take as a point of departure the assumption that media trust is rooted in individuals' expectations of the news

industry and news workers, as formulated through decades of research on trust in news (Hanitzsch et al., 2018; Strömbäck, 2020). Thus, I explore how respondents articulate these expectations, via media folk theories and perceptions of journalists' roles, with the theoretical assumption that such perceptions can be examined as drivers of trust, with the opportunity to test these assumptions in phase two of the project.

#### ***4.3.1 Qualitative sampling and recruitment***

The purposive sampling strategy targeted respondents across a range of criteria, ensuring that the sample contained enough variation along key demographic and theoretical dimensions to draw conclusions beyond the individuals studied (Lamont & White, 2008). Based on my theoretical interests, these attributes include variation in reported news use, reported media trust, political interest, and experiences with news workers, as well as basic demographic characteristics said to shape perceptions of news, such as age, gender, education, and socio-economic status.

Following IRB approval (00017016) from the University of Washington's Human Subjects Division, I began by reaching out to local contacts working in a variety of sectors, namely healthcare, journalism, community development, and education, given my professional connections to these fields. These personal contacts connected me to four individuals who became primary interlocutors for recruitment. Each interlocuter, or intermediary who served as a bridge to potential participants, then connected me to willing respondents in three targeted social environments: university students, middle-class professionals, and individuals working in informal sectors (e.g., markets, clothes shops, street vendors, public transportation).

I then contacted study participants by phone or WhatsApp. Recruitment messaging broadly accomplished the following goals:

- Presented the study's interest in respondents' opinions about news in Uganda
- Described participation as a 45- to 60-minute face-to-face interview
- Assured respondents that participation is voluntary and confidential
- Offered to arrange a time and location for the conversation.

At the beginning of each interview, I read respondents a verbal consent script (see Appendix A), which included requested permission to record the conversation. In some cases, particularly when recruiting in lower socio-economic brackets, it was not possible to make advanced interview arrangements given security considerations associated with working in informal housing settlements. Thus, for several respondents, both description of the study and the verbal consent script were provided together, with the assistance of a translator.

After approximately two dozen interviews, participants' responses to questions became appreciably predictable based on sampling criteria. Recruitment continued until it was determined that little to no new information related to the research questions would be gleaned through additional interviews. This signaled that thematic saturation had been reached (Glaser & Strauss, 2017), resulting in the final sample of 28 respondents.

This sampling and recruitment approach is appropriate in the context of this study for several reasons. First, I constructed a sample with diverse experiences (i.e., age, gender, education, socio-economic status) in order to maximize range and achieve variation needed to draw relevant conclusions across a specific population, namely urban Ugandan adults (Weiss, 1994). Secondly, purposive sampling through interlocutors allows researchers to access

multiple networks rather than relying on a single individuals' contacts, thus broadening the diversity and experience of participants (Fujii, 2017). Finally, as opposed to devising a more random sampling method—to the extent that this is desirable or achievable in interview-based research—working with interlocutors also helped me to establish legitimacy with respondents who may otherwise be skeptical of my position as an outsider.

### 4.3.1 Description of qualitative data

As indicated, this recruitment approach ultimately produced 28 respondents. Table 1 presents basic descriptive information about participants, including distribution across gender, age, relative location of upbringing, education, and occupation as a proxy for socio-economic status. Notably, respondents were between ages of 18 and 65 ( $M = 32$ ,  $SD = 12.59$ ) and the sample includes more men ( $N = 19$ ) than women ( $N = 9$ ). Location of upbringing, or where individuals were raised through primary school, is categorized as either “urban” or “more rural”

**Table 1**

*Interview Respondent Information by Gender, Age, Location, Education, and Occupation*

	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
<b>1</b>	4/30/23	Male	18	Urban	Secondary	University student
<b>2</b>	4/30/23	Male	19	Urban	Secondary	University student
<b>3</b>	4/30/23	Female	19	Urban	Secondary	University student
<b>4</b>	4/26/23	Male	21	More rural	Primary	Driver
<b>5</b>	4/14/23	Male	23	Urban	Bachelor’s degree	Communications
<b>6</b>	4/18/23	Female	23	Urban	Secondary	Shop owner

7	4/20/23	Female	23	Urban	Bachelor's degree	University student
8	4/20/23	Male	23	Urban	Secondary	Community development
9	4/30/23	Male	23	More rural	Secondary	University student
10	4/25/23	Male	24	More rural	Secondary	University student
11	4/18/23	Male	27	Urban	Trade school	Shop owner
12	4/21/23	Male	27	Urban	Bachelor's degree	Shop owner
13	4/26/23	Male	29	More rural	Primary	Askari (guard)
14	4/27/23	Male	29	Urban	Primary	Shop owner
15	4/27/23	Male	29	Urban	Bachelor's degree	Tour guide
16	4/18/23	Male	30	Urban	Secondary	Driver
17	4/27/23	Male	30	Urban	Secondary	Shop owner
18	4/25/23	Female	31	Urban	Bachelor's degree	Community development
19	4/29/23	Female	31	Urban	Bachelor's degree	Shop owner
20	4/18/23	Male	35	Urban	Bachelor's degree	Public relations
21	4/27/23	Male	35	Urban	None	Unemployed
22	4/20/23	Male	37	More rural	Secondary	Community development
23	4/18/23	Female	45	Urban	Bachelor's degree	Public relations
24	5/5/23	Male	45	More rural	Bachelor's degree	Shop owner
25	5/5/23	Male	48	More rural	Primary	Shop owner
26	5/5/23	Female	54	Urban	Primary	Shop owner
27	5/5/23	Female	64	More rural	Primary	Shop owner
28	5/5/23	Female	65	More rural	Primary	Shop owner

with urban referring to those who self-identified as growing up in a city and “more rural” corresponding to those who self-identified as growing up outside a major city. Education refers to the highest level of education attained and occupation is categorized as one’s current position.

This sampling distribution generally corresponds to demographic trends in Uganda, with the exception of gender. According to 2021 World Bank data, the ratio of men to women in Uganda is roughly even. However, women have on average lower rates of literacy, secondary school completion, and labor force participation, spending nearly two times as much time on household domestic and care work compared to men. Such conditions make it relatively more difficult to contact and speak with women, thus contextualizing the final sampling distribution. Beyond gender, there is considerable variation across education and occupation, as well as age where, in Uganda, the average life expectancy is 63 years of age (World Bank, 2021).

Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations, including coffee shops, parks, cafes, and individuals’ workplaces. All locations were selected by or in consultation with the respondent and reflected environments that were public enough to ensure safety and security for both parties as well as intimate enough to facilitate comfortable and confidential conversation. Interviews lasted between 15 and 61 minutes with an average duration of 34 minutes ( $SD = 14.15$ ) per interview.

#### **4.3.2 Qualitative data analysis**

Semi-structured interviews lend themselves to interpretive analysis and provide space for researchers to pursue situated meanings or experiences (Hopf, 2004). Interview data were

thus analyzed by coding for themes and engaging in a thematic analysis of transcripts. Coding was conducted at the semantic or descriptive level with the goal of organizing data to be interpreted in a broader sense (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Based on the theoretical orientation of this project and its research questions, several themes were predetermined from the beginning of analysis. These include themes related to individuals' expectations of news—operationalized as codes for specific media folk theories and perceptions of journalists' normative roles—as well as codes to assess determinants of the expectations, such as socio-cultural factors like personal interactions with news workers or perceptions of press freedom.

In coding for media folk theories, I looked for information related to how respondents described the 1) function of news and its relationship to society, 2) perceptions of satisfactory journalism, and 3) general or secondhand experiences with news organizations. In coding for perceptions of journalists' roles, I created codes for different ways journalists were described, including assumed professional tasks and references to satisfactory or unsatisfactory job performance. In coding for social and political determinants of media trust, I coded for any information indicative of influences shaping perceptions of news beyond individual evaluations, such as interpersonal recommendations, personal experiences with news workers, and associations between news media and politics. I also coded for explicit evaluations of news organizations and journalists, as well as the industry more broadly, such as expressions of trust or credibility. Finally, I coded for select demographic factors, such as education and urban versus rural backgrounds, in order to explore ways in which the aforementioned themes may be stratified by individual-level characteristics.

From the information gleaned through these codes, it became clear that respondents held markedly different normative expectations of journalists and journalism than what they expected from the news industry in practice. I then re-reviewed the data with two labels in mind—normative expectations and actual expectations—and categorized these perceptions accordingly. This further resulted in the creation of six sub-codes, split evenly between normative and actual expectations, respectively.

In addition to the analysis guided by the project's theoretical framework, I also considered inductive themes not reflected by my initial theoretical lens. This process involved noting overarching trends present in the data, followed by a close reading to identify and label relevant words, phrases, sentences, or sections. These markings were made based on data that were repeated several times, were especially surprising, or were characterized as important explicitly by an interview subject (Owen, 1984).

After indexing these data, and concurrently considering the relative divergence between actual and normative expectations, I created two additional codes. These included a code for information related to the defense of journalistic practices as well as a code for references to dissatisfaction with government services. Respondents came to the defense of journalists, for example, when justifying normatively undesirable journalistic practices, such as accepting bribes, due to extralegal censorship. They also expressed dissatisfaction with government services when complaining about political indifference to pressing issues, such as high unemployment rates. Both of these topics appeared in most, if not all, interview conversations and ultimately helped to explain respondents generally positive perceptions of journalism and

journalists despite unmet desires and normative expectations (see Appendix C for illustrative examples by respondent).

#### **4.4 Quantitative survey data and analysis**

The second phase of the project examined associations between the themes derived from interviews and reported levels of media trust utilizing a nationally representative sample of Ugandan adults. In particular, the second study explores the extent to which the perceived fulfillment of actual and normative expectations of news organizations and journalists correspond to higher reported levels of media trust. This work is well-suited for survey research, which is helpful for establishing statistical associations among variables (Moy & Murphy, 2016; Reinard, 2007). Moreover, surveys research allows scholars to make reasonably generalizable claims about a large population, such as Ugandan adults, at lower cost and at times more accurately than a census of this same group (Lavrakas, 2008).

Data for this study were collected using the computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) survey method with a sample of Ugandan adults, nationally representative by age, gender, and urbanicity. Compared to an online survey, a computer-assisted telephone survey was selected to ensure broad participation in places where internet access may be scarce. While telephone surveys still inherently fail to meet the entire population, existing data suggests somewhere between approximately 60-70 percent of Ugandans have access to a mobile phone (Kibuacha, 2021).

The survey was fielded by Hatchile Consult Ltd, a Uganda-based polling firm and the country's administrator of the pan-African Afrobarometer survey. Since 1999, Afrobarometer

has fielded nine rounds of face-to-face surveys in 42 African countries. I first met with the Hatchile Consult research team and Managing Director Francis Kibirige when conducting interview fieldwork in Kampala, Uganda in May 2023. At that time, I presented the project's principal research questions and broad aims of a future survey, with the understanding that I would contact Hatchile Consult in later months to explore opportunities related fielding a nationally representative survey using their participant panels and survey infrastructure.

#### ***4.4.1 Quantitative sampling and recruitment***

Following interview analyses, I conducted numerous videoconferencing calls with the Hatchile Consult team to finalize a nationally representative sampling strategy. Quotas for select demographics (age, gender, location) were determined using Uganda's official 2014 census and updated to reflect the country's 2024 projections. The sampling frame was constructed from a larger national sample utilized in an earlier Afrobarometer survey (round 8) conducted in 2021. Survey respondents were then randomly selected from this panel.

Before being substituted, prospective participants received five contact attempts at different times of the day at least three hours apart. Only one individual per household was eligible to be interviewed and each respondent was offered the choice to complete the call with an interviewer of the same gender, ethnic background, and/or language. Survey respondents were compensated at a rate of 6,000 UXG (approximately \$1.70 USD) upon completion of the interview using mobile money transfer.

Concurrent to finalizing the sampling strategy, I developed the final survey tool (Appendix E) using existing measures of media trust and covariates as well as operationalized

measures of relevant interview themes. I participated in the virtual training of 12 telephone interviewers using the questionnaire, which was translated into 11 languages forward and back. All 12 interviewers had previously participated in the collection of Afrobarometer data. The interviewer training lasted two days, including one day set aside for pilot interview calls (N = 24) with a minimum of two pilot interviews per interviewer. The pilot data were also used to identify and address any problem areas, including issues pertaining to question wording and interpretation, question order, and total burden placed on respondents (Ruel, Wagner, & Gillespie, 2016). In particular, steps were taken to make instructions more concise, to break up large matrix questions, and to provide participants an “I don’t know” option for select questions.

Following IRB approval (00019647) from the University of Washington’s Human Subjects Division, telephone interviews were fielded February 12-16, 2024, resulting in a final sample of  $N = 607$ . A target sample of 600, while lower than the 1,200-respondent sample that Afrobarometer typically recommends for nationally representative surveys, was selected based on cost considerations with the understanding that this number would provide sufficient statistical power given the project goals. To account for this further, the Cronbach’s alpha values reported in the results are calculated using bootstrap resampling based on 1000 samples and a 95% confidence interval.

#### ***4.4.2 Survey measures and analysis***

Questions included in the survey instrument were used to assess relationships between individuals’ expectations of journalists and news organizations, reported levels of media trust,

trust in political leaders, and other relevant covariates as identified by existing literature. The tool included a combination of single-choice demographic questions, Likert and numerical scale rating questions, as well as a number of matrix questions (see Appendix E), the univariate statistics for which are shown in Table 2. Telephone interviews lasted between 14 and 74 minutes ( $M = 30.75$ ,  $SD = 7.54$ ).

The primary dependent variable, *media trust*, was assessed using a combination of both single- and multi-item measures. Conceptually, media-trust items asked about perceptions of “media houses” (i.e., news organizations) in Uganda, as opposed to specific journalists or the journalism industry more broadly. While this inevitably collapsed individuals’ evaluations of different types of media houses, an organization-level referent was selected given it occupies a sort of meso-level position in the structure of news production and consumption. Said another way, asking about “media houses” alludes to more generalized perceptions of institutions without abstracting entirely to the field of journalism as whole, which respondents may have relatively more difficulty evaluating.

While many operationalizations of media trust exist, there is some consensus that media trust should be measured “by multi-item scales but not different dimensions that are measured and used as separate variables” (Strömbäck et al. 2020, p. 142). For example, the questionnaire included a battery of five-point Likert items adapted from Gaziano and McGrath’s (1987) News Credibility Scale, which offers a global assessment of news credibility across four dimensions: believability, reliability, ability to improve understanding, and medium preferences (see also Tsfaty & Cappella 2003). Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that media houses in Uganda are (1) credible, (2) balanced, (3) unfair (reverse-

**Table 2***Univariate Descriptive Statistics (N = 607)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Measures of Central Tendency</b>
Gender (male)	53.7%
Urbanicity (more rural)	71.8%
Party ID (Pro-National Resistance Movement)	53.4%
Education	<i>Mdn</i> = Intermediate school or some secondary school
Age in years (range: 18-92)	<i>M</i> = 39.51, <i>SD</i> = 13.56
Political interest (range: 1.00-5.00)	<i>M</i> = 3.42, <i>SD</i> = 0.89
Political trust (range: 1.00-4.00)	<i>M</i> = 3.10, <i>SD</i> = 0.89
Media use (range: 1.00-5.00)	<i>M</i> = 2.75, <i>SD</i> = 0.87
Perception of press freedom (range: 1.00-5.00)	<i>M</i> = 2.83, <i>SD</i> = 1.27
Media trust, News Credibility Scale (range: 1.46-5.00)	<i>M</i> = 3.58, <i>SD</i> = 0.72
Media trust, single-item (range: 1.00-5.00)	<i>M</i> = 3.12, <i>SD</i> = 0.77

coded), (4) accurate, (5) comprehensible, (6) biased (reverse-coded), and (7) opinionated (reverse-coded). Items also asked whether media houses in Uganda (8) can be trusted, (9) tell the whole story, (10) base reports on factual information, and (11) report fairly on news topic. The items were averaged to create a single multi-item measure of news credibility (*M* = 3.58, *SD* = 0.72) and was reliable (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha$  = .86).

Although media trust is typically measured using multi-item measures like that of above, the survey also included items assessing media trust with single-item questions, given the

project's theoretical interest in how driving factors (e.g., accuracy, bias, fairness) of trust may be unique to the empirical context at hand. Specifically, and drawing on Gallup poll question wording, the questionnaire asked respondents how much confidence (“a great deal,” “a fair amount,” “not very much,” or “none at all”) they had “in media houses in general” (reverse-coded;  $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ). Including both the multi-item News Credibility Scale index as well as a single-item media trust measure allows me to compare how expectations of journalists shape each of these outcome variables, respectively, in the later analysis (see Chapter 6).

The primary independent variables under investigation included expectations of journalists in Uganda. The decision to focus conceptually on expectations of journalists is based on the idea that individuals—particularly those who may have little awareness of media houses or engage with news infrequently—are likely to have an easier time connecting expectations to discrete professionals than to more abstract entities, such as organizations or industries. Thus, to measure expectations of journalists, the questionnaire included a 12-item matrix question randomized between respondents, which asked about respondents' expectations of journalists based on themes gleaned from interview data. Specifically, these questions asked “How often do you think journalists in Uganda (1) provide information that improves your daily life, (2) provide information that exposes corruption, (3) serve the general public, (4) produce pro-government content, (5) produce anti-government content, (6) delay coverage of some stories over others, (7) accept bribes to suppress stories, (8) are influenced by politics, (9) work in fear of government influence, (10) care about people like you, (11), provide information that holds powerful people accountable, (12) provide information about celebrity gossip.” Response means and standard deviations for each individual item are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3***Response Means and Standard Deviations of Expectations of Journalism in Uganda (N = 461)*

<b>Expectations of journalists</b>	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>
1. Provide information about celebrity gossip	4.08	(0.98)
2. Serve the general public	3.67	(1.12)
3. Provide information that improves your daily life	3.60	(1.04)
4. Produce pro-government content	3.55	(1.05)
5. Work in fear of government influence	3.45	(1.12)
6. Produce anti-government content	3.31	(1.10)
7. Provide information that holds powerful people accountable	3.29	(1.06)
8. Are influenced by politics	3.24	(1.21)
9. Provide information that exposes corruption	3.19	(1.12)
10. Care about people like you	3.09	(1.18)
11. Delay coverage of some stories over others	2.84	(1.20)
12. Accept bribes to suppress stories	2.77	(1.30)

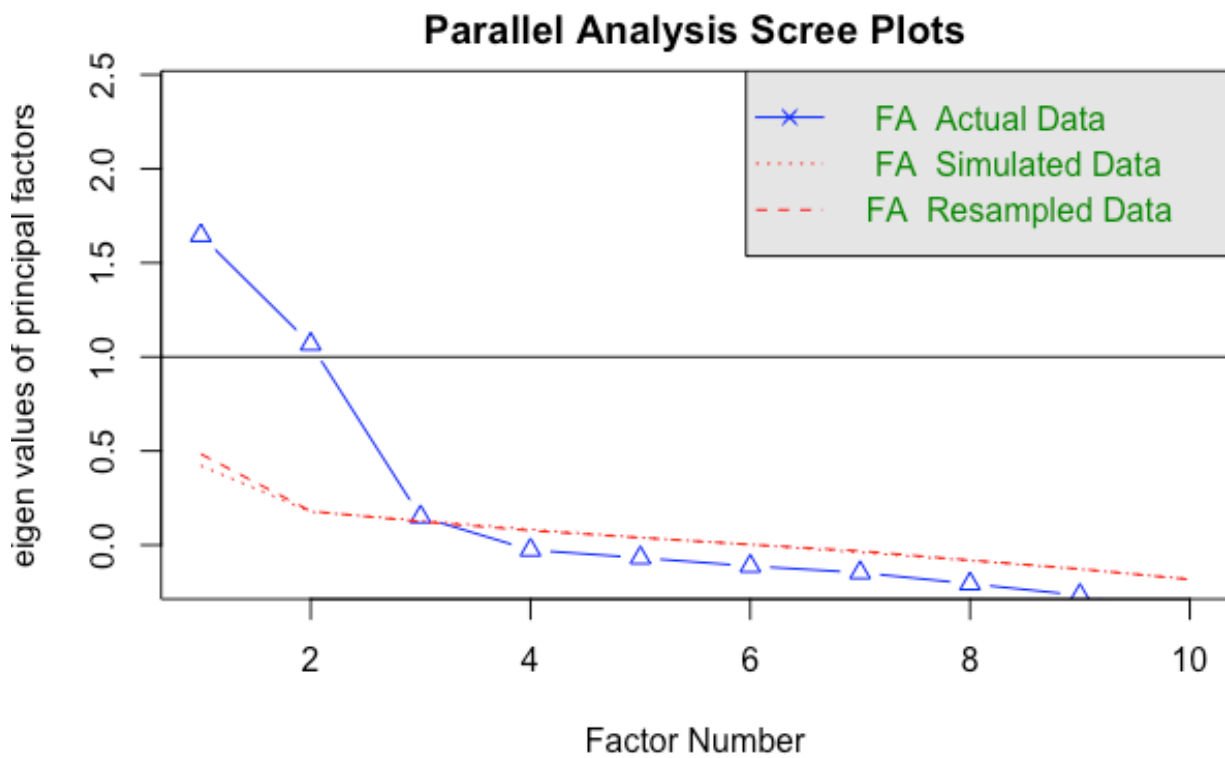
However, given that these measures were expected to be conceptually related, an exploratory factor analysis of operational expectations of journalists was conducted in order to identify latent factor structures (Fabrigar et al., 1999). This conceptual decision was further supported by a Bartlett's test of sphericity (666.75,  $df = 45$ ,  $p > .001$ ) indicating substantial correlation in these data. Parallel analysis (Horn, 1965) and a visual scree test (Cagttell, 1966)

were then used to determine an appropriate number of factors to retain while keeping considerations of theory and parsimony in mind.

As illustrated in Figure 1 and Table 4, the EFA results showed that items loaded onto two factors, explaining 47% of total variance. Although a three-factor solution was considered and

**Figure 1**

*Scree Plot for Exploratory Factor Analysis of Expectations of Journalists (N = 461)*



would have brought total variance explained up to 75%, the third factor was removed using Kaiser's rule that meaningful factor loadings should be greater than 1.00 (Zwick & Velicer, 1986). Factor adequacy was determined according to extant literature suggesting that pattern coefficients  $\geq .37$  may be considered salient (Norman & Streiner, 2014). With this guidance in mind, three items (questions addressing anti-government content, content that exposes

**Table 4***Factor Loadings of Expectations of Journalists*

Item No.	Items	Factor		Uniqueness
		1	2	
1	Journalists provide information that improves your daily life	<b>0.59</b>	-0.07	0.66
2	Journalists serve the general public	<b>0.58</b>	0.11	0.63
3	Journalists produce pro-government content (reverse-coded)	-0.12	<b>0.47</b>	0.78
4	Journalists delay coverage of some stories over others (reverse-coded)	0.11	<b>0.50</b>	0.73
5	Journalists accept bribes to suppress stories (reverse-coded)	0.22	<b>0.54</b>	0.63
6	Journalists are influenced by politics (reverse-coded)	-0.14	<b>0.63</b>	0.60
7	Journalists work in fear of government influence (reverse-coded)	-0.02	<b>0.46</b>	0.79
8	Journalists care about people like you	<b>0.69</b>	-0.01	0.53
9	Journalists provide information that holds powerful people accountable	<b>0.48</b>	-0.05	0.77
<b>Eigenvalues</b>		1.48	1.38	
<b>% of Variance</b>		17.00	32.00	

*Note.*  $N = 467$ ; EFA was conducted using the ordinary least squares (OLS) method of extraction, with the oblique rotation method ProMax.

corruption, and content related to celebrity gossip) were removed from subsequent analysis as a result of low factor loadings.

Factor 1 contained four items (items 1, 2, 8, and 9), which appeared to measure an expectation that journalists and journalism work in the public interest. Specifically, the items in Factor 1 included expectations that journalists 1) provide information that improves daily life, 2) serve the general public, 8) care about average people, and 9) provide information that holds powerful people accountable. This expectation factor was therefore named the Public-Interest Expectation, and a follow-up reliability test indicated good internal consistency (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = 0.73$ ).

Factor 2 contained five items (items 3-7) and appeared to measure an expectation that journalists and their work are characterized by political influences. Relevant items included expectations that journalists 3) produce pro-government content, 4) delay coverage of stories, 5) accept bribes, 6) are influenced by politics, and 7) work in fear of political influence. This second factor was thus named the Political-Pressure Expectation and also reached acceptable internal consistency based on a subsequent reliability test (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .70$ ). Good model fit for the factor analysis was indicated by a Tucker Lewis Index larger than .90 (Tucker Lewis Index = 0.95), residual mean square of the residual value less than 0.06 (RMSEA = 0.04), and root mean square of residuals value less than 0.08 (RMSR = 0.03). The Public-Interest Expectation factor and Political-Pressure Expectation factors related at 0.15 and thus produced comparable pattern and structure coefficients.

Based on these results and theoretical indications, the two-factor solution was accepted

as an adequate structural representation of expectations of journalists. From here, two distinct variables were created. *Public-interest expectations* were calculated as an average of the four four-point questions outlined above. Specifically, these questions asked how often (“never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” “often,” or “all the time”) journalists provide information that improves daily life and holds powerful actors accountable, as well as the extent to which journalists serve the general public and care about average people ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ , *Cronbach’s*  $\alpha = .73$ ). *Expectations of political pressure* were likewise measured using an average of five five-point items asking how often (“never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” “often,” or “all the time”) journalists produce pro-government content, delay coverage, accept bribes, are influenced by politics, and work in fear of political influence ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ , *Cronbach’s*  $\alpha = .70$ ).

Lastly, relevant correlates of media trust include political interest, political trust, perceptions of press freedom, and media use. To measure *political interest*, I averaged two five-point questions that were presented at different points in the survey tool. The first asked respondents how interested they are in politics (“not at all [interested],” “not very,” “somewhat,” “very,” or “extremely interested”) ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ). The second question asked how often (“all of the time,” “most of the time,” “some of the time,” “only now and then,” or “hardly at all”) respondents follow what’s going on in Uganda’s national-level politics (reverse-coded;  $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ). This index suggests moderate political interest across the sample ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = .89$ ,  $r = .46$ , *Cronbach’s*  $\alpha = .70$ ).

*Political trust* was calculated by averaging two four-point questions that asked how much confidence respondents have in the central government [district local government] in Uganda, respectively (“a great deal of confidence,” “a fair amount of confidence,” “not very

much confidence,” or “no confidence at all”). These items were reverse coded to aid in interpretation and were reliable ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ,  $Cronbach's \alpha = .73$ ). Finally, perceptions of *press freedom* were measured using a single item that asked respondents the extent to which they agreed (“strongly disagree,” “somewhat disagree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “somewhat agree,” or “strongly agree”) that journalists work in fear of political influence (reverse-coded;  $M = 2.17$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ).

Media use was assessed using 10 five-point items asking respondents how often (“never,” “less than once a month,” “a few times a month,” “a few times a week,” “every day”) they use a battery of media types (print or online newspapers, television, radio, social media, and the internet) in general and how often they use these same media to get information about politics. The items were averaged to create a single measure of media use ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) that was reliable ( $Cronbach's \alpha = .86$ ).

The survey instrument also included several demographic variables that served as controls: age ( $M = 39.51$ ,  $SD = 13.56$ ), gender (46% female), urbanicity (27% more urban), education ( $Mdn =$  Intermediate school or some secondary), and political party identification. Given Uganda’s restrictive political environment in favor of the National Resistance Movement (NRM), political identification was examined as a binary variable, with 53% of respondents reportedly identifying with the NRM and 47% with other political parties or none at all. For all variables and analyses, pairwise deletion was used for missing data in an attempt minimize loss of information, particularly given the narrow sample size, with relevant sample sizes reported in tables throughout the study’s findings.

Using the R statistical package, survey data were then analyzed for relationships between variables of interest (i.e., expectations of journalists) and reported levels of media trust, as well as the influence of relevant covariates. Specifically, I conducted a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions with media trust as the dependent variable and expectations of journalists, both expectations related to work in the public interest and work characterized by political pressure, as the primary independent variables of interest. Variables for political ideology, political interest, party identification, perceptions of press freedom, media use, and demographics were introduced as covariates when adjusting for model fit. Before model specification and interpretation of regression results, I also reported correlation coefficients (Pearson's  $r$ ) between expectations of journalists and theoretically salient covariates (i.e., political interest, political trust, and media use) to better understand how these theoretically salient variables interact with situated expectations.

A final methodological stage of the larger project included integrating the findings from both qualitative and quantitative phases. In mixed-method research, this process refers to the generation of meta-inferences, which “link, compare, contrast or modify inferences” from both qualitative and quantitative strands of data analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 300). These meta-inferences are included and expounded on in the final dissertation chapter (Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion).

Beyond generating compelling insights, the combination of in-depth interviews and a survey in this context offset weaknesses inherent to each of these methods. More specifically, interviews can be critiqued for what some have deemed a “slippery slope of methodological individualism” whereby explanations are essentially reduced to individual differences as

opposed to field-level correlations (Lamont & Swidler, 2014, p. 10). In the context of this project, the statistical analysis of survey data reveals the extent to which findings from qualitative analysis are generalizable to a more representative sample. However, on its own, survey research does not deal well with context specificity and is only as strong as its instrument.

In other words, and as supported by theory, the use of existing survey questions in the context of Uganda may not be reliable measures of media trust if they are not accessing relevant conceptual constructs. Indeed, and as further elaborated in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, findings from this project illustrate these phenomena. Specifically, interviews revealed situated expectations of journalists distinct from normative theorizing, and survey results demonstrated that these expectations drive reported levels of media trust in Ugandan adults, even when controlling for other theoretically important influences. Thus, and their individual contributions notwithstanding, either of these methods would have provided an incomplete picture of media-trust evaluations on their own. Taken together, however, the qualitative and quantitative studies provide wider and deeper understanding of the mechanisms driving media trust in a non-Western context, ultimately producing richer, more nuanced explanations of the social world (Creamer, 2017). The following chapter therefore begins by presenting findings from the interview-based study.

## Chapter 5: Expectations of News Media and Journalists in Uganda

The first phase of the project explores individuals' expectations of journalism and journalists (RQ1). Following from the project's theoretical framework and drawing on 28 interviews with a stratified sample of urban Ugandans, insights generated from these conversations shed light on the conditions under which potential news audiences may extend trust to news media and journalists. Corresponding thematic analyses of interview transcripts yielded 876 applications of 17 codes and sub-codes in Dedoose, resulting in several key findings.

First, over the course of interview conversations, respondents distinguished between what they thought journalists and news organizations *should* do and what they actually expected from media houses and journalists in practice. These distinctions were developed iteratively early in the interview process when it became clear that what individuals expected from news and news workers in Uganda were not in their view favorable behaviors in many cases; however, many respondents could conceive of other roles or practices that would be more desirable. More specifically, when participants were asked to describe a journalist's job or the purpose of media houses in Uganda, most responded first with normative expectations, or practices and values they thought news organizations or journalists "ought" to abide by. In some cases, participants promptly and explicitly contrasted this with what they believed these actors were actually doing. In other cases, I deliberately confirmed with respondents whether they wished to distinguish between normative and actual expectations.

For example, I spoke to Mukisa<sup>1</sup>, an undergraduate student studying microfinance, on a bench outside of his university dorm room. He told me early in our conversation that the purpose of media houses in Uganda is to bring relevant information to communities and to “render small services” to the local area, such as jobs or clean water. When I asked whether he believed news organizations were fulfilling that purpose, he apprehensively responded, “Maybe some are doing it, but I think they should.” As the interview concluded, I asked Mukisa if there were any remaining opinions he’d like to share with me. With little hesitation, he said, “A few media houses Uganda are independent, that you should know. But most media houses, most media groups, they have influences... And they usually put wrong information in circulation.” With my final question, I asked why he thought journalists would cave to external pressures. Mukisa responded quickly and with a knowing laugh, “Money, people want money. It’s not that everyone has that genuine heart that they won’t take a bribe” (25 April 2023).

Mukisa’s comments indicated that he expected “most” new organizations to be involved in some level of misinformation or brown-envelope journalism. However, he also believed that news organizations *should* provide relevant information and small social services to communities. Such normative desires are categorically different than what Mukisa and other respondents seemed to anticipate in practice, therefore necessitating a distinction between actual expectations of media professionals on one hand and more aspirational expectations for what journalism and journalists could be, on the on the other.

“Aspiration” is thus used here to designate respondents’ normative expectations of news organizations and news workers. Though colloquial use of “aspiration” typically refers to

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<sup>1</sup> Respondent names have been replaced with pseudonyms throughout.

an individual's personal desire for oneself, an etymological understanding of the term broadens its use. Derived from the Latin word *aspirare*, meaning "to strive for" or literally "to breathe into," aspiration captures participants' impulse to set goals or ambitions for news organizations and practitioners. Moreover, compared to alternatives like "hopes" or "desires," "aspiration" better reflects the gap between what respondents wanted from media houses and what they believed they were likely to receive.

With respect to specific *aspirations*, respondents described both traditional journalistic roles, such as journalists as watchdogs and bridges to government operations in service of citizens, as well as more unconventional functions, like news organizations as supplemental purveyors of certain social services (e.g., education, work training, employment). In practice, respondents' actual *expectations* of news and news workers were more variable. First, respondents acknowledged that journalists indeed provide important information that they would not otherwise receive, particularly information related to weather and community happenings, such as market closures. However, they also expected media professionals to accept bribes, delay coverage that was not considered financially lucrative, and produce pro-government stories in many cases. These practices often led to what respondents deemed inaccurate or at least unsatisfactory reports. Furthermore, any social services that were ostensibly available (e.g., training opportunities) were reportedly exclusive or inaccessible to many of the respondents interviewed.

Beyond accurately characterizing respondents' perceptions, distinguishing between aspirations and actual expectations became a central analytical decision within the project, particularly given that participants generally held news media in high regard despite this

seeming chasm. For example, nearly every respondent reiterated their appreciation for news and journalists, with many appealing for the end of extralegal censorship of journalists by political elites. In other words, while important gaps existed between what individuals could reasonably conceive of news organizations doing and what they actually anticipated to happen in practice, respondents still held curiously positive perceptions of journalism's role in their lives and communities.

The resulting puzzle warranted additional explanation, particularly because extant approaches struggle to explain this seemingly contradictory finding. Expectancy violation theory, for instance, would suggest that an infraction of actual expectations may not necessarily lead to negative perceptions of journalism or journalists depending on one's evaluation of the expectation in question (Burgoon et al., 2016). For example, a news organization that does not produce pro-government coverage would presumably violate the audience expectation, yet this violation may actually lead to more positive perceptions of that organization. However, a gap between actual expectations and audiences' aspirations (i.e., normative expectations) would ostensibly lead to a negative perception of news and news workers, unless of course the actual experience is somehow more favorable than the normatively desirable aspiration, which is logically nonsensical.

Existing journalism expectancy research confirms this suspicion. Specifically, the violation of normative expectations has been shown to turn users away from journalists and media outlets (Lee, 2015). Again, participants' responses would suggest that negative experiences with journalists or news organizations (e.g., government-leaning content) do not constitute an expectation violation; on the contrary, such acts would seem to reflect a

confirmation of actual expectations. However, given that these actual expectations did not align with participants' aspirations, one would reasonably assume a net negative perception of journalism what little empirical evidence is available. To my knowledge, no study has systematically examined descriptive expectations (e.g., based on cognitions or opinions) alongside prescriptive expectations (e.g., based on norms or requests) in the context of journalism studies and perceptions of news (Biddle, 1979).

A third and final way that the combination of these perceptions diverge from conventional wisdom is with respect to media trust scholarship more broadly. Media trust research has long documented that audiences engage with news that they do not trust (Tsfati & Cappella, 2005). In fact, individuals have been shown to use news in a variety of unexpected ways, such as a means of entertainment, to fulfill social needs, or even as part of daily ritual (Katz et al., 1973; Rubin, 2009). However, while this work helps to explain individuals' media use despite low trust, it does not fully account for the inverse (i.e., why individuals might trust an industry or news organization despite reportedly negative expectations of it).

Beyond the present interview data, this puzzle is further illustrated in quantitative research in which Ugandan survey respondents express relatively high degrees of confidence in news (Matovu, 2023; Daily Monitor, 2020). These attitudes exist in an objectively unfavorable press-freedom environment—after all, Uganda's most recent Press Freedom Index score was just 133 of 180 countries included in the report (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). Furthermore, Ugandans are aware of these press-freedom challenges, both based on the range of individuals I interviewed as well as 2021 survey data in which just 23 percent of respondents considered Ugandan news media to be “completely free” (Afrobarometer, 2021a).

Thus, a third finding emerging from these interview data begins to reconcile these arguably unintuitive realities and helps to contextualize respondents' seemingly divergent attitudes. Namely, the aspiration-expectation gap, coupled with generally favorable perceptions of journalists, can be in part explained by a sense of *relative institutional trust* across respondents. In the context of this study, relative institutional trust refers to the ways in which individuals extend trust to news media in part based on the confidence—or lack of confidence—that they have in other public institutions. For interview respondents, distrust was primarily aimed at elected officials and government agencies, which in contrast cast news media and journalists in at least a marginally more positive light. Such perceptions were evident in respondents' accounts, particularly when defending unsatisfactory journalistic performance, seeking supplementary social services from news organizations, and describing their preferred journalistic content, which overwhelmingly reflected investigative reporting to address government malfeasance.

The following sections analytically elucidate each of these major themes—aspirations, expectations, and relative institutional trust—using illustrative examples and ultimately advancing an understanding of media trust that is relational at its core, inextricably bound to individuals' lived realities and perceptions of other social institutions. Together, these findings not only illuminate important variables (i.e., expectations and aspirations) that can be used to contextualize and evaluate existing definitions of media trust, but they also begin to unriddle unusual cases of high or low trust in contexts where conventional wisdom would expect the converse.

## 5.1 Aspirations

Beginning with aspirations, participants answered a series of questions regarding their perceptions of journalists and news organizations, namely how they would describe a journalist's job and the goals of an average news organization in their community. In answering these questions, respondents described what they believed media professionals and organizations "should" do, implicitly and explicitly contrasting these practices with perceptions of what journalists and news organizations "actually" do in later parts of the interviews. Such normative perceptions of journalists' roles and news organizations are discussed together here as *aspirations* that respondents hold for news and news workers and coalesce around three primary themes. These include journalists and media houses as (1) information providers, (2) bridges to government operations in service of Ugandan citizens, and (3) supplemental purveyors of social services.

Notably, such aspirations represent a range of perceptions, from abstract notions of journalism as a source of information in societies to extremely applied ideas about how journalists can provide hands-on training to common people. This continuum—from theoretical to practical perceptions of news—was not necessarily stratified by demographic indicators (e.g., age, gender, education level, income). However, the degree to which respondents applied aspirations to their personal lives did vary by social background.

Specifically, those in lower socio-economic brackets tended to discuss aspirations in very personal terms, like how specific types of training would improve their livelihood or how their children would benefit from journalism scholarships. For example, Felix, the owner of a small clothing stall, indicated that a goal of journalists should be to help small business owners

“get skills” in business or accounting (18 April 2023). On the other hand, those in more comfortable financial and social circumstances mentioned similar aspirations but with respect to how they would benefit others in the community. Mukisa, a college-educated young adult, put it this way: “Let’s say a [media] organization is located in Kyambogo, and they need a cleaner... Give a job to someone” (25 April 2018). Thus, while respondents across a variety of social profiles discussed similar types of aspirations (i.e., employment), their actual relationship to news organizations and journalists became less material—or more abstract—as individuals climbed the social hierarchy. Such distinctions help to contextualize the range of abstractness evident across the following aspirations, even while the substantive topics discussed are similar.

### ***5.1.1 News organizations and journalists as information providers***

Nearly all interview respondents saw the provision of information as the primary normative function of both individual journalists and news organizations. As Damba noted, journalists are there to “let people know what’s really happening in the world” (18 April 2023). For Fatuma, the role of media houses is the same: “It’s their duty to reach information to us” (20 April 2023). For some, like Julius, it is equally important that the information provided is balanced because “the moment you have a side on any matter, you cannot report the accurate information” (30 April 2023). But for most, information in and of itself was the focus of attention.

This is perhaps the case because journalists and news organizations were perceived as at times the only mechanisms for learning about local and international affairs that may otherwise be reserved for elite audiences. As Kabilito noted, journalists “bring light to stuff that

has happened behind the curtains” (30 April 2023), referring to elite activity across a variety of sectors and domains. Patience referred to this as “the hidden information that we don’t know” (30 April 2023), with both respondents indicating there is important information—from the war in Ukraine to local business dealings—that the average person would otherwise not learn about. Ivan summarized this perspective succinctly: “If the journalists are not there, the people will be blind” (5 May 2023).

Many participants went farther, expanding on why they believed this information is important. For some, the information provided by news media is simply an integral part of participating in daily life. As Mariam noted, “You need information even just to have a conversation with your neighbor, to talk about the [government] ministers (18 April 2023). Others framed the need for information as a human rights issue saying, for example, that “at times, journalists are like human rights activists, empowering [people] with information so that they can make their own decisions” (Patience, 30 April 2023). Others used language evocative of development, as Henry described: “For any society to develop, information must not be selfishly guarded, whether good or bad. It has to be disseminated so that people make their own judgments, and their own decisions depending on the information they have” (5 May 2023).

As later illustrated, a majority of respondents acknowledged that journalists often fulfill this normative aspiration for information, even if not perfectly. However, in such cases, individuals provide specific examples of information that they perceive is (and is not) provided satisfactorily. Thus, while not every respondent believed that journalists and journalism fulfill

the aspiration of providing relevant and accurate information all of the time, nearly every single individual saw this as the primary function of news and news media.

### ***5.1.2 News organizations and journalists as bridges to government in service of citizens***

A second salient aspiration for news and news workers coalesced around a specific type of information or topical focus, namely the kind of investigative reporting associated with traditional political watchdog journalism. Watchdog journalism generally refers to reporting aimed at increasing the transparency of government operations and holding public officials accountable. While the journalist-as-information-provider aspiration invokes transparency (i.e., opening the curtains, revealing hidden information), this second aspiration goes farther to include the active investigation and critique of elected officials and political elites. Some respondents, like Musa, invoked this normative ideal explicitly, saying “here in Uganda, we describe [journalists] as watchdogs... They watch what is happening” (30 April 2023). Similarly, news media were described as the “fourth organ” of the government, following Uganda’s executive, parliament, and judicial branches (Julius, 30 April 2023).

Beyond relying on news media to track and monitor government malfeasance, respondents also noted the general inaccessibility of government operations to the average Ugandan and the role of journalists in bridging this divide. “Trust me, there are people who are like 30 years old who have never been to parliament,” Fatuma said. “So, it’s because of the news of the media houses that we know what happens there” (20 April 2023). Isaac echoed this sentiment, illustrating an unlikely hypothetical situation: “I can’t personally walk into a [government] office and be like ‘Hey, can I have this document?’ No, these organizations, for

example, New Vision Uganda, they get that document... They're the ones who publish it" (21 April 2023).

For some, the news media's role in facilitating government-citizen interactions should extend further, not only translating government operations to citizens but also offering opportunities for citizens to voice concerns. Emmanuel compared this to how he perceived the press in the United States to operate:

In the United States community, you feel like people should be able to critique the education policy. And whose duty is that? It's a journalist. People should be able to question the policy being informed... There's a sense of empowerment among the citizens that they're able to question things they care about. (20 April 2023)

In other words, respondents considered news media and journalists to be "bridging the gap" between the public and Uganda's political power, which includes both making government operations more accessible to citizens as well as bringing public concerns to the steps of parliament (Isaac, 21 April 2023).

Finally, respondents' eagerness for a news media to work in service of ordinary citizens, as opposed to elites, cannot be overemphasized. When describing this aspiration, many individuals discussed it in relation to its opposite, or the absence of such reporting. For example, Mariam noted that there are many relevant stories that news media fail to capture that "could benefit the common person." She expanded on this idea using an example: "For instance, the president's son gets a huge headline because he says something. But there's a school in the rural area that doesn't have iron sheets [roofing], but you will only see that on

social media, not in the media” (18 April 2023). Gabriel expressed similar frustrations, further illustrating a shared desire for citizen-focused journalism. He said:

We ask [journalists] questions and to go ask the government officials, and they don’t...

We air out our ideas, what we want the government to do, and you wait on the news to see whether what you’ve said will go on. They don’t, they just keep it out. (27 April 2023)

Gabriel’s dissatisfaction with journalists’ coverage speaks to what he felt was missing from news more broadly—representation of ordinary Ugandan voices. Julius referred to such citizen-focused reporting as going “the extra mile” to “reach the ground, the local people” (30 April 2023).

In sum, participants believed that journalists and journalism should serve as a check on government operations, reflecting what many would consider a traditional normative function of news media. However, for many respondents, this duty extended beyond being a neutral observer of politics to acting as a bridge from citizens to their political leaders, particularly by amplifying on-the-ground perspectives and “reaching the public” (Gabriel, 17 April 2021). This seeming disconnect between citizens and their government is further developed with respect to the third and final aspiration.

### ***5.1.2 News organizations as purveyors of social services***

A third prominent aspiration for the news media, particularly at the institutional level of media houses, was for these organizations to act as supplemental providers of various social services. In some cases, services refer to opportunities afforded through basic news coverage,

such as the exposure that comes with spotlighting a business or community event. In other cases, respondents discussed the provision of social services that would conventionally be provided by government entities, such as youth employment or educational opportunities.

With respect to the former, respondents described opportunities where media houses can improve business or livelihoods through news coverage. For example, Rose worked for a community development organization at the time of her interview and described the way that media improved her organization's public visibility. She shared:

I feel like the media did a great job of putting our work out there, and I felt like in a very short period of six months, people were talking about something that was not even there, that was not visible at all. (25 April 2023)

Similarly, Patience noted that media houses can support the economy more broadly by running advertisements, saying that a major purpose of a media house is to "promote business because [media houses] run adverts and people get to learn" (30 April 2023). These sentiments extend to the content of news stories, where reporting can "put something in your head and you learn something about business... [News] builds up the nation in that way" (Brenda, 5 May 2023).

Beyond advertisements, participants suggested that media houses can support economic activity in other ways. Some respondents, for example, believed that media houses can "help you get skills" (Felix, 18 April 2023). In this vein, Musa recalled a training program he had heard about, where a major news organization in Uganda helped individuals improve their farming techniques:

[The media house] takes these people outside to learn how to grow crops even. They get the best farmer, and they take them out and they study how to rear animals on an

international level and they teach. Every year they do it. So, they have done a great impact to give back to the community. (30 April 202)

Respondents also indicated that media houses can alleviate employment concerns directly by hiring community members. In other words, news organizations “should give jobs to people” (Mukisa, 25 April 2018), such as custodial positions or other grounds work. Many participants described this work in terms of youth employment, as Eva did. She believed a local media house in her community had hired many people, saying, “They’re helping the unemployed youth... They are giving them jobs, so they are solving the problem of unemployment in this country” (18 April 2023).

In addition to addressing youth unemployment, interviewees voiced aspirations that media houses support primary education or, as Kabilito put it, “to help the youngsters to come up” (30 April 2023). Isaac called this a news organization’s “added value” in which media houses provide supplemental school materials to children alongside news content for adults. He reminisced on what he remembered experiencing as a child: “They [media houses] would provide educational materials to children, even advanced-level classes. You see, someone is reading the new stories or whatever, but then there’s a paper—maybe chemistry—and children do it. I used to love it” (21 April 2023). Sanyu, a father of three, said he is hopeful that media houses may someday connect him with scholarships for his kids (26 April 2023).

Perhaps at the broadest level, respondents generally believed that media houses should “give back to their community” (Musa, 30 April 2023). Mukisa described this as a necessary “social mission” of news organizations in the sense that “there is no way that an organization is going to be located in a community where there is no clean water.” For him, “they [media

houses] should render those small services that they can to the communities where they are located” (25 April 2023). Furthermore, helping to provide access to basic infrastructure to communities is part of quality business operations and employee management. As one respondent summarized, “organizations really need employees and you need to cater to their welfare” (Isaac, 21 April 2023).

Despite the potential opportunities outlined above, respondents generally indicated that access to these programs and services is not necessarily equal. Most notably, nearly all of the examples provided were articulated as aspirations or isolated experiences, as opposed to empirical realities that respondents could count on media houses to deliver. In other cases, individuals recalled opportunities they had heard about, though very few respondents described actually benefiting from such services. Some respondents addressed this reality directly. For instance, Gabriel was unemployed at the time of his interview and living in downtown Kampala. He insisted that any services that may be ostensibly available through media houses are inaccessible to poor areas of the city:

They [media houses] don't even engage in volunteering work here. I've never seen any. Because those are the things they're supposed to do, like engage in volunteering. Come here, they could clean around. They don't even give scholarships to people here. Even getting a job there, there's a lot of bureaucracy. You have to know someone there to get a job. You have to know a friend who knows a friend who knows a friend who is the manager. (27 April 2023)

Simon—also unemployed—echoed this sentiment when asked what the purposes of a media house are in his community: “The problem in the ghetto is jobs... The news doesn't help me to

be employed" (27 April 2023). Thus, by deductive logic, Simon's and Gabriel's responses likewise indicate that such employment services would be normatively desirable functions of news media, even while they felt as though such services were unavailable to them.

The above sub-themes—news media as information providers, bridges to government operations, and supplemental purveyors of social services—reflect respondents' aspirations for journalists and news organizations in Uganda. In other words, when participants were asked what journalists do for work or what they perceived the role of media houses to be in society, many respondents first described their normative aspirations for what journalism could or should be. Such aspirations are an important piece to understanding perceptions of news media and (dis)trust in Uganda, particularly because they are not necessarily reflective of respondents' lived experiences. In fact, individuals' expectations of what media practitioners actually do in practice deviate from the above aspirations in notable ways.

## **5.2 Expectations**

Respondents disclosed their actual expectations of journalists and media practitioners in a variety of ways over the course of their interviews. Some detailed specific examples or first-hand experiences in response to the aforementioned questions (i.e., perceptions of journalists' jobs, role of media houses in society). Others revealed their expectations while recounting a recent news story that they remember reading or listening to, while still others articulated expectations when they were invited to share final opinions and attitudes about news media at the end of the interview. These expectations are likewise categorized into three primary themes, including the expectation that journalists and news media (1) provide information, (2)

accept bribes and delay coverage, and (3) produce pro-government content more often than not.

### ***5.2.1 News organizations and journalists provide information***

Of the three primary expectations of journalists and news media in practice, the most positive expectation was that media professionals indeed provide information that Ugandan citizens otherwise would not receive. “I like the job they are doing because I am able to know what I don’t know,” one participant said straightforwardly (Francis, 18 April 2023). For many respondents, news is especially important for learning about events closer to home, as Brenda describes: “I really appreciate journalists because if it wasn't for the journalists, we wouldn't be getting news. You wouldn't know what's happening in your own country” (5 May 2023).

What sets this information apart from the type of information that respondents aspired to receive from journalists and news media? For many, the difference is in scope and topic. While earlier aspirations referenced bringing “hidden information to light” and exposing “behind the curtain,” the information that most respondents expected from news media was relatively more mundane. For example, Martha described how a news report can save her from making an unnecessary trip to town:

Let's say I'm in my home and there's something happening, and I come here [to the market] when it's closed. But if I have a source of news somewhere, I'll know there's no need of coming to the market because it's been closed, and that's how I check the news.” (5 May 2023)

Such information reflects relatively minor updates that do not necessarily rise to the level of in-depth reporting or aspirational watchdog journalism, even while the information indeed improves respondents' daily lives in some ways. After all, some information is better than none at all, and "so long as you want to be updated, so long as want to know what's trending, so long as you want to know what's going on in the country, you have to be in touch with news" (Mukisa, 25 April 2023).

This distinction between types of information becomes even more important when considered alongside topics covered. For example, while individuals expected to receive accurate information about economic activity or natural disasters, there was some consensus that political reporting had been "spoiled by politics" (Julius, 30 April 2023). In other words, political reporting was perceived as particularly polarized and censored compared to other topics, reflecting one-sided views and presumptively shaped by political influences on such reporting. Francis shared this sentiment saying that while much of the information shared by media houses is correct, with political news, "there is something hidden over" (18 April 2023).

Thus, while respondents expected to receive some types of information from news media—certainly more than they would have without access to news—their expectations were tempered. Specifically, they were limited with respect to the degree of investigative reporting as well as the extent to which they expected to receive impartial and high-quality political news more broadly. Ivan articulated this perspective poignantly, saying, "They [media houses] are positive, but... Sometimes they give wrong information and sometimes they exaggerate stories. They have caused some problems for the community" (5 May 2023).

### **5.2.2 Journalists accept bribes and delay coverage**

A second salient expectation of journalists was that they frequently accept bribes and delay coverage of certain events. Regarding the former, the practice of accepting monetary inducements to produce certain types of coverage, or “brown-envelope” journalism, is not unheard of in journalistic storytelling, particularly in East Africa (e.g., Nkie Mongo, 2021). However, nearly all respondents expected journalists to engage in this type of behavior with some regularity.

More specifically, respondents explained that some journalists “twist stories” to get paid, altering the content of a story for financial benefits (Rose, 25 April 2023). In other instances, monetary incentives can move stories up in a publication or broadcast. Julius, who has a history of working in local politics, described it like this:

“To be in the lead stories, you have to pay those reporters. And you have to send some money today to the editor, and the editor will give it a lead story. But if you leave it normally and it moves in a normal situation, they can bring it last... Then you just know that they're working under influence or something they have been given. (30 April 2023)

Some, like Henry, believed the practice was ultimately changing the industry for the worse.

“The money-driven kind of journalism and the vendetta-driven kind of journalism is now overshadowing the original journalism,” he said (5 May 2023).

In addition to accepting bribes, respondents assumed journalists would be late to events or delay coverage of certain stories for political reasons. As Rose described, “When everything has happened, [journalists] will be like, ‘Oh my god, we’re here.’ You’re coming to capture the news, but you are late, so now you are going to miss out on very important information” (25

April 2023). Gabriel explained that these delays are exponentially worse in poor areas of the city, adding that “[journalists] take long to come around... If they were going to come around this side here, in a week they would have come” (27 April 2023). Simon, who also resides in a particularly poor part of Kampala, confirmed this suspicion. “Journalists never come to the ghetto,” he said, before going on to compare journalists to police. Specifically, he indicated that both journalists and police arrive late and often undercount casualties in poor areas of the city: “Seven people might die, and they report one” (27 April 2023).

While no respondents indicated that they were necessarily satisfied with these behaviors—accepting bribes and delaying coverage—most were quick to identify what they perceived as the root causes: “Money, people want money. It's not that everyone has that genuine heart that they won't take a bribe from anyone,” as Mukisa described (25 April 2023). With respect to delayed coverage, some believed that journalists “normally don't reach the public” and that “they're only around when something has happened, something great” (Musa, 30 April 2023). For others, delayed coverage can be traced back to the production of pro-government news content, the topic of the third and final prominent expectation in this section. Gabriel summarized the news media in Uganda to that end: “It delays. They have to first check if it's not against the government. So, you can't get news as it happens” (27 April 2023).

### ***5.2.2 News organizations and journalists produce pro-government news content***

A final prominent expectation of journalists and news media in Uganda was that reports would include pro-government—or at least avoid anti-government—sentiment more often

than not. For some respondents, this pro-government coverage was described as simply avoiding negative coverage of Uganda's ruling party, while others characterized such reporting decisions as intentional propaganda. Overall, participants shared a broad expectation that media houses produced coverage shaped by outside influences, "specifically influences from government" (Mukisa, 25 April 2023).

What characterizes these political influences? For some, a sense of political pressure leads journalists to a kind of blind objectivity, or neutral reporting to a fault. In particular, respondents were concerned that journalists were inadvertently producing pro-government content by allowing government officials to justify controversial decisions, such as arresting opposition protestors, in news reports. Simon gave this example: "When people from the ghetto protest, some of them are taken, and the news allows officials to say that they don't know where they are" (27 April 2023). Experiences like this led some respondents to reject the idea of objectivity altogether. This was David's position, who said "the media should not tell balanced or objective stories. Just tell what's happening" (27 April 2023).

Participants often acknowledged that this blind objectivity in the face of government malfeasance was in response to extralegal political pressure. Mukisa described what he perceived as journalists' rationale for these practices saying, "You [journalists] shouldn't criticize anyone. You have to be neutral when it comes to criticizing the government.... These journalists you see around, they don't want problems with the government" (25 April 2023). Still others pointed to the politicization of media more broadly when describing how journalists selectively choose which perspectives to highlight. Kabilito shared:

Even our media, it's based on politics, so you should be aware of that. There are some TVs that do not broadcast certain stuff because it's political based. That's how it is in Uganda. Some stuff like that they will hide. (30 April 2023)

Thus, for Kabilito and others who share his perspective, journalists and news media sidestep political topics to retain a sense of neutrality.

In other instances, however, participants felt that the news media were more intentionally producing pro-government content. "We end up getting news which has the feelings of the reporter," Julius explained. "He reports the side which he wants and leaves the other content, which is a disservice to us" (30 April 2023). In other words, rather than prioritizing an impression of neutrality, some participants indicated that journalists openly pushed pro-government content and that they expected journalists to "tell stories that benefit one party" (Geoffrey, 20 April 2023). Of course, respondents acknowledged that not all journalists always participated in this kind of brazen pro-government coverage, but there is a shared understanding that this behavior existed and could be expected from at least a subset of Ugandan journalists and media houses. In the context of the 2021 general election in Uganda, Bacia expanded on this saying that "at times, [journalist's name redacted] really does cover things for the government. For example, the media houses influenced the vote counting for the election... Everyone watched it and we knew that we were being robbed" (29 April 2023).

In contrast to the idea that journalists adopt a pro-government perspective out of individual interests or preferences, some participants also described news media as direct mouthpieces of government officials. For example, in response to a question about the purpose of media houses in a later part of her interview, Bacia did not mince words: News media exist

“to serve the government” (29 April 2023). Others took this idea further, suggesting that some journalists are recruited by the Museveni regime to produce government propaganda. Julius called these practitioners “regime journalists” whose main objective is to “popularize government news” (30 April 2023). Beyond recruiting individual journalists to create pro-government coverage, some respondents suggested that these practices infiltrate the very ownership structure of media houses in Uganda. As Julius explained, “They [media houses] are owned by the government official... When the worse comes to the worst, they report more news on the government side than any other side” (30 April 2023).

Together, these accounts illustrate the broad expectation that journalists and media houses will advance pro-government interests through their coverage more often than not. Such practices include both the sidestepping of politically sensitive topics as well as more directly producing government-leaning reports. Interviewees primarily attribute these practices to political pressure, though acknowledge that at times individual journalists’ opinions and preferences may shape such content.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the idea that journalists and media houses would produce pro-government content was not a favorable expectation, as described by respondents. However, similar to the expectation that journalists would accept bribes and delay coverage, participants were quick to defend journalists for this behavior in many cases, citing the risks and pressures associated with their jobs. Moreover, nearly all respondents were appreciative of the news media and indicated generally positive perceptions of journalists throughout their respective interviews.

### 5.3 Relative institutional trust

All of this in mind, what explains why respondents would hold generally positive perceptions of journalists and journalism, despite the seeming disconnect between participants' aspirations for media practitioners and their actual expectations in practice? The following section illuminates this puzzle by advancing the notion of *relative institutional trust*, or the idea that individuals' motivations to trust journalists or news media are shaped as much, if not more, by their perceptions of other social institutions as it may be by any substantive evaluation of media performance. Notably, trust in this context refers less to the expectation that news organizations and journalists will fulfill specific performance aims. In other words, it is not to say that individuals necessarily trust that journalists will expose corruption or even provide accurate and balanced information; rather, individuals trust that media professionals and news organizations are well-intentioned, or at least more well-intentioned than other social actors.

This insight is important to the study of trust in news for two reasons. First, it highlights the ambiguity embedded in audiences' trust evaluations by suggesting that one's propensity to trust may be as much about perceptions of media professionals' intentions as opposed to any expectation that practitioners have the ability or means to achieve those aims. Secondly, relative institutional trust posits that one's perceptions of intentions are—consciously or subconsciously—positioned relative to other social actors. In the case of Uganda, respondents perceived journalists' intentions as more trustworthy than those of political elites and government officials, despite broad awareness that media professionals are constrained in their ability to carry out their work.

Put in terms of prevailing definitions of media trust, an understanding that integrates relative institutional trust would refer not only to expected materials “gains” and “losses” from interactions with news media but also an assessment of how one perceives practitioners’ motives or purposes behind their work. Moreover, expected gains, losses, and motivations would be considered relative to other social actors, between which individuals are inherently comparing to some degree. Of course, these conceptual modifications may be more or less salient across contexts and perhaps particularly relevant to environments with low press freedom and/or political trust. Still, such interpretations are notably absent across existing research and public-opinion work on perceptions of news despite their potential impact on trust evaluations in Uganda and beyond.

Empirically, this argument is supported by three primary themes present in interview data, namely that individuals (1) cite political censorship when sympathizing with, and at times defending, undesirable journalistic practices; (2) look to news organizations to provide social services and information traditionally purveyed by government agencies; and (3) elevate news reporting that appears to hold government officials accountable for political corruption. Together, these lines of evidence lend support to the idea that trust in news media in this context may be relative and, in particular, relative to individuals’ perceptions of elected officials and government agencies.

### ***5.3.1 Citing censorship, defending journalists***

The most consistent perception across all respondents was the sense that political elites pressure and effectively censor Ugandan journalists and news media. Without any specific

prompts related to journalists' working conditions or the larger press-freedom environment, every single participant alluded to government censorship at some point in the interview. From here, respondents sympathized with journalists, often defending unsatisfactory journalistic performance and pleading for an end to censorship practices.

More specifically, participants were straightforward when describing what they perceived as censorship and highlighted three main tactics. First, and as Francis put it, "Journalists are very good people, but they're being tortured" (18 April 2023). Several others referred to the physical "risks" that news workers undertake (Henry, 5 May 2023; Sanyu, 26 April 2023) and acknowledged that they "suffer a lot" (Fatuma, 20 April 2023). In particular, journalists are reportedly "beaten" by the associates of the ruling government (Eva, 18 April 2023; Patience, 30 April 2023) and police, in particular (Peter, 26 April 2023).

Beyond bodily harm, a second censorship tactic that respondents identified is restricting the ability to attain broadcast licenses in some cases. Julius explained this clearly saying, "If you support the opposition, even if you have how many billions of dollars, [the state] has to verify you to do the work... So that bans journalists from doing professional work. They are somehow limited" (30 April 2023). This also includes the cancelling of existing licenses, as Gabriel described: "[Journalists] have that fear when [news] is against the government. They have that fear that if they air it out, the next time their license will be cancelled" (27 April 2023). Thus, respondents indicated that individual journalists were not the only objects of political pressure, but also the very channels used to reach news audiences.

Finally, participants believed that journalists and news media are routinely denied information and access by public officials. For instance, Emmanuel shared: "In Uganda, I feel

like journalists have been brutalized, that they have been denied access to information,” he said. “It raises a question about if we are consuming the right information” (20 April 2023). Information is also censored when journalists are denied access to certain areas, such as political rallies or crime scenes. “We know that the constitution gives [journalists] the rights,” Patience added. “There are times that their rights are violated, and they don't exercise them. They even stop them from accessing places” (30 April 2023). Respondents therefore recognized that censorship could take many shapes, including physical violence, licensure threats, and denied access.

However, beyond simply acknowledging political censorship of journalists, respondents also referred to such realities when characterizing, and ultimately defending, journalistic performance. For example, when reflecting on normatively undesirable practices, like accepting bribes for coverage, many respondents sympathized with media professionals. Participants shared perspectives like “journalists are paid to do such things because they fear... You have to take care of your life. Why would you say a different thing? Then you would be dead” (Francis, 18 April 2023). Similarly, Ivan justified incomplete reporting, saying that “the journalists have a big problem because [the government] keeps them, they fight with them... Journalists find it's difficult to give the real picture” (5 May 2023). Others acknowledged that journalists may “turn their lens away” from certain stories, knowing that if they published anti-government content, “they may be on the run in the next 24 hours” (Emmanuel, 20 April 2023).

In a broader sense, respondents maintained that most journalists are “just focused on doing their jobs” (Eva, 18 April 2023) and “doing their best” (Rose, 25 April 2023) despite the aforementioned pressures. In other words, respondents were willing to excuse, or at least

overlook, some unsatisfactory journalistic practices given their awareness of the press-freedom environment in Uganda. “Let’s give credit where it’s due” (Rose, 25 April 2023) was a common refrain.

Participants further advocated for the end of political censorship of journalists, asking rhetorical questions like “Why are [political elites] imprisoning journalists? Why are they beating them up?” (Eva, 18 April 2023). Others echoed this sentiment with comments like “I don’t like people who hurt [journalists]” (Francis, 18 April 2023), thereby implicating political elites and highlighting respondents’ relative contempt. In contrast, many respondents indicated that they generally find journalists “good” and “professional” (Brenda, 5 May 2023) despite collective awareness that their work may not always reflect full, fair, or accurate reports. Ivan summarized this shared perspective succinctly saying,

I think journalists are doing a good job. It’s better that they get their freedom to give out the real view of the picture, what is happening in the world so that everybody can be informed. Because information is power. When you're not informed, you are just blind.  
(5 May 2023)

In sum, participants were quick to cite political censorship of news media as a serious issue in Uganda. Furthermore, respondents referred to these perceptions when characterizing journalistic performance and normatively undesirable practices, in particular. There was general agreement among individuals that “being a journalist in Uganda is not easy” (Fatuma, 20 April 2023) and that the Ugandan government and political elites are, in part, to blame. From here, individuals generally held more favorable attitudes toward media professionals relative to the political elites and government agencies who perceivably censor them. Together,

these perceptions provide initial insight into how and why individuals may extend trust to Ugandan media organizations and professionals, despite expecting sub-optimal content or interactions with these groups.

### ***5.3.2 Dissatisfaction with government information and services***

A second theme to support the notion of relative institutional trust refers to individuals' desire for media houses to provide certain social services, an aspiration previously presented. More specifically, many respondents believed that media houses should engage in community development work, particularly by supplementing services conventionally provided by government agencies, such as public education or employment assistance. Beyond one of several aspirations, this perception draws into sharp relief the extent to which respondents distrust their elected officials to deliver these resources satisfactorily. Moreover, individuals may not necessarily expect news media to provide these social services consistently or comprehensively, but their aspiration for news organizations to do so illustrates a relative confidence in news media.

More specifically, the earlier section discussing aspirations detailed a variety of social services that respondents aspired for news organizations to provide—advertising, skills training, direct employment, general employment assistance, primary education materials, scholarships, and city infrastructure. Beyond these discrete services, however, respondents implicitly and explicitly tied these services to larger issues of national development. For example, individuals described how journalists and news media helped them “to grow in business and even in community” (Francis, 18 April 2023). Likewise, Brenda pointed specifically to the proliferation

and diversity of media houses in Uganda as an important nation-building strategy. She said, “I think having all these media houses is good for Uganda, and their perspective is to build the nation. They have different ways of building Uganda, and that's why I'm happy that all of them are here” (5 May 2023).

Some invoked development even more explicitly. For example, respondents indicated that media houses “are developing the country” (Eva, 18 April 2023) and that journalists “give real information to the public” and thus “give development” (Ivan, 5 May 2023). Henry, the owner of a vegetable stall in an urban market, suggested that social development is tied to access to information, in particular. He shared: “For any society to develop, information must not be selfishly guarded, whether good or bad... Because [people] may all perceive in different ways, but let them have it anyway” (5 May 2023). Henry discussed this idea in the context of government censorship of journalists, which he deemed to be a regular and damaging occurrence. Emmanuel reiterated this perspective, adding, “Even when you have the opportunity to develop, you don't have the social structure to develop because you have not allowed people to access information” (20 April 2023).

In addition to information access, others characterized journalism's role in development vis-à-vis coverage of social issues. As Bacia reported, “Some regions don't develop unless someone does a story on it” (29 April 2023). She went on to describe an investigative news story in which children were trafficked into cities to beg for money, creating a “cycle” of poverty that the government had been ignoring, if not endorsing. Thus, whether by coverage of specific topics or general access to information, respondents shared a broad sentiment that

news media and journalists are contributing, or at least could contribute, to the country's development in certain ways and in lieu of political action.

These perceptions are notable given traditional notions of development, in which public policy efforts and government-provided social services are typically foregrounded. For many of the individuals interviewed, however, elected officials and government agencies had failed to deliver these services across a variety of sectors. Instead, politicians were described as actively “engaging in corruption” (Gabriel, 27 April 2023) and drawing up politically motivated public policies. For example, one respondent described a situation in which she believed money for infrastructure was withheld based on regional voting patterns. She explained, “We realize the reason why most of the roads are not done now in Kampala is because when they were voting in the central region, they didn't vote for the president... They voted for the opposition. So, this could be punishment for all of us” (Bacia, 29 April 2023).

A small subset of respondents were less optimistic about the ability of media houses and journalists to realistically effect social change. In such cases, individuals believed that many media professionals had been spoiled by politics, reflecting the kind of “regime journalists” previously introduced and, thus, were either unable to or uninterested in disrupting the political status quo. Importantly, however, these respondents still saw such nation building as an important normative goal for news media, therefore holding to a potential that they had otherwise all but written off for most public officials and government agencies.

### ***5.3.3 News media and political corruption: An empirical example***

A final piece of empirical evidence supporting the idea of relative institutional trust emerged in response to a discrete and simple question asked of each participant near the

beginning of the interview: “Could you tell me about the last news story you remember reading or listening to?” Of the 23 respondents who provided an answer to this question (i.e., several respondents reportedly could not remember a recent news story), all but two referenced stories related to government corruption, and 14 of these accounts were from the same news event. At a time when many high-profile stories were circulating in and outside of Uganda, the fact that the vast majority of respondents recalled a news story highlighting domestic political malfeasance should not go unnoticed and further illustrates individuals’ relationship to news media relative to their elected leaders and government.

The most common news story referenced by participants concerned the recent arrest of a Ugandan minister, who had been accused of diverting iron roofing sheets intended to benefit the Karamoja region, a poor and underserved area in northeast Uganda (Atuhaire, 2023). Respondents characterized the news event much like it was being reported by both domestic and international media, saying that the iron roofing had been “stolen” (Bacia, 29 April 2023) and “embezzled” by government officials (Steven, 14 April 2023). Moreover, participants highlighted the rate at which the story was spreading across Uganda, with many referring to it as “the iron sheets saga” (Henry, 5 May 2023; Rose, 25 April 2023).

In some cases, discussion of the iron sheets saga was followed by praise for journalists and media houses. Referring specifically to this label, Bacia said that such coverage helps “with dropping the levels of corruption” and that “the media houses are very important for keeping us informed, otherwise all of these things would happen and we wouldn’t know” (29 April 2023). However, a larger number of respondents voiced skepticism as to whether the arrest

would have any real impact on Ugandan politics, further illustrating their disenchantment with the political system.

For example, Damba referred to the minister who was arrested as a “sacrificial lamb” (18 April 2023), suggesting that she (i.e., the minister) would alone be held accountable for a system’s worth of corruption. This cynicism was shared by David, who took issue with popular concern over roofing sheets more broadly:

Why are we arresting those who stole iron sheets and not those who stole money for airplanes or vaccinations for kids?... The government is capitalizing on the iron sheets saga when it is not the biggest thing. There are bigger scandals. (27 April 2023)

Thus, these respondents not only cited the iron sheets scandal as a memorable news story but also as a story exemplifying larger issues of political corruption.

Related to this, while the iron sheets story came up in nearly every interview at one point or another, nine respondents discussed other instances of political malfeasance first. Several referenced a different story in which a minister was shot and killed by their bodyguard (Muhumuza, 2023). Later reports indicated that the attack was in response to unpaid salary, sparking concerns over wages and financial corruption in the security sector in Uganda and beyond (Naturinda, 2023). Other memorable stories included the government-sponsored torture of *boda boda* (motorcycle taxi) drivers as well as the arrests and kidnapping of supporters of opposition leader Bobi Wine. Of the 23 memorable stories provided by respondents, just one story dealt with a topic obviously unrelated to political corruption, which concerned reporting on a recent thunderstorm.

Thus, respondents' tendency to remember stories related to domestic political wrongdoing and corruption provides further evidence for individuals' relative confidence in news media compared to their government elites. In other words, when given the opportunity to elevate specific journalistic content, the vast majority of participants paid homage to stories in which their own political officials were held accountable—or at least called out—for their actions. It is noteworthy that, at the time of the interviews, other major news events included the war in Ukraine, war in neighboring Sudan, deadly flooding in southern Uganda, and Uganda's passing of one of the harshest anti-LGBTQ laws in the world.

Of course, it is important to remember that the same participants who offered the stories described above also indicated—in different ways and to different degrees—that news organizations and news workers often fall short when it comes to investigative and critical political reporting. The memorable stories detailed above, therefore, should not be understood as representative journalistic content in this context, at least insofar as the perceptions of this project's participants are concerned. Rather, the political-corruption stories provided are better understood as seemingly isolated instances in which individuals saw a positive opportunity or potential for what journalists and journalism in Uganda *could* be.

#### **5.4 Implications for journalism expectancy research and media trust**

In conclusion of this chapter, respondents' trust in journalism and journalists can ultimately be understood as relative in two ways. First, individuals appear to extend trust in news media relative to specific tasks, as evidenced by participants' perceived gap between what they aspire for journalists and media houses to do and what they expect in practice.

Respondents expect journalists and media houses to provide certain kinds of information, accept bribes and delay coverage, and produce pro-government content more often than not. These are, of course, relative to other practices that they do not necessarily trust journalists and journalism to fulfill consistently or comprehensively (e.g., employment assistance or critical political reporting).

It is worth noting that some degree of tension is likely to exist between aspirations for and actual expectations of journalism in all contexts. In fact, such disconnects may even facilitate healthier polities when, for example, journalists see value in news events or political information that audiences find boring (Kleemans & Hendriks Vettehen, 2009; Tewksbury, 2003). That said, the extent to which these respondents' normative aspirations differed from what they anticipated in practice is stark. In other words, responses did not reflect simply a difference in degree between aspirations and actual expectations (e.g., "I would like a lot of watchdog reporting, but I expect to get a little"). The expectations that respondents reportedly anticipated in practice were substantively and markedly different actions than what they could imagine as normatively desirable (e.g., "I would like a lot of watchdog reporting, but I expect pro-government coverage more often than not"). For this reason, characterizing participants' positive perceptions of journalism despite a gap in aspirations and actual expectations as emblematic of typical reactions or media cynicism would be remiss. Instead, I have argued that such perceptions are in part a response to the situated sociopolitical context in which distrust of political elites and government officials casts media professionals in a relatively more favorable and trustworthy light, despite their perceived shortcomings. For these reasons, the present findings should not be understood as generalizable to other contexts; rather, they

provide a set of mechanisms that could be explored in other environments across space and time.

This observation corresponds to the second way in which audience trust in journalism and journalists can be understood as relative. Specifically, trust in journalism may be relative to individuals' perceptions of other social institutions and, in this context, politics and government operations. Even while their expectations did not meet their aspirations in most cases, respondents maintained high regard for media professionals and articulated relatively higher trust in this group than their elected officials or government agency representatives. This became particularly apparent when respondents cited censorship in defense of journalistic practices, expressed unsolicited dissatisfaction with government-provided social services, and elevated new stories that highlighted various forms of political corruption.

Taken together, these findings have several implications for discussions of media trust. On one hand, a cursory read could suggest that trust in journalism and journalists may improve as domestic political situations deteriorate. However, historical record and common sense would indicate that such a perspective is likely to hit an early inflection point, at which time journalists are unable to conduct remotely independent work, if any work at all. Rather, it would stand to reason that individuals need to perceive at least some potential autonomy on behalf of news organizations in order to extend even *relative* institutional trust. For example, relative institutional trust may be at least partially contingent on the extent to which audiences feel that journalists and news organizations have some ability to achieve some of their aims some of the time, even if incompletely. Thus, notions of media trust, including relatively

institutional trust in journalism, may be moderated by perceptions of press freedom and future work should explore this relationship.

On the other hand, a more nuanced take is that evaluations of news media may be as much a reaction to the broader sociopolitical environment as they are any substantive measure of accuracy or positive influence of journalism on society. This matters given that most journalism trust-building efforts target media interventions, when a much broader discussion of institutional trust may be needed. Moreover, the findings run contrary to what work does exist on the relationship between media trust and political trust, nearly all of which demonstrates positive correlations between the two (Ariely, 2015; Hanitzsch et al, 2018). While this observation is not a call to swing the pendulum in the other direction entirely, it should prompt investigations into associations between media trust and political trust across diverse societies and levels of political influence.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that the present study adopted a theoretical approach consistent with prevailing definitions of media trust (i.e., audience expectation that engaging with news will lead to more gains than losses). However, these interview data do not attempt to quantify audience expectations nor systematically compare them to reported levels of trust in journalism. Rather, participants' responses illuminate what individuals expect—or, in some cases, aspire—to receive from journalists and news organizations, with a theoretical assumption that such expectations are conceptually related to trust. Accordingly, additional empirical evidence is needed to ascertain to what extent the above expectations correlate with reported levels of media trust, this a primary conceptual goal of the project's subsequent phase.

## Chapter 6: Relating Expectations to Trust Evaluations in Uganda

From the insights generated by the interview-based study, the second phase of this project explores statistical associations between situated expectations of journalists, media trust, and relevant covariates. This investigation is motivated by the dearth of scholarship on media trust suggesting that one's trust in journalism can be understood as the expectation that "interactions will lead to gains rather than losses" (Strömbäck, 2020, p. 141). However, few studies have endeavored to explain what constitutes expected "gains" and "losses" from news and news workers, and fewer yet have related these expectations back to reported levels of media trust. As I argue, such oversights risk obscuring the very referents (i.e., expectations) for which any substantive measure of trust is based, particularly as measures are used across diverse contexts.

One goal of the present study is therefore to elucidate the extent to which individuals' expected gains from interactions with journalists and their content actually lead to higher levels of trust in news. RQ2a, specifically, asked to what extent situated expectations (i.e., those themes derived from interview data and RQ1) are associated with higher reported levels of media trust in Uganda. As findings from the preceding chapter indicated, however, interviewees' expectations—actual and normative—of their interactions with journalism and/or journalism included a range of what could be considered positive "gains" (journalists and corresponding coverage as reflective of watchdogs, public servants, etc.) as well as "losses" (journalists and corresponding coverage as characterized by bribes and political influence).

Thus, a second dataset and analytic approach was needed to understand how these diverse expectations interact with one another and shape media-trust evaluations. Specifically,

I fielded a nationally representative telephone survey with the aim of measuring the extent to which individuals expect that journalists are engaged in the range of activities described above (see Chapter 4: Research Design for detailed methodology). Results from an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) showed that expectations loaded onto two distinct factor constructs, the first of which I characterize as the expectation that journalists work in the public interest. Such expectations include, for example, that journalists provide information that improves daily life and care about average people. The second factor refers to the expectation that journalists work under—and in response to—political pressures. Examples in this area include individuals' expectations that journalists will accept bribes or produce government-leading content (see Table 3 for EFA results). Based on these findings, and for purposes of this discussion, I refer to these variables as *public-interest expectations* and *political-pressure expectations* of journalists and journalism, respectively, in presenting the results of the project's final two research questions.

Specifically, I begin with a brief overview of all variables included in the study. I then present a series of bivariate analyses to explore intercorrelations among the study's theoretically salient control variables and expectations of journalists (RQ2b). Lastly, I use a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions to examine how expectations of journalists—both public-interest and political-pressure varieties—shape individuals' reported levels of media trust while controlling for relevant covariates" (RQ2a).

## 6.1 Correlates of situated expectations of journalists in Uganda

RQ2b asked how situated expectations of journalists in Uganda correlate with commonly studied antecedents of media trust. Based on existing media-trust literature, theoretically salient variables included in the present analysis are media use, political trust, political interest, and perceptions of press freedom. While extant scholarship has produced mixed results regarding how these variables shape media trust—both increasing and decreasing individual-level trust at different times and in disparate contexts—all have been identified as important variables for consideration (Lee, 2010; Hopmann et al., 2015; Schranz et al., 2018; Toff & Kalogeropoulos, 2020; Tsifti & Ariely, 2014). See Chapter 2: Defining and Measuring Media Trust for a full review of these concepts.

A correlation analysis was therefore conducted to examine relationships between the aforementioned media-trust covariates (i.e., media use, political trust, political interest, and perceptions of press freedom) and expectations of journalists in Uganda, operationalized as public-interest and political-pressure expectation variables. Specifically, after confirming that variables were linearly related and normally distributed, Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficients were calculated. As shown in Table 5, results indicate a significant positive correlation between the public-interest expectation of journalists and political interest ( $r(434) = .22, p < .001$ ), political trust ( $r(434) = .19, p < .001$ ), and perceptions of press freedom ( $r(434) = .15, p < .01$ ). The expectation that journalists work in the public interest was negatively correlated with the expectation that journalists work in response to political pressure ( $r(434) = -.13, p < .01$ ), and media use was not significantly correlated with the political-interest expectation variable.

**Table 5***Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Expectations and Select Covariates*

	M	SD	N	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
					items						
1. Media use	2.80	0.87	10	.86							
2. Political interest	3.45	0.85	2	.70	.14**						
3. Political trust	3.11	0.74	2	.73	-.15**	.15**					
4. Press freedom	2.17	1.27	1	NA	-.10*	.05	.21***				
5. Public-interest expectation	3.37	0.73	5	.72	.00	.22***	.19***	.15**			
6. Political-pressure expectation	3.16	0.75	5	.70	.20***	.04	-.28***	-.35***	-.13**		
7. Media trust (multi-item)	3.58	0.72	11	.86	-.11*	.19***	.34***	.17***	.37***	-.37***	
8. Media trust (single-item)	3.12	0.77	1	NA	.12*	.14**	.28***	.08	.17***	-.19***	.29***

*Note.*  $N = 436$ ;  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two-tailed)

The correlation landscape looks notably different with respect to the expectation that journalists work under, and in response, to political pressures. Specifically, the political-pressure expectation is positively associated with media use ( $r(434) = .20, p < .001$ ) and negatively associated with both political trust ( $r(434) = -.28, p < .001$ ) and perceptions of press freedom ( $r(434) = -.35, p < .001$ ). Political interest, on the other hand, was not significantly correlated with the expectation that journalists work in response to political pressures.

While the strength of these correlations can be interpreted as weak to moderate in most cases, as  $r$  values fall between  $-.35$  and  $.22$  (Dancey & Reidy, 2008), the values are still useful when considering positive or negative associations. In particular, perceptions of a positive press-freedom environment are associated with decreased expectations that journalists work under political pressure, perhaps intuitively. Those who use news media more, often however, may be exposed to more perceived instances of political pressure, thus contextualizing the positive relationship between media use and the political-pressure expectation.

As for the expectation that journalists work in the public interest, individuals may believe that political malfeasance and censorship are kept at bay by an independent, watchdog press environment. On the other hand, an interest in politics and favorable perceptions of political leaders (i.e., political trust) and their relationship to the news media (e.g., positive perceptions of press freedom) may lead individuals to believe the news media should have the ability to fulfill normative goals associated with public-interest reporting regardless of whether that is actually feasible. Of course, all of these relationships should be interpreted with caution as correlations do not constitute causation or a direction of effect. However, they begin to shed

light on how situated expectations of journalists in Uganda interact with commonly studied antecedents of media trust, providing an opportunity to examine how expectations shape media trust directly in subsequent analyses.

Before turning to analyses of media trust as an outcome variable, Table 5 also presents correlation coefficients between non-demographic control variables and media trust. The two measures for media trust, a single-item variable asking about trust in Ugandan media houses directly and the 11-item News Credibility Scale, are weakly related to one another with a Pearson's  $r$  of .28 ( $p < .001$ ). The media-trust variables otherwise correlate similarly with all control variables, with the exception of media use, where the News Credibility Scale variable is negatively associated with media use while the single-item measure of media trust is positively correlated. To ensure robust findings and considering the project's theoretical interest in whether driving factors of media trust appear different across contexts, these results motivate an analysis of factors shaping media trust as both a single-item and multi-item measure as demonstrated in the following section.

## **6.2 Predicting media trust using situated expectations of journalists**

RQ2a asked to what extent expectations of journalists and journalism are associated with higher reported media trust. Given existing scholarly consensus that media trust should be measured using multi-item scales and that the News Credibility Scale showed high internal reliability across the sample, I begin by examining media trust as a multi-item outcome variable. According to the ordinary least squares regressions shown in Table 6, education is negatively associated with higher trust in Ugandan media houses. In other words, more educated

respondents tended to trust news media less over all compared to those that were less educated. Other demographic variables—age, gender, and urbanicity—were not significant

**Table 6**

*Predicting Media Trust in Uganda (Multi-Item News Credibility Scale)*

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	(SE)	$\beta$	B	(SE)	$\beta$
Education	-0.06	(0.016)***	-0.20	-0.06	(0.015)***	-0.17
Gender (female)	-0.07	(0.068)	-0.05	-0.02	(0.063)	-0.01
Urbanicity (urban)	0.01	(0.076)	0.01	0.05	(0.070)	0.03
Age	-0.00	(0.003)	-0.05	-0.00	(0.002)	-0.05
Media use	0.01	(0.045)	0.01	0.02	(0.041)	0.03
Perceptions of press freedom	0.05	(0.026)†	0.08	-0.01	(0.025)	-0.02
Political interest	0.09	(0.040)*	0.12	0.08	(0.038)*	0.09
Political trust	0.25	(0.048)***	0.25	0.17	(0.048)***	0.17
Party ID (non-NRM)	-0.22	(0.071)**	-0.15	-0.16	(0.066)*	-0.12
Public-interest expectation				0.24	(0.040)***	0.26
Political-pressure expectation				-0.27	(0.044)***	-0.27
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.19			0.32		
Observations (N)	441			441		

*Notes.* Cells represent coefficients from ordinary least squares regressions with standard errors

in parentheses. †  $p < 0.10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

predictors of reported media trust.

In terms of other important covariates, political trust, political interest, and party identification were all significantly associated with media trust. Political trust, operationalized as an average of trust in central (federal) officials and district (local) officials, was positively related to media trust as was political interest. With respect to party ID, identification with the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) was positively associated with trust in news media. Put another way, lack of identification with the NRM (i.e., identification with a different political party or no political party) was associated with lower levels of media trust. Media use and perceptions of press freedom were not significantly associated with reported trust in news media. Together, these variables accounted for 19% of variance in the model.

However, once the analysis includes independent variables of interest—expectations of public-interest journalism and journalism characterized by political pressure—the variance accounted for jumps to 32%. Notably, Model 2 reveals a significantly positive relationship between public-interest expectations of journalists and reported media trust as well as a statistically significant negative association between the expectation that journalists work in response to political pressures and media trust. In other words, when individuals expect that journalists are working in the public interest, they tend to report higher levels of trust in news media. When they perceive that journalists bend to political pressures, reported media trust is lower. Standardized coefficients suggest that these relationships explain a similar amount of individuals' reported media trust levels.

All previous covariates (i.e., education, political interest, political trust, and party ID) also remained statistically significant predictors. Standardized coefficients for political trust and

party ID remained particularly strong, though still comparatively weaker than the public-interest and political-pressure expectation variables. A comparison of the two models suggests that Model 2, which includes independent variables of interest (i.e., public-interest and political-pressure expectations), is preferred in that it explained enough additional variance beyond Model 1 ( $R^2 = 0.19$ ; BIC = 944.10) to account for the additional parameters introduced by Model 2 ( $R^2 = 0.32$ ; BIC = 878.72).

As a robustness check on these findings, and to examine how the inclusion of situated expectations shapes both multi-item and single-item measurements of trust in news media, I also examined how situated expectations of journalists in the Ugandan context shape reported media trust as measured by a single-item outcome variable. Specifically, the question asked respondents directly about their confidence in media houses as opposed to asking about various dimensions of trust (media houses are... fair, balanced, comprehensible, etc.). I then ran a final set of analyses with this item as the dependent variable using the same model progression as that of Table 6.

According to Model 3 in Table 7, age is the only demographic predictor of media trust when media trust is measured as a single-item dependent variable. Specifically, older respondents tended to trust news media less over all compared to younger respondents. This is a noteworthy change from previous models with a multi-item outcome variable, where education was the only predictive demographic characteristic. Other differences include the observation that media use is significantly positively related to media trust—i.e., those who use news media more often report high levels of trust in Ugandan media houses—whereas political interest was not significantly associated with media trust at all. Similar to the previous set of

analyses, both political trust and identification with the NRM political party are positively associated with media trust.

**Table 7**

*Predicting Media Trust in Uganda (Single-item Outcome Variable)*

	Model 3			Model 4		
	B	(SE)	$\beta$	B	(SE)	$\beta$
Education	-0.01	(0.022)	-0.03	-0.01	(0.022)	-0.02
Gender (female)	-0.07	(0.093)	-0.04	-0.04	(0.092)	-0.02
Urbanicity (urban)	-0.13	(0.103)	-0.06	-0.11	(0.102)	-0.05
Age	-0.01	(0.003)**	-0.13	-0.01	(0.003)**	-0.13
Media use	0.17	(0.061)**	0.15	0.18	(0.061)**	0.16
Perceptions of press freedom	0.00	(0.036)	0.01	-0.03	(0.037)	-0.04
Political interest	0.08	(0.055)	0.07	0.07	(0.055)	0.06
Political trust	0.33	(0.065)***	0.25	0.29	(0.066)***	0.22
Party ID (non-NRM)	-0.23	(0.097)*	-0.12	-0.20	(0.097)*	-0.10
Public-interest expectation				0.14	(0.058)*	0.11
Political-pressure expectation				-0.16	(0.064)*	-0.12
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.12			0.15		
Observations (N)	441			441		

*Notes.* Cells represent coefficients from ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions with standard errors in parentheses and standardized beta coefficients to the right.

†  $p < 0.10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Once the analysis (Model 4 in Table 7) includes public-interest and political-pressure expectation variables, the variance accounted for climbs slightly 15% up from 12%. Here, both the expectation that journalists are engaged in public-interest work as well as the expectation that their work is characterized by political influence are statistically significant predictors of media trust and again in opposite directions from one another (i.e., public-interest expectations are associated with higher reported media trust and vice versa). All previously significant control variables remained significant in this model, with standardized coefficients suggesting that political trust and media use are the strongest predictors among all variables, including expectations of journalists. A comparison of these two models suggests that Model 4 (BIC = 1214.73) fits the data only slightly better than Model 3 (BIC = 1215.70).

### **6.3 Implications for media-trust survey research**

Together, the results of these analyses suggest that situated expectations of journalists indeed predict levels of media trust, even when controlling for a host of other theoretically salient variables. This predictive power also extends to both single-item and multi-item measures of media trust as the dependent variable, though arguably to different degrees. Specifically, analyses in which media trust was measured by the multi-item News Credibility Scale indicated a better fit and explained more variance in terms of media-trust evaluations. Expectations of journalists—both those associated with public-interest work and work shaped by political pressures—also were stronger predictors in these models.

While future work is needed to ascertain exactly why this is the case, one possibility is that News Credibility Scale scores, by nature of including 11 items on diverse topics related to

perceptions of news, absorb some of the explanatory power that variables like political trust or media use pick up in analyses when media trust is measured by a single item. In other words, single-item measures of media trust that ask about confidence or trust directly may be more likely to tap individuals' a priori assumptions about news media. A multi-item scale, on the other hand, forces respondents to think beyond gut reactions or more politicized buzzwords like "confidence" or "trust" to reflect on specific perceptions or experiences of news, perhaps leaving more room for individuals' expectations of journalists to drive levels of trust in news.

Also noteworthy when comparing models with multi- versus single-item outcome variables, age and education had different associations with media trust across these analyses. One explanation for these divergent relationships may be that measures that include multiple items to assess media trust—such as the News Credibility Scale, where education was a significant predictor—ask respondents to engage in relatively more sophisticated evaluations of news media than a single-item question on trust or confidence. The single-item measure, on the other hand, asked about confidence in media houses directly, and age was the only demographic predictor. Thus, in concert with the preceding supposition, single-item measures may tap more deep-seated generational differences in world views or ideology, whereas multi-item measures are more likely to tap respondents' preexisting experience with or interest in aspects of journalism.

Across both sets of analyses, the expectation that journalists are engaged in public-interest work and the expectation that journalists work in response to political pressure presented similar predictive strength with respect to shaping media trust levels, though in reverse directions. This would suggest that journalists may not necessarily need to engage in

excessively robust public-interest work to increase levels of trust in Uganda; rather, simply abstaining from or avoiding behaviors associated with bending to political pressure could help move the dial. The best way to increase trust, based on these findings, would indeed be to reduce these behaviors while increasing work perceived to be in the public interest.

Related to this, media use was not a consistent predictor of media trust, despite existing scholarship to suggest that these variables correlate positively (Hopmann et al., 2015; Schranz et al., 2018). This finding is particularly meaningful insofar as it suggests that increased news consumption does not necessarily translate to audiences' perceptions that Ugandan journalists work in the public interest. In addition to increasing these activities in general, as posited above, media organizations and media workers in Uganda may consider additional initiatives to highlight their commitment to serving the public to address this gap.

At a more gestalt level, such findings support assumptions embedded in prevailing definitions of media trust. Namely, when respondents expected that journalists were working in the public interest, which would constitute a "gain" on behalf of average audience members, at least the normative sense, they reported higher media trust. On the other hand, when individuals perceived that journalists were bending to political pressure (i.e., normatively a "loss" on behalf of audiences), this was associated with lower reported levels of media trust.

Where these findings arguably push the boundary on existing media-trust research is with respect to the inclusion of expectation referents (i.e., public-interest and political-pressure expectations). Although previous polling efforts and media-trust survey research in Uganda and other strong-state environments have returned substantive results (Afrobarometer, Reuters Digital News Report, etc.), they often stop short of identifying situated factors driving trust. This

lapse in context—likely obviated by constraints on time and resources—leaves audiences to their own imaginations, at best, and cynicisms, at worst in interpreting survey findings. This may be particularly unsettling when results do not match preconceived notions of what drives trust in news in other contexts or from a normative point of view.

Of course, situated expectations were not the only statistically significant predictors of trust in news media, as higher political trust and political interest were both associated with higher media trust. Political trust, in particular, remained a relatively strong predictor of trust in news media across all analyses. This is interesting to the extent that it is not necessarily consonant with findings gleaned from interview data, in which respondents expressed little trust in government officials despite often positive associations with news media. While this may result from any number of factors, including effects due to measurement, it is worth noting that three quarters of survey participants reside in more rural areas, reflective of true geographic population distributions in Uganda. Meanwhile, the interview sample consisted of mainly urban residents, many of whom had been in Uganda's capital city for many years. It is possible, if not likely, that those in more rural areas have different relationships to not only news (e.g., there may be one community radio station versus many different outlets in urban spaces) but also to their political leaders (e.g., perhaps those in more rural areas are less taken by national politics and more closely affiliated with district local officials). A worthwhile follow-up study would therefore further explore the relationship between political trust and media trust in Uganda, perhaps statistically comparing different levels of political influence or using interviews to better understand rural perspectives at the intersection of news and politics.

Relatedly, and aligned with some of these suspicions, identification with the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party was also consistently positively associated with media trust. A couple of explanations for this observation come to mind. First, and as supported by earlier interview conversations, there seems to be popular consensus that journalists work cooperatively (if not by extralegal coercion) with the government more often than not. Thus, if one reports high trust in government, it logically follows that news media would also be held in high regard. Secondly, there may be some amount of survey response bias regarding levels of political trust generally, given the sensitivity involved with asking individuals about their political affiliations. This consideration is especially relevant given my position as an American researcher, even while I attempted to mitigate this to the extent possible by partnering with the Ugandan-operated Hatchile Consult firm.

Additionally, the small sample size of the pilot telephone interviews ( $N = 24$ ) meant that a statistically reliable factor analysis of situated expectations could not be performed before collection of the full data sample. In a world with unlimited resources, a larger pilot sample and complete factor analyses would have allowed for questionnaire revisions that may have resulted in a different latent factor structure with potentially different analytic findings. Similarly, and is the case with all survey-based research, the results are necessarily shaped by the operationalization of concepts. Future work make seek to compare the utility of these measures in other environments, particularly more inductive measures like those for expectations, while keeping in mind that a key theoretical goal underpinning this project was the inductive development of situated expectations of journalists in Uganda. It should therefore not be assumed that these expectations are the most relevant factors driving trust across

diverse societies, even while the research design provides a replicable tool for those interested in mapping similar perceptions in other contexts.

## Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

Motivated by a need to better understand factors driving trust in journalism, particularly beyond the United States and Western Europe, this project examined individuals' expectations of journalists and news organizations as well as how these expectations relate to reported levels of media trust. Using Uganda as a case study, I drew on two lines of existing communication scholarship, namely 1) work integrating expectancy theory into journalism studies and 2) work on cultures of news consumption. These combined bodies of research served as a theoretical lens through which to examine how individuals construct media-trust evaluations. The project advances both areas of work in notable ways.

First, with respect to work on expectations of journalism, the project responds to what could be perceived as an unintuitive gap in the sub-area; despite growing work on normative expectations of news, surprisingly little work addresses what audiences "actually expect" (Riedl & Eberl, 2022, p. 1683). In other words, research may examine what individuals desire from news and news workers but seldom follow up about what these same individuals expect in practice. This project, on the other hand, begins from audiences' actual expectations of journalists and journalism and extends forward to implications for normative theory and impacts on media trust. Findings, for instance, suggest that individuals often expect journalists to work in ways that might be normatively undesirable, such as accepting bribes or bending to political influence, even while respondents could imagine more desirable behaviors. The project therefore advances journalism expectancy research to the extent that its design moves beyond normative ideals of what journalism can or should be to center individuals' situated perceptions and lived realities.

Moreover, qualitative findings not only characterize individuals' actual expectations of journalists and journalism; they provide one explanation about how these expectations relate to media trust, advancing the notion of *relative institutional trust*. This contribution is noteworthy given that journalism expectancy research has primarily focused on documenting and classifying expectations without necessarily explaining what shapes these expectations to begin with. The present research, and particularly the interview-based study, foreground both individual- and group-level forces influencing expectations of news and news workers, finding that perceptions of other social institutions, such as government agencies or elected officials, play a notable role in shaping one's expectations of journalism. In this way, the project responds to calls for more journalism expectancy research that is "strongly aware of recipients' political reality" (Riedl & Eberl, 2022, p. 1696).

This research also contributes to ongoing work on cultures of news consumption, a theoretical orientation that assumes individual-level perceptions of and interactions with journalism are shaped in part by group-level social phenomena (Toff & Kalogeropoulous, 2020). By applying this perspective to an examination of media trust, I started from the premise that individuals' propensity or reasons for trusting journalism and journalists are guided as much by the social environment, and perhaps more at times, than personal attributes or characteristics of news itself. While a small number of studies have harnessed a cultures-of-news-consumption perspective to examine topics tangential to media trust, such as news avoidance (e.g., Toff & Kalogeropoulous, 2020) or engagement (e.g., Ferrer-Conill et al., 2023), these investigations have typically adopted relatively deductive and quantitative approaches, presupposing relevant social and political forces that may influence said behaviors.

In contrast, this project began with an inductive phase in which in-depth interviews with a stratified sample of Ugandan adults revealed situated social and political forces of interest. Specifically, concerns around a general lack of social services, perceptions of a poor press-freedom environment, and broad distrust of politicians were all identified by respondents as pressing issues that could then be considered alongside individuals' reported trust in news. This approach therefore represents an innovative application of the cultures-of-news-consumption framework, which is responsive to local context and can likewise be used to ascertain relevant social and political factors across a variety of geographies.

Finally, the conceptual approach used here further extends work on both cultures of news consumption and expectancy theory in journalism studies by integrating their respective perspectives. In particular, expectancy theory is broadly applied to examinations of individuals—and for obvious reasons. Expectations, after all, are thought to be one's personal perception of "stable patterns of anticipated behavior" (Wilhelm et al., 2021, p. 1011). However, and as has been established in communication-adjacent fields like social psychology, personal expectations are inevitably shaped by social context (Burgoon, 1993; Burgoon & Walther, 1990). Research on cultures of news consumption therefore provides a theoretical basis by which to assume that one's expectations of journalism and journalists, in particular, are indeed shaped by group-level forces. The integration of expectancy theory likewise introduces a body of scholarship and theory that centers individuals as units of analyses. When combined, expectancy theory may illuminate a host of mechanisms by which cultures of news consumption are absorbed and manifested at the individual level.

Of course, the contributions and implications of the project go beyond the theoretical perspectives applied. The remainder of this chapter thus summarizes key findings from Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, followed by meta-inferences that can be gleaned when these findings are considered alongside one another. I then discuss avenues for future research on media trust, keeping in mind the limitations introduced by my own research design. Finally, I conclude by outlining a series of recommendations for news organizations and journalists based on insights from the project.

### **7.1 Key findings**

Several key findings emerged from both the interview- and survey-based studies. Beginning with the former, insights gleaned from RQ1 suggest that individuals' actual expectations of journalists and journalism did not always align with what they aspired to receive from news content or news professionals in practice. In fact, many interview respondents not only indicated that news organizations failed to deliver on some of their most lofty goals, such as critical investigative reporting of political malfeasance, but on the contrary, they felt that news professionals were often engaged in the opposite. In other words, and keeping with the same example, respondents felt that news organizations succumbed to political pressures more often than not, resulting in pro-government content and the exchange of bribes for positive coverage of these groups. Distinguishing between individuals' actual expectations and their aspirations (i.e., normative expectations) therefore became a central outcome of the study.

A second finding, made more interesting by the preceding insight, was that individuals still held generally positive perceptions of journalists despite unmet aspirations. This comports with existing research on perceptions of news in Uganda, as well as other countries in the Global South, where conventional wisdom would forecast the opposite (i.e., negative perceptions or low trust) due to poor press freedom and perceived lack of journalism professionalization. Instead, people in these countries have reported moderate trust in news, at times higher than populations in so-called WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) nations (Hanitzsch et al., 2018; Henrich et al., 2010). The present findings thus lend credence to these existing survey results, which some have denounced as flawed without substantive evidence (Beckett, 2023). Of course, the present study's results benefit from their own contextualization. Specifically, what explains why individuals would hold positive perceptions of—or perhaps even trust—news media when they do not receive the content and/or services they aspire to receive?

The third key finding from the interview-based study sheds light on this paradox. In particular, individuals' perceptions of news, including their propensity to trust, appeared to be relative to their perceptions of other institutions, namely political officials. Some respondents made this conceptual connection explicitly, acknowledging that journalists try their best but are widely constrained and at times physically threatened by political censorship. Others did so less explicitly by, for example, expressing dissatisfaction with government-provided social services while simultaneously calling for journalists to fill these perceived gaps. This aspiration, in particular—for journalists to support communities through social support, such as employment or food assistance—is distinct given that it falls outside of what might be considered typical

normative roles of journalists, as least as they have been defined in liberal democratic societies. These insights together not only answer the study's research question, which asked about the primary expectations of news media and news workers in Uganda, but also places these expectations into context through the lens of relative institutional trust.

While the second phase of the project was ultimately designed to build on the interview-based findings, the telephone survey results produced their own series of key insights. First, perceptions that were operationalized as survey measures based on the interview findings tended to group into two types of expectations. The first set referred to expectations that journalists work in the public interest, while the second set was characterized as a broad expectation that journalists work in response to political pressures. This is notable in that study participants perceived—if only latently—conceptual differences between these types of activities, supporting the notion that expectations should be assessed discretely while keeping in mind individuals may conceive of such expectations as conceptually related in some cases.

A second key finding that emerged from the survey study was that both expectation types—political interest and political pressure—had distinct correlations with commonly studied antecedents of media trust. The expectation that journalists work in the public interest, for instance, was associated with perceptions of a more positive press freedom environment, increased political trust, and increased media trust. Expectations that journalists worked under political pressure, on the other hand, were associated with negative perceptions of the press-freedom environment, decreased political trust, and decreased media trust. The expectations also diverged with respect to their relationships to media use and politics interest, where the

political-pressure expectation was positively associated with media use and not associated with political interest, and the public-interest expectation was not significantly associated with media use, but positively associated with political interest. Understanding these correlations is an important point of departure for future work in this area, where researchers may elect to examine interaction effects of any number of these relationships on trust in news.

Thirdly, and in answering RQ2a, these two sets of expectations indeed predicted reported levels of media trust and with similar strength. Specifically, the expectation that journalists were engaged in public-interest work was associated with higher reported trust in news, while the expectation that journalists worked in response to political pressures was associated with lower media trust. This finding aligns with existing conceptualizations of media trust—i.e., trust resulting from the expectation that interactions with news media lead to more gains than losses—as long as one accepts the normative premise that journalists should work independently and hold powerful entities and government officials accountable to the public. Moreover, these relationships remained when media trust was examined as both a multi-item and single-item outcome variable and when controlling for relevant covariates.

A final noteworthy finding from the survey results was that several control variables also remained significant predictors of media trust across analyses. In particular, education, age, political interest, political trust, and party ID all predicted reported trust in news to different degrees. While such observations deserve more elaborate attention in future work, they allude to enduring questions in media-trust research. Specifically, demographic indicators like education and age may be related to media consumption in a variety of ways that interact to shape trust, such as access to and comfortability with technology and/or levels of literacy. With

respect to political influences, political interest, political trust, and party identification likewise confirm decades of work suggesting that trust in news, and perhaps perceptions of journalism more broadly, are closely related to political predispositions (Strömbäck et al., 2013; Stroud, 2008). As is discussed further in later sections of this chapter, this insight tempers the idea that changes in media trust can alone be addressed by industry-specific interventions but may indeed be tied to larger social and political identities.

## **7.2 Meta-inferences**

Beyond the distinct contributions of the qualitative and quantitative findings, respectively, mixed-method research is uniquely positioned to increase the “comprehensiveness, cohesiveness, robustness, and theoretical power of [research] inferences and conclusions” (Creamer, 2017, p. 148). This refers to the process of generating meta-inferences, or broader conclusions about a phenomenon, from both qualitative and quantitative strands of data (Taddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Thus, this section compares, contrasts, and integrates the findings on expectations of journalists in Uganda (RQ1) with reported levels of media trust (RQ2a, RQ2b), ultimately illuminating the project’s overarching research question: What are the most important factors driving media trust in Uganda?

First, expectations of journalists indeed predict media trust. Interview findings outlined a series of expectations—both actual and normative—that individuals held for journalists and news organizations in Uganda. Survey results showed that these expectations broadly predicted trust in news. Specifically, individuals’ trust evaluations systematically varied based on the extent to which they felt journalists were meeting said expectations. However, whereas

interviews allowed respondents to elaborate on specific practices that they expected in theory (e.g., investigative reporting) or in practice (e.g., information to improve their business), quantitative analyses demonstrated that these practices tended to group together under broad role categories, such as journalism for the public interest or journalism that is shaped by political influence. In other words, quantitative results tempered the extent to which discrete practices drive (dis)trust and instead directed attention to the larger ethos behind journalistic work (i.e., to serve the public versus to serve political interests).

Of course, the above categories are sufficiently broad as to seemingly apply almost anywhere. However, interview findings contextualize the specific expectations that make up these philosophies of the purposes of journalism in Uganda. In other words, the types of practices and roles that individuals have in mind when thinking about journalism for the public interest or journalism that works in response to political pressures are notably different than what exists at the forefront of existing scholarship on and measures of media trust.

For example, the lion's share of extant literature would suggest that public-interest journalism is nearly synonymous with investigative journalism (Carvajal et al., 2012; Price, 2020). While the type of public-interest journalism that emerged through interviews certainly includes investigations of political malfeasance, this was not the only—or even primary—concern for some respondents. As the qualitative data illustrate, examples of news organizations working in the public interest also included education opportunities for the public or hiring local people instead of hiring through patronage networks. Such differences therefore suggest that any meaningful reading of reported levels of media trust in Uganda can, and

arguably should, be understood with situated referents and expectations in mind, including the quantitative results of this dissertation.

A second meta-inference that is produced through both sets of data and analyses is that expectations of journalists are not the only factors shaping trust evaluations; perceptions of politics also had a marked impact on perceptions of news generally and evaluations of media trust, in particular. For instance, findings from qualitative data suggested that perceptions of politics shaped specific expectations of news organizations, such as the aspiration that media houses should supplement social services, as well as broader perceptions of media professionals, evident when respondents defended journalists' practices with political censorship in mind.

In terms of trust, quantitative findings further emphasized the significance of political perceptions on individuals' evaluations of trust in news media. In particular, interest in politics, political trust, and party were robust predictors of media trust, even when expectations of journalists were considered. This finding lends support to the idea of relative institutional trust, a theme that emerged first from qualitative interview data. In particular, the fact that political trust and party identification remained significant predictors of trust in news media once expectations of journalists were accounted for suggests that trust may not merely be a substantive reflection of media performance and associated gains (or losses). Rather, trust in news media may also be relative to other social institutions, including politics.

A third and final meta-inference from the combination of qualitative and quantitative data relates to this project's stated goal to examine the suitability of prevailing conceptualizations of media trust across otherwise diverse sociopolitical contexts. On one

hand, quantitative findings affirm the relevance of existing definitions of media trust to some degree, in particular the idea individuals extend trust to news media when they expect to receive more than they expect to lose through interactions with news organizations or news content (Hanitzsch et al., 2018; Strömbäck, 2020). When individuals expect journalists to work in the public interest, reported trust in news media tends to be higher, whereas the expectation that journalists bend to political pressure was generally associated with lower reported trust in news.

However, the quantitative and qualitative findings together suggest that this conceptual definition may be incomplete, at least under some circumstances. Specifically, while quantitative results showed that expectations of journalists were indeed the strongest predictors of trust in news media, political trust was not far behind in terms of its own associations with media trust. This suggests that trust in district (local) or central (federal) government plays a distinct role in shaping evaluations of trust in news media, outside and regardless of expectations of media professionals.

Qualitative findings illustrate the relative nature of trust in journalism and journalists even more explicitly. Specifically, themes associated with citing censorship in defense of journalistic practices, expressing dissatisfaction with government services, and uplifting stories about political corruption (infrequent as they may be in practice) all reflect a general propensity to trust journalists and news organizations, if even only marginally more than government officials. Such inferences should motivate researchers to integrate considerations of relative trust into future conceptual definitions and investigations of media trust.

In summary, this mixed-method project produced a number of meta-inferences about the most important factors driving media trust in Uganda. Specifically, expectations of journalists are undeniable drivers of trust in news media. However, they are not the sole predictors; political predispositions and perceptions of politics, for example, also matter. Prevailing definitions of media trust therefore provide a nice starting point for investigations of trust in news across diverse contexts, even while the findings from this project indicate that there is room for further conceptual development. Additional directions for future research are thus provided in the penultimate section of this chapter.

### **7.3 Directions for future research**

Like all research, findings from this project, as well as implications associated with its design, introduce a host of new questions and directions for future inquiry. Beginning with implications for media-trust research, this dissertation helps clarify the relationship between audiences' expectations of journalists and reported levels of media trust. However, it also makes many assumptions that could and should be further explored. For one, by focusing on expectations from the outset and therefore accepting prevailing definitions of media trust as a point of departure, I limited the extent to which truly inductive definitions of media trust could develop throughout the project. This was an intentional decision, meant to test basic assumptions and aid in the integration of relevant findings back into existing literature, but it's important to consider that other conceptions of trust may exist, such as trust built entirely on social affiliation, for example. With respect to the survey, some have argued that deductive quantitative approaches are inherently embedded with Western assumptions and therefore

can limit the nuance that qualitative methods might produce in African contexts (Mkabela, 2005). For these reasons, grounded-theory approaches or more open interview and coding protocols in general would be better suited to examine a wider range of media-trust definitions.

Where inductive coding and interpretation were applied to this project, a resulting finding from the interview-based study was the seeming presence of relative institutional trust in news media. As a concept, relative institutional trust joins the perspectives of those who view trust as a differentiated act, where trust may be extended at different times to different sources based on a range of subjective criteria (O'Neill, 2002). However, given that relative institutional trust was developed as an explanation to contextualize a set of findings, as opposed to operationalized and investigated as a central part of the project's theoretical orientation, additional work is needed to ascertain its conceptual dimensions and transferability. Future research may seek to study relative trust in journalism and politics qualitatively, perhaps asking about confidence in these institutions within the same interview setting. A survey operationalizing trust in different levels of news media (e.g., individual journalists, news organizations, industry) and levels of political influence (e.g., local, central, traditional) would also be a useful follow-up study.

The preceding point speaks to an additional limitation of this study, which is that its analyses left the object of individuals' trust—in terms of trust in individual journalists versus trust in news organizations versus trust in the news industry—underspecified at times. While the interview protocol did include separate questions about perceptions of journalists versus perceptions of news organizations, heeding calls to disaggregate individuals' trust evaluations

of these groups (Strömbäck et al., 2020), the interview-based findings section largely discusses these evaluations together. Keeping true to the data collected, this analytic decision was made given that respondents generally discussed media professionals and media organizations interchangeably, despite my cues to differentiate, unless otherwise noted (e.g., news organizations, not individual journalists, were expected to provide social services).

Moreover, the survey used individuals' expectations of journalists to predict trust in news media more broadly. The rationale for this was that I anticipated, drawing on assumptions embedded in work on media folks' theories, that respondents would have a clearer understanding of their expectations for individual journalists, rather than more abstract organizations. Media trust, on the other hand, is customarily measured at a more global level, rather than in individual journalists. Of course, it is possible—if not likely—that collapsing these evaluations inevitably shaped the analytical conclusions drawn. While this was deemed an acceptable trade-off given the exploratory nature of this project, an important follow-up study should more intentionally disaggregate individuals' objects of expectations and trust.

A final contribution to media-trust research is found in the project's methodological approach. Trust in news has a long history of quantitative study, with scales and polling measures dating back several decades (e.g., Gallup, 2024). This project, in contrast, joins more recent efforts to move beyond pre-established, "researcher-defined" categories of media trust to an orientation toward audience understandings and perspectives (Knudsen et al., 2022, p. 2348). Of studies in this area, many have continued to rely on closed- and open-ended survey questions (Fisher et al., 2021; Knudsen et al., 2022; but see Toff et al., 2021). Their contributions notwithstanding, such approaches still constrict the extent to which individuals

can reflect, clarify, and expand on their attitudes, therefore potentially limiting not only their perceptions but also explanations for those perceptions.

By beginning with an inductive phase supported by in-depth interviews, the dissertation's sequential mixed-method approach was designed to flip this script. This was, of course, guided by the project's conceptual orientation; after all, "methodology is ever the servant of purpose, never the master" (Greene, 2007, p. 91). Specifically, I used in-depth interviews to identify respondents' situated expectations of media professionals and news organizations and then used these context-specific findings to better understand factors driving media trust. The semi-structured interviews, in particular, allowed for surprising—even seemingly contradictory—insights to emerge, which may not have been possible without the synchronous conversations involved.

From here, the survey was designed to measure the extent to which these expectations were associated with reported levels of trust in news. This second phase therefore tied context-specific realities back to larger definitions and debates surrounding media trust, thus advancing theory while remaining committed to individuals' lived experiences. Even while discrete findings are not meant to be generalized beyond the case of Uganda, the research design provides a blueprint for others interested in examining similar phenomena in other places. Such research would open the door for cross-national comparative work using this approach, which would undoubtedly provide clearer understandings of the scope conditions associated with these findings.

The project's findings also have implications for understanding relationships between journalism and politics more broadly. For instance, research has long documented an

association between individuals' trust in news media and trust in politics, or what some have called a "trust nexus" (Hanitzsch et al., 2018). In other words, confidence in news media rises and falls with confidence political institutions and vice versa. The findings from this project certainly support these theories—to a point. Quantitative survey results, for instance, illustrate a clear and positive association between the two. However, interview findings would suggest that, even if the relationship between political and media trust is positively correlated, they may not necessarily be proportional nor is their relationship fixed. That is, media trust and political trust may increase (or decrease) together, even while media trust remains consistently higher (or lower) and/or changes at an exponential rate compared to political trust (or vice versa). These differences matter with respect to interpreting relationships between politics and journalism, particularly across diverse political systems and press-freedom environments. One direction for future work in this area includes identifying driving mechanisms of the association between media trust and political trust. For example, do levels of political influence (e.g., local, national, traditional) interact with trust in news differently? Or perhaps results vary by news medium or topic. In any case, the findings from this project reinforce the importance of investigating relationships between trust in media and perceptions of politics in Uganda and beyond.

These findings also have implications for several ongoing conversations in African journalism studies. In designing the project with situated expectations of journalists and news organizations in mind, the dissertation answers the call to reverse "long-standing, one-way, Western-dominated flows of research and theories" (Waisbord, 2015, p. 31), particularly in media studies (Banda, 2009; Obonyo, 2011). However, I tie these context-specific perceptions

back to broader questions and debates in literature, namely by examining how these expectations relate to existing definitions of media trust. The project thereby serves as an empirical example of what Waisbord (2015) refers to as a “bifocal perspective” (p. 33) in journalism studies, in which research is focused on local developments without essentializing these developments as isolated from global intellectual traditions.

With respect to future inquiries in African journalism studies, the project’s findings echo arguments that philosophical orientations toward *ubuntuism*, an ethic in which humanness is inextricable from social affiliation, may not be the best lens through which to examine social and political phenomena in African contexts, despite its popular use. Alternatively, some have suggested that theoretical frameworks for understanding media in African societies should instead incorporate ethnic nationalism and African political leadership styles into their conceptualizations (Blankenberg, 1999; Obonyo, 2011). This would seem to track with both qualitative and quantitative findings from this project, in which perceptions of and identification with politics certainly shaped expectations of journalism and levels of media trust, arguably more strongly than any notion of social affiliation or community wellbeing. Thus, future projects would benefit from incorporating more questions and/or measures for political preferences and orientations into their research designs.

At the most gestalt level, this project contributes to debates in the larger field of communication studies. In particular, its conceptual orientation intentionally integrates theoretical perspectives from the sub-areas of political communication and journalism studies. While this combination of literatures may seem complementary, if not obvious, given shared topical foci, their integration is not always straightforward. As others have argued, political

communication and journalism studies in many ways have developed distinctly from one another, both in terms of epistemological and methodological tendencies (Anderson, 2020; Karpf et al., 2015). While I am not the first to suggest the joining of these perspectives (see, for example, Nielsen, 2014), I integrate them here with the aim of expanding collective understanding of media trust, a longstanding concept of interest to researchers in both camps.

For political-communication scholars, the above findings should motivate those interested in media-trust research to reevaluate basic assumptions about the concept. I have suggested one path in this direction, namely that existing measures of trust may be as much—if not more, in some contexts—reflections of individuals' relative trust in other institutions than any substantive measure of media performance. This proposition, which draws on journalism-studies theoretical perspectives like cultures of news consumption, would surely change how researchers and pollsters ask questions and interpret their responses. By the same token, these findings also have significance for journalism-studies researchers, where trust-building interventions are often media-centric and at times disconnected from sociopolitical environments in which audiences experience news. Political-communication theories may help illuminate salient characteristics of political environments that should be examined alongside trust building strategies. Ultimately, both perspectives and research approaches are crucial for full understandings of media-trust evaluations and together illustrate the kind of knowledge-sharing that is possible when sub-areas de-silo.

Finally, and before moving onto final recommendations for practitioners, it is critical to recognize how my own social background and positionality as a researcher shaped the project and its findings. While I have interdisciplinary training in African studies and previous

professional work experience in Uganda, my position as a cis-gendered American woman demanded constant reflexivity and continual bias checking, especially during fieldwork. For example, in entering a social context different from my own, I inevitably brought a set of subconscious ideological constructions of what constitutes “otherness” as well as heteronormativity biases about how politics, journalism, and media consumption work (Johnson, 1997; Zohrabi, 2013).

I made several conscious attempts to mitigate these assumptions to the extent possible, particularly when conducting interviews. This included working with Uganda interlocutors to collect data (Fujii, 2017) as well as conducting member-checking conversations following data collection to identify gaps in my understandings or interpretations (McKim, 2023). Despite my best efforts, my positionality undoubtedly informed my access to interview respondents, the types of responses I received, as well as my interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative data (Berger, 2015).

#### **7.4 Recommendations for practitioners**

In this dissertation, I have conducted empirical research to understand individuals’ expectations of journalists and news organizations in Uganda and how these expectations relate to evaluations of media trust. From the findings, I have advanced a (re)conceptualization of media trust that integrates relative trust in other social institutions into working definitions, as well as provided implications for future research. Lastly, I offer new perspectives on audience trust and trust building based on these findings and with media practitioners in mind.

From the outset, it is worth acknowledging that insights from this project do not lend themselves to easy solutions, nor is there a one-size-fits-all approach to audience engagement and trust building. However, the findings do shed light on why existing trust-building practices may be insufficient under some circumstances. They also draw attention to alternative sites of intervention, which are inevitably more or less feasible based on sociopolitical context and resource constraints.

First, a central finding from the interview-based study was that respondents held aspirations for media professionals and news organizations that seemingly fall outside of normative journalistic role conceptions. These included services like employment assistance, business development, professional-skills training, primary education, and even material resources, like clean water. While many journalistic role typologies exist, most coalesce around normative ideas like objectivity, neutrality, and scrutiny of political behavior (Mellado, 2019). In other words, they do not typically include social welfare initiatives. While it is indeed difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a world in which journalists and news organizations fill roles conventionally belonging to elected officials and government agencies, these findings may have some relevance yet.

On one level, they complicate existing trust building efforts, which have largely focused on issues like editorial decision making, transparency, audience engagement, and increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in newsrooms (Banerjee et al., 2023). While these initiatives may be appropriate for some audiences, it is not clear that such activities would satisfactorily address the aspirations outlined by Ugandan interview respondents. Rather, their concerns

appear to be related to deeper issues like political representation, self-determination, and social welfare, as previously suggested.

It is then fair to ask: What do media professionals and organizations have to contribute to these ends? Here, there may be something to learn from research and practice in community journalism. While community journalism has been defined straightforwardly as “gathering, packaging, and distributing news in predominantly small, distinct geographic markets, with an emphasis on local news and community life” (Reader, 2012, p. 3), the normative model for journalism practice also brings with it an ethic of care (Kim et al., 2022; Robinson & Johnson, 2023). While the concept of care has its own history rooted in development psychology and has since been applied to many fields across the social sciences, an ethic of care in journalism essentially refers to “recogniz[ing] individuals and issues in need of material, mental, or even semiotic care” (Jones, 2021, p. 77).

In the Ugandan context, and based on interview data from this project, audiences reportedly desired more actionable representation from their political leaders and basic social services, like sanitation and primary education. From a practitioner’s perspective, and with an ethic of care in mind, one way that news organizations could approach the first set of concerns (i.e., actionable representation by political leaders) is through government-transparency initiatives, such as those resembling the Documenter’s program. The Documenters Network, a nonprofit civic journalism initiative based in Chicago, USA, trains and pays United States citizens to attend local government meetings and participate in newsgathering processes. This returns a sense of agency to individuals who may otherwise feel excluded from political processes and provides a public record of important democratic processes; it also falls squarely within the

purview of popular normative understandings of journalism, in which a primary aim is to monitor power (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2021).

Of course, an initiative like Documenter's is not a small undertaking; it requires relatively open political processes, a reasonably positive state-press environment, as well as the funds to support such work, and I do not take for granted that these conditions exist everywhere. In fact, many of the interview respondents I spoke to were keenly aware of the threats to journalists' job security and physical wellbeing when they attempted to report critically on government affairs, and asking individual media professionals—or community members—to take such risks is misguided. Smaller, yet equally important, measures include listening sessions with communities to better understand their needs and concerns as well as translating these concerns to public officials and *reporting back to communities* whenever possible. As with most social change, organizations with relatively consistent funding and resources are better positioned to do this work than individual media practitioners.

With respect to basic social services like sanitation and education, it is also unrealistic to expect news organizations—particularly in resource-strained areas—to provide these material needs directly. However, and again under the banner of community-centered journalism and an ethic of care, news organizations might consider partnering with local or international NGOs who are already engaged in this type of supplemental social-services work. Media houses could go so far as to actively co-organize trainings, perhaps providing meeting spaces or other non-financial commitments, though they might also simply bring relevant parties together at the same table. For example, media professionals can convene nonprofit executives, business leaders, and/or political officials to discuss issues that matter to communities, such as well-

water installations or strategies to address unemployment. Not only do these public forums give community members an outlet for expressing their concerns and needs, but such events are productive opportunities for story-idea generation and networking, which are also in the best interest of media houses and their bottom lines. Moreover, it is possible that such initiatives help build public trust in political officials over time, which—as the quantitative survey results show—is positively associated with increasing trust in news media, too.

However, the potential for such outcomes alludes to a higher-order question regarding the goals of trust-building efforts in news and politics. As others have argued, blind trust in journalism without some degree of skepticism is not a desirable outcome for healthy societies and “has been the aspiration of autocrats throughout modern history” (Usher, 2017, p. 2). This is a particularly salient argument in Uganda and contexts with similarly restrictive political environments, where news organizations and professionals are faced with extralegal censorship of their work. While this point is well taken and critical to keep in mind when developing both research and practices in this area, there is also evidence that journalists in Uganda—and around the world—value roles that involve advocating for social change and contributing to social wellbeing (Hantizsch et al., 2012; McIntyre & Cohen, 2022). If this is indeed the case, then the above recommendations may fulfill such commitments without any presumption that they can, or should, restore unconditional trust in journalism or politics.

At the end of the day, there should be no excuses made and no substitute for elected officials who fail to represent and care for the communities they claim to represent; these should be the foci of political scientists and those engaged in governance work, particularly in strong-state environments like Uganda. Still, media professionals and news organizations

represent a social institution of their own and can—and, as some may argue, should—consider and respond to audiences’ interests and desires in kind, particularly if they are interested in sustaining, if not increasing, individuals’ trust in news. My mixed-method dissertation project offers a starting point for these conversations, both for scholars interested in advancing future research in this area as well as for practitioners attentive to their audiences and wider communities.

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## **Appendix A: Verbal consent script**

First, thanks again for agreeing to speak with me. Before I start, I want to clarify that your answers are confidential. You will not be named in my study. Instead, your answers will be included with other people like you that I'm interviewing, with everyone's names changed. Please tell me if there is a pseudonym that you would prefer to go by. You can even tell me later if you think of one that you would like me to use.

I understand that talking about your opinions of the news media may touch upon sensitive topics. While I want you to be as open as possible, you are under no obligation to speak about anything you feel uncomfortable about. If you do not feel like answering a question or feel your response may be damaging, just tell me, and I will move on to a different question. You do not need to justify your refusal to answer anything. You can choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

Do you have any questions about any of this? You can ask me now or at any time during the interview. Also, if you have a question after the interview, please feel free to email me. Now, I'm just going to ask you a couple of questions and need you to clearly and verbally respond to each:

Can you participate in the project? Can I record this interview? This recording will not be shared with anyone else; it is for me to remember our conversation while I'm writing up my study.

## **Appendix B: Interview protocol**

Thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me. I'm a graduate student at the University of Washington in the United States. I conduct research on journalism and public opinion in East Africa. I'm particularly interested in your perceptions of the news media, and I would be grateful if you could share your own experience and help me learn more about this. This interview should take about an hour of your time. I want to stress that I am really interested in your day-to-day perspective as opposed to obtaining any kind of "correct" information. Is there anything else about the study you'd like me to tell you before we begin?

### **Opening questions**

Before we begin, I'd like to begin by learning a bit more about you.

1. Tell me, are you originally from the Kampala area?
  - a. Follow-up: And what is your educational background? Did you attend any schooling in the area?

### **Theme 1: General experience with news**

That's great. Next, I have a few questions related to your experience with news.

1. First, how often would you say you consume news?
  - a. Follow-up: Where do you typically find the stories you read (listen to or watch)?
  - b. Follow-up: Where do you learn about things happening in your community?
2. Could you tell me about the last news story you remember reading or listening to?
  - a. Follow-up: What kinds of media do you read or listen to?
3. How do you normally learn about things happening in the news?

- a. Follow-up: Do you find news yourself or learn about it from others or something else?

### **Theme 2: Interpersonal and relational news consumption**

1. To what extent do you discuss news with people close to you?
  - a. Follow-up: Could you tell me about the last time you talked to a friend or family member about something happening in the news?
2. Do you know anyone who works in the news industry?
  - a. Follow-up: Did you know anyone working in journalism when you were growing up? Tell me about that experience.
  - b. Follow-up: Have you ever personally interacted with a journalist or media professional? Tell me about that experience.

### **Theme 3: Perceptions of journalists' roles**

Now, I'd like to ask you a few questions about your perspective on what journalists do for work...

1. From your own perspective, how would you describe a journalists' job?
2. What would you say are journalists' top priorities when doing this work?
  - a. Follow-up: When journalists are working in your community, what would you say are their top concerns?

### **Theme 4: Media folk theories**

Finally, I have several questions about your opinions about news organizations more generally...

1. Similar to my earlier question, how would you describe the mission statement of an average news organization?

2. For you personally, how do you decide which news to read, if any?
3. From your perspective, what would you say the news is good for, if anything?
4. What would you say makes a particular piece of news credible? Could you give me an example?
  - a. Follow: In contrast, what would you say makes a piece of news NOT credible?  
Could you give me an example?
5. What types of news sources do you personally trust, if any?
  - a. Follow up: How do you decide what news information to trust?
  - b. Follow up: What news did you trust during the 2021 election and why?

### **Closing questions**

Thanks very much again for taking the time to speak with me...

1. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience with news?
  - a. Follow-up: Based on our conversations, is there anything you think I may be missing regarding how people like you experience the news?

## Appendix C: Thematic analysis codebook

Categories and codes	Operationalization	Example
<b><i>Media folk theories</i></b>		
Function of news	Information about how journalism relates to society, including how the news industry “ought” to operate	<i>“I would say [the mission of media houses is] to help us make decisions about policies... Provide us information, accurate information.” (Isaac)</i>
Satisfactory journalism	Information pertaining to news quality, including references to both low-and high-quality journalism	<i>“Once you report something that is not true, eventually the truth will come out, and they either lose their job or people no longer take them as someone who will put something that is true.” (Henry)</i>
General experience with journalism	Information related to direct or secondhand experiences with journalism or journalists	<i>“There are some journalists who normally come within the market here looking for news. Sometimes they used to come and get some interviews.” (Ivan)</i>
<b><i>Perceptions of journalists’ roles</i></b>		
Descriptions of journalists’ jobs	Information that describes journalists’ work, including personal observations and assumed tasks	<i>“I think it’s someone who sources information and shares information with the people.” (Damba)</i>
Reporting quality	Any reference to “good” or “bad” reporting practices, including how journalists “ought” to perform	<i>“When everything has happened, they [journalists] will be like ‘Oh my God, we’re here.’ You’re coming to capture news, but you are late, so you’re going to miss out on very, very important information.” (Rose)</i>
<b><i>Aspirations (normative expectations)</i></b>		

Investigative reporting	References to investigative or “watchdog” journalism	<i>“I think the purpose of a media house is to bring to light some stuff that happened behind the curtains that we do not see because the world is large or the country's large.” (Kabilito)</i>
Service to common person	References to journalism that is produced for ordinary Ugandan citizens	<i>“Media houses here in Uganda, sometimes they go extra mile and they reach the ground, the local people.” (Julius)</i>
Provision of social services	Reference to social needs or services that news organizations and/or journalists may provide	<i>“I think a media house, it has almost a 100 people that they are employing. They are giving them jobs, so they are solving the problem of unemployment in this country.” (Eva)</i>

### ***Expectations (in practice)***

Information about daily life	References to information that is not investigative or reflective of in-depth reporting	<i>“Journalists help us to know what we don’t know and help us to grow in business and even in our community.” (Francis)</i>
Bribes and delayed coverage	References to perceived unethical reporting practices, such as brown-envelope journalism	<i>“They [media houses] delay. They have to first check if it's not against the government. So, you can't get news as it happens.” (Gabriel)</i>
Pro-government bias	References to news coverage that contains a pro-government leaning	<i>“Let’s say, in this country, there are some media houses we know that are corrupted. They say they won't criticize something from the government. They always sideline with a certain party. (Mukisa)</i>

### ***Relative institutional trust***

Defending journalists	Information that justifies journalistic practice or sympathizes with	<i>“They are all paid to do such things because I know they fear.... You have to take care of your life.</i>
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	professional working conditions	<i>Why would you say a different thing? Then you would be dead... They risk a lot." (Francis)</i>
Dissatisfaction with government	References to unsatisfactory job performance on behalf of Uganda's central and/or local governing bodies	<i>"In this particular region, you can see the roads are not being worked on. And it's only until we protested online. But if you do it physically and journalists are involved, then the police will come for you." (Bacia)</i>
Memorable news story	Information pertaining to a recent and memorable news story of the respondents' choosing	<i>"Now the main issue now is the iron sheets... The money was supposed to go to Karamoja, but it was corrupted by government." (Gabriel)</i>
<b><i>Personal background</i></b>		
Media use	Information pertaining to use of news media, including frequency, medium, and topic	<i>"I follow a few journalists. So, when I want to get something, I go to their page directly." (Patience)</i>
Location of upbringing	Information related to location or environment in which respondent was raised	<i>"I'm originally from Mbarara, but I've lived here [Kampala] for my adult life." (Rose)</i>
Education	Information about any relevant schooling, especially tertiary education and additional training	<i>"I started in primary school just near here, but school fees... I didn't have school fees, so I stopped in primary four. (Brenda)</i>

## Appendix D: Survey verbal consent and debrief scripts

### VERBAL CONSENT SCRIPT

*Read to participant pre-interview*

Hello, my name is [insert interviewer name]. I'm calling on behalf of Hatchile Consult, Ltd., a research organization based here in Kampala, and Meagan Doll, a researcher and PhD student at the University of Washington in Seattle, USA. Meagan is studying journalism and public opinion in Uganda. As part of this academic study, this phone survey seeks your opinions about journalism and politics in Uganda. Before we start, I want to clarify that your answers will be completely anonymous and included together with opinions from 600 other Ugandans who we are speaking with.

The interview will take about 20-30 minutes. In consideration of your time, we will provide you 6000 UGX through mobile money as a token of appreciation upon completion of the survey. Your phone number will be stored to distribute this payment, but it will not be stored with the research data that is collected from you. The researchers will not be accessing any personally identifying information.

You have been randomly selected to participate in this study. There are no right or wrong answers, just feel free to give your views. You are also free not to answer a question if you feel so, or to withdraw from the interview at any time. If you have any questions or concerns about the interview, feel free to contact the researchers, Meagan Doll, on telephone numbers +1

(715) 388-7969 or e-mail [medoll@uw.edu](mailto:medoll@uw.edu). You can also contact Mr. Francis Kibirige, the managing director, on 0771756465 or e-mail [francis@hatchileconsult.com](mailto:francis@hatchileconsult.com).

Do you have any questions about any of this? If not, do you wish to participate in the study?

### **DEBRIEF SCRIPT**

*Read to participant post-interview*

Thank you very much for your time. For questions regarding this research, you are welcome to reach out to the principal investigator on the research project. Please contact Hatchile Consult and reference this call and date to be put in touch with the relevant researcher. Goodbye.

**Appendix E: Computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) questionnaire**

<p>What language would you like to hear this call in?</p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>English</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>Luganda</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Runyankole/Rukiga</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Runyoro/Rutooro</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Lusoga</i>          &lt;6&gt; <i>Lumasaaba</i>          &lt;7&gt; <i>Ateso</i>          &lt;8&gt; <i>Acholi/Langi</i>          &lt;9&gt; <i>Alur</i>          &lt;10&gt; <i>Lugbara</i>          &lt;11&gt; <i>Japadhola</i>          &lt;12&gt; <i>Kupsabinyi</i>          &lt;13&gt; <i>Ngakarimajong</i>          &lt;14&gt; <i>Does not speak survey language</i></p>
<p>First, we'd like to ask you about your media habits. In general, how often do you use the following media? Would you say you use them every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, less than once a month or never?</p>	
<p><i>Print or online newspapers</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>Every day</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>A few times a week</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>A few times a month</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Less than once a month</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Never</i></p>
<p><i>Television</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>Every day</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>A few times a week</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>A few times a month</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Less than once a month</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Never</i></p>
<p><i>Radio</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>Every day</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>A few times a week</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>A few times a month</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Less than once a month</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Never</i></p>

<i>Social media</i>	<1> Every day <2> A few times a week <3> A few times a month <4> Less than once a month <5> Never
<i>The internet</i>	<1> Every day <2> A few times a week <3> A few times a month <4> Less than once a month <5> Never
Thinking now about politics, how often do you use the following media to get information about politics? Would you say you use them every day, a few times a week, a few times a month, less than once a month or never to get information about politics?	
<i>Print or online newspapers</i>	<1> Every day <2> A few times a week <3> A few times a month <4> Less than once a month <5> Never
<i>Television</i>	<1> Every day <2> A few times a week <3> A few times a month <4> Less than once a month <5> Never
<i>Radio</i>	<1> Every day <2> A few times a week <3> A few times a month <4> Less than once a month <5> Never
<i>Social media</i>	<1> Every day <2> A few times a week <3> A few times a month <4> Less than once a month <5> Never

<i>The internet</i>	<1> <i>Every day</i> <2> <i>A few times a week</i> <3> <i>A few times a month</i> <4> <i>Less than once a month</i> <5> <i>Never</i>
Now, on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means very little attention and 10 means a great deal of attention, how much attention do you pay to the following news topics? If you don't pay any attention at all, please say zero.	
<i>News about national and local politics</i>	<1> <i>No attention</i> <2> <i>Very little attention</i> <3> 2 <4> 3 <5> 4 <6> 5 <7> 6 <8> 7 <9> 8 <10> 9 <11> <i>A great deal of attention</i>
<i>News about agriculture and trade</i>	<1> <i>No attention</i> <2> <i>Very little attention</i> <3> 2 <4> 3 <5> 4 <6> 5 <7> 6 <8> 7 <9> 8 <10> 9 <11> <i>A great deal of attention</i>
<i>News about international affairs</i>	<1> <i>No attention</i> <2> <i>Very little attention</i> <3> 2 <4> 3 <5> 4 <6> 5

	<p>&lt;7&gt; 6        &lt;8&gt; 7        &lt;9&gt; 8        &lt;10&gt; 9        &lt;11&gt; <i>A great deal of attention</i></p>
<i>Entertainment news/celebrity gossip</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>No attention</i>        &lt;2&gt; <i>Very little attention</i>        &lt;3&gt; 2        &lt;4&gt; 3        &lt;5&gt; 4        &lt;6&gt; 5        &lt;7&gt; 6        &lt;8&gt; 7        &lt;9&gt; 8        &lt;10&gt; 9        &lt;11&gt; <i>A great deal of attention</i></p>
<i>News about your community</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>No attention</i>        &lt;2&gt; <i>Very little attention</i>        &lt;3&gt; 2        &lt;4&gt; 3        &lt;5&gt; 4        &lt;6&gt; 5        &lt;7&gt; 6        &lt;8&gt; 7        &lt;9&gt; 8        &lt;10&gt; 9        &lt;11&gt; <i>A great deal of attention</i></p>
<i>News about public safety</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>No attention</i>        &lt;2&gt; <i>Very little attention</i>        &lt;3&gt; 2        &lt;4&gt; 3        &lt;5&gt; 4        &lt;6&gt; 5        &lt;7&gt; 6        &lt;8&gt; 7        &lt;9&gt; 8        &lt;10&gt; 9        &lt;11&gt; <i>A great deal of attention</i></p>

<p>I am now going to read you some sources of news that people in Uganda use. For each source, please tell me how much confidence you have in it as a source of news: A great deal of confidence, a fair amount of confidence, not very much confidence, or no confidence at all.</p>	
<p><i>Radio</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>A great deal of confidence</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>A fair amount of confidence</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Not very much confidence</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>No confidence at all</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Don` t Know (DNR)</i></p>
<p><i>Television</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>A great deal of confidence</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>A fair amount of confidence</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Not very much confidence</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>No confidence at all</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Don` t Know (DNR)</i></p>
<p><i>Print newspapers</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>A great deal of confidence</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>A fair amount of confidence</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Not very much confidence</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>No confidence at all</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Don` t Know (DNR)</i></p>
<p><i>Internet</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>A great deal of confidence</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>A fair amount of confidence</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Not very much confidence</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>No confidence at all</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Don` t Know (DNR)</i></p>
<p><i>Social media</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>A great deal of confidence</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>A fair amount of confidence</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Not very much confidence</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>No confidence at all</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Don` t Know (DNR)</i></p>
<p><i>Media houses in general</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>A great deal of confidence</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>A fair amount of confidence</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Not very much confidence</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>No confidence at all</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Don` t Know (DNR)</i></p>

<p>Now, I'm going to read you some statements people have made about media houses in Uganda. For each, tell me whether you strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, or strongly agree, or neither agree nor disagree. Media houses in Uganda...</p>	
<p><i>Are credible.</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>Strongly disagree</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>Somewhat disagree</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Somewhat agree</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Strongly agree</i>          &lt;6&gt; <i>Don't Know (DNR)</i></p>
<p><i>Are balanced.</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>Strongly disagree</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>Somewhat disagree</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Somewhat agree</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Strongly agree</i>          &lt;6&gt; <i>Don't Know (DNR)</i></p>
<p><i>Are not fair.</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>Strongly disagree</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>Somewhat disagree</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Somewhat agree</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Strongly agree</i>          &lt;6&gt; <i>Don't Know (DNR)</i></p>
<p><i>Can be trusted.</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>Strongly disagree</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>Somewhat disagree</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Somewhat agree</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Strongly agree</i>          &lt;6&gt; <i>Don't Know (DNR)</i></p>
<p><i>Are accurate.</i></p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>Strongly disagree</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>Somewhat disagree</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Somewhat agree</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Strongly agree</i>          &lt;6&gt; <i>Don't Know (DNR)</i></p>

<i>Tell the whole story.</i>	<1> Strongly disagree <2> Somewhat disagree <3> Neither agree nor disagree <4> Somewhat agree <5> Strongly agree <6> Don `t Know (DNR)
<i>Base reports on factual information.</i>	<1> Strongly disagree <2> Somewhat disagree <3> Neither agree nor disagree <4> Somewhat agree <5> Strongly agree <6> Don `t Know (DNR)
<i>Report fairly on news topics.</i>	<1> Strongly disagree <2> Somewhat disagree <3> Neither agree nor disagree <4> Somewhat agree <5> Strongly agree <6> Don `t Know (DNR)
<i>Are comprehensible.</i>	<1> Strongly disagree <2> Somewhat disagree <3> Neither agree nor disagree <4> Somewhat agree <5> Strongly agree <6> Don `t Know (DNR)
<i>Are biased.</i>	<1> Strongly disagree <2> Somewhat disagree <3> Neither agree nor disagree <4> Somewhat agree <5> Strongly agree <6> Don `t Know (DNR)
<i>Are opinionated.</i>	<1> Strongly disagree <2> Somewhat disagree <3> Neither agree nor disagree <4> Somewhat agree <5> Strongly agree <6> Don `t Know (DNR)

<i>Are not interesting.</i>	<1> <i>Strongly disagree</i> <2> <i>Somewhat disagree</i> <3> <i>Neither agree nor disagree</i> <4> <i>Somewhat agree</i> <5> <i>Strongly agree</i> <6> <i>Don `t Know (DNR)</i>
<i>Are enjoyable to read and/or watch.</i>	<1> <i>Strongly disagree</i> <2> <i>Somewhat disagree</i> <3> <i>Neither agree nor disagree</i> <4> <i>Somewhat agree</i> <5> <i>Strongly agree</i> <6> <i>Don `t Know (DNR)</i>
How much of the time do you think you can trust media houses to report the news fairly?	<1> Just about always <2> Most of the time <3> Only some of the time <4> None of the time
How much of the time do you think you can trust media houses to report the news accurately?	<1> Just about always <2> Most of the time <3> Only some of the time <4> None of the time
Media houses have different priorities. How concerned do you think media houses are about...	
<i>Being accurate in reporting a story?</i>	<1> <i>Not at all concerned</i> <2> <i>Slightly concerned</i> <3> <i>Somewhat concerned</i> <4> <i>Moderately concerned</i> <5> <i>Extremely concerned</i> <6> <i>Don `t Know (DNR)</i>
<i>Being the first to report a story?</i>	<1> <i>Not at all concerned</i> <2> <i>Slightly concerned</i> <3> <i>Somewhat concerned</i> <4> <i>Moderately concerned</i> <5> <i>Extremely concerned</i> <6> <i>Don `t Know (DNR)</i>
<i>Maximizing business interests and profit?</i>	<1> <i>Not at all concerned</i> <2> <i>Slightly concerned</i> <3> <i>Somewhat concerned</i> <4> <i>Moderately concerned</i>

	<p>&lt;5&gt; <i>Extremely concerned</i>          &lt;6&gt; <i>Don` t Know (DNR)</i></p>
<i>Avoiding trouble with authorities?</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>Not at all concerned</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>Slightly concerned</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Somewhat concerned</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Moderately concerned</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Extremely concerned</i>          &lt;6&gt; <i>Don` t Know (DNR)</i></p>
<i>Following news-reporting standards?</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>Not at all concerned</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>Slightly concerned</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Somewhat concerned</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Moderately concerned</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>Extremely concerned</i>          &lt;6&gt; <i>Don` t Know (DNR)</i></p>
Thank you. Let`s turn now to journalists.	
How often do you think journalists in Uganda	
<i>Provide information that improves your daily life?</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>Never</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>Rarely</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Sometimes</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Often</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>All the time</i>          &lt;6&gt; <i>Don` t know (DNR)</i></p>
<i>Provide information that exposes corruption?</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>Never</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>Rarely</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Sometimes</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Often</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>All the time</i>          &lt;6&gt; <i>Don` t know (DNR)</i></p>
<i>Serve the general public?</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; <i>Never</i>          &lt;2&gt; <i>Rarely</i>          &lt;3&gt; <i>Sometimes</i>          &lt;4&gt; <i>Often</i>          &lt;5&gt; <i>All the time</i>          &lt;6&gt; <i>Don` t know (DNR)</i></p>

<i>Produce pro-government content?</i>	<1> Never <2> Rarely <3> Sometimes <4> Often <5> All the time <6> Don't know (DNR)
<i>Produce anti-government content?</i>	<1> Never <2> Rarely <3> Sometimes <4> Often <5> All the time <6> Don't know (DNR)
<i>Delay coverage of some stories over others?</i>	<1> Never <2> Rarely <3> Sometimes <4> Often <5> All the time <6> Don't know (DNR)
<i>Accept bribes to repress stories?</i>	<1> Never <2> Rarely <3> Sometimes <4> Often <5> All the time <6> Don't know (DNR)
<i>Are influenced by politics?</i>	<1> Never <2> Rarely <3> Sometimes <4> Often <5> All the time <6> Don't know (DNR)
<i>Work in fear of government influence?</i>	<1> Never <2> Rarely <3> Sometimes <4> Often <5> All the time <6> Don't know (DNR)

<i>Care about people like you?</i>	<1> Never <2> Rarely <3> Sometimes <4> Often <5> All the time <6> Don `t know (DNR)
<i>Provide information that holds powerful people accountable?</i>	<1> Never <2> Rarely <3> Sometimes <4> Often <5> All the time <6> Don `t know (DNR)
<i>Provide information about celebrity gossip?</i>	<1> Never <2> Rarely <3> Sometimes <4> Often <5> All the time <6> Don `t know (DNR)
Now, regardless of what you think journalists do in practice, how important to you believe it is that journalists in Uganda	
<i>Provide information that improves your daily life?</i>	<1> Not at all important <2> A little important <3> Somewhat important <4> Very important <5> Extremely important <6> Don `t Know (DNR)
<i>Provide information that exposes corruption?</i>	<1> Not at all important <2> A little important <3> Somewhat important <4> Very important <5> Extremely important <6> Don `t Know (DNR)
<i>Serve the general public?</i>	<1> Not at all important <2> A little important <3> Somewhat important <4> Very important <5> Extremely important

	<6> Don't Know (DNR)
<i>Produce pro-government content?</i>	<1> Not at all important <2> A little important <3> Somewhat important <4> Very important <5> Extremely important <6> Don't Know (DNR)
<i>Produce anti-government content?</i>	<1> Not at all important <2> A little important <3> Somewhat important <4> Very important <5> Extremely important <6> Don't Know (DNR)
<i>Delay coverage of some stories over others?</i>	<1> Not at all important <2> A little important <3> Somewhat important <4> Very important <5> Extremely important <6> Don't Know (DNR)
<i>Accept bribes to repress stories?</i>	<1> Not at all important <2> A little important <3> Somewhat important <4> Very important <5> Extremely important <6> Don't Know (DNR)
<i>Are influenced by politics?</i>	<1> Not at all important <2> A little important <3> Somewhat important <4> Very important <5> Extremely important <6> Don't Know (DNR)
<i>Work in fear of government influence?</i>	<1> Not at all important <2> A little important <3> Somewhat important <4> Very important <5> Extremely important <6> Don't Know (DNR)

<i>Care about people like you?</i>	<1> Not at all important <2> A little important <3> Somewhat important <4> Very important <5> Extremely important <6> Don `t Know (DNR)
<i>Provide information that holds powerful people accountable?</i>	<1> Not at all important <2> A little important <3> Somewhat important <4> Very important <5> Extremely important <6> Don `t Know (DNR)
<i>Provide information about celebrity gossip?</i>	<1> Not at all important <2> A little important <3> Somewhat important <4> Very important <5> Extremely important <6> Don `t Know (DNR)
Q11. Below are some statements about media houses. As organizations, how often do you think media houses in Uganda	
<i>Serve the general public?</i>	<1> Never <2> Rarely <3> Sometimes <4> Often <5> All of the time <6> Don `t Know (DNR)
<i>Provide educational opportunities to the general public?</i>	<1> Never <2> Rarely <3> Sometimes <4> Often <5> All of the time <6> Don `t Know (DNR)
<i>Provide employment opportunities to the general public?</i>	<1> Never <2> Rarely <3> Sometimes

	<p>&lt;4&gt; Often</p> <p>&lt;5&gt; All of the time</p> <p>&lt;6&gt; Don't Know (DNR)</p>
Now, regardless of what you think media houses do in practice, how often do you believe media houses in Uganda should	
<i>Serve the general public</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; Never</p> <p>&lt;2&gt; Rarely</p> <p>&lt;3&gt; Sometimes</p> <p>&lt;4&gt; Often</p> <p>&lt;5&gt; All of the time</p>
<i>Provide educational opportunities to the general public.</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; Never</p> <p>&lt;2&gt; Rarely</p> <p>&lt;3&gt; Sometimes</p> <p>&lt;4&gt; Often</p> <p>&lt;5&gt; All of the time</p>
<i>Provide employment opportunities to the general public</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; Never</p> <p>&lt;2&gt; Rarely</p> <p>&lt;3&gt; Sometimes</p> <p>&lt;4&gt; Often</p> <p>&lt;5&gt; All of the time</p>
In general, how often do you follow what's going on in Uganda's national-level politics?	<p>&lt;1&gt; All the time</p> <p>&lt;2&gt; Most of the time</p> <p>&lt;3&gt; Some of the time</p> <p>&lt;4&gt; Only now and then</p> <p>&lt;5&gt; Hardly at all</p>
How much confidence do you have in the following groups in Uganda? For each group, please tell me how much confidence you have: A great deal of confidence, a fair amount of confidence, not very much confidence, or no confidence at all.	
<i>Central government</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; A great deal of confidence</p> <p>&lt;2&gt; A fair amount of confidence</p> <p>&lt;3&gt; Not very much confidence</p> <p>&lt;4&gt; No confidence at all</p>
<i>District local government</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; A great deal of confidence</p> <p>&lt;2&gt; A fair amount of confidence</p> <p>&lt;3&gt; Not very much confidence</p>

	<4> <i>No confidence at all</i>
<i>Religious leaders</i>	<1> <i>A great deal of confidence</i> <2> <i>A fair amount of confidence</i> <3> <i>Not very much confidence</i> <4> <i>No confidence at all</i>
<i>News media</i>	<1> <i>A great deal of confidence</i> <2> <i>A fair amount of confidence</i> <3> <i>Not very much confidence</i> <4> <i>No confidence at all</i>
<i>Large companies</i>	<1> <i>A great deal of confidence</i> <2> <i>A fair amount of confidence</i> <3> <i>Not very much confidence</i> <4> <i>No confidence at all</i>
Please tell me how often you think people from each of the following groups in Uganda spread information that they know is false?	
<i>Government officials</i>	<1> <i>Never</i> <2> <i>Rarely</i> <3> <i>Sometimes</i> <4> <i>Often</i> <5> <i>All the time</i> <6> <i>Don` t Know (DNR)</i>
<i>Politicians and political parties</i>	<1> <i>Never</i> <2> <i>Rarely</i> <3> <i>Sometimes</i> <4> <i>Often</i> <5> <i>All the time</i> <6> <i>Don` t Know (DNR)</i>
<i>News media and journalists</i>	<1> <i>Never</i> <2> <i>Rarely</i> <3> <i>Sometimes</i> <4> <i>Often</i> <5> <i>All the time</i> <6> <i>Don` t Know (DNR)</i>
<i>Social media users</i>	<1> <i>Never</i> <2> <i>Rarely</i> <3> <i>Sometimes</i> <4> <i>Often</i>

	<p>&lt;5&gt; All the time</p> <p>&lt;6&gt; Don` t Know (DNR)</p>
<i>Activists and interest groups</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; Never</p> <p>&lt;2&gt; Rarely</p> <p>&lt;3&gt; Sometimes</p> <p>&lt;4&gt; Often</p> <p>&lt;5&gt; All the time</p> <p>&lt;6&gt; Don` t Know (DNR)</p>
In your opinion, how much do you agree with the following statements about Uganda?	
<i>Journalists work in fear of political influence.</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; Strongly disagree</p> <p>&lt;2&gt; Somewhat disagree</p> <p>&lt;3&gt; Neither agree nor disagree</p> <p>&lt;4&gt; Somewhat agree</p> <p>&lt;5&gt; Strongly agree</p>
<i>Journalists are able to report freely on politics.</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; Strongly disagree</p> <p>&lt;2&gt; Somewhat disagree</p> <p>&lt;3&gt; Neither agree nor disagree</p> <p>&lt;4&gt; Somewhat agree</p> <p>&lt;5&gt; Strongly agree</p>
<i>People are free to express their opinions about politics.</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; Strongly disagree</p> <p>&lt;2&gt; Somewhat disagree</p> <p>&lt;3&gt; Neither agree nor disagree</p> <p>&lt;4&gt; Somewhat agree</p> <p>&lt;5&gt; Strongly agree</p>
<i>People must be careful about what they say about politics.</i>	<p>&lt;1&gt; Strongly disagree</p> <p>&lt;2&gt; Somewhat disagree</p> <p>&lt;3&gt; Neither agree nor disagree</p> <p>&lt;4&gt; Somewhat agree</p> <p>&lt;5&gt; Strongly agree</p>
In general, how interested are you in politics?	<p>&lt;1&gt; Not at all interested</p> <p>&lt;2&gt; Not very interested</p> <p>&lt;3&gt; Somewhat interested</p> <p>&lt;4&gt; Very interested</p> <p>&lt;5&gt; Extremely interested</p>
Finally, we would like to ask you some questions about yourself.	

<p>What is your highest level of education?</p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; No formal schooling          &lt;2&gt; Informal schooling only (including Koranic schooling)          &lt;3&gt; Some primary schooling          &lt;4&gt; Primary school completed          &lt;5&gt; Intermediate school of some secondary school          &lt;6&gt; Intermediate or some secondary school completed          &lt;7&gt; Some high school          &lt;8&gt; High school completed          &lt;9&gt; Post-secondary qualifications, other than university e.g. a diploma or degree from a polytechnic or college          &lt;10&gt; Some university          &lt;11&gt; University completed          &lt;12&gt; Post-graduate</p>
<p>Do you feel close to any particular political party?</p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; No          &lt;2&gt; Yes          &lt;3&gt; Refused          &lt;4&gt; Don't know</p>
<p>Which party is that?</p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; National Resistance Movement          &lt;2&gt; Forum for Democratic Change          &lt;3&gt; Democratic Party          &lt;4&gt; National Unity Platform          &lt;5&gt; Conservative Party          &lt;6&gt; Uganda People's Congress          &lt;7&gt; The People's Progressive Party          &lt;8&gt; Social Democratic Party          &lt;9&gt; Uganda Federal Alliance          &lt;10&gt; The Justice Forum          &lt;11&gt; The People's Development Party          &lt;12&gt; The Alliance for National Transformation          &lt;13&gt; Uganda Farmer's party          &lt;14&gt; Other specify</p>
<p>Lastly, in what year were you born?</p>	<p>&lt;1&gt; Don't Know          &lt;2&gt; Refused to Answer</p>

<i>[Answered by interviewer]</i> Does respondent come from a rural or urban area?	<1> More rural <2> More urban
<i>[Answered by interviewer]</i> What is respondent's gender?	<1> Male <2> Female