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Article

## The ethics of using anonymous sources in journalistic investigations: Perceptions of Kazakhstani citizens

Shynggys A. Atay, Aizhan Sh. Burkitbayeva  
Farabi University, Kazakhstan



This article examines the ethics of using anonymous sources in journalistic investigations considering perceptions of Kazakhstan's citizens. Contemporary journalism often faces the need to work with anonymous sources. This raises questions about the reliability, ethicality and safety of this practice. The aim of the study is to analyze citizens' attitudes toward the use of anonymous sources in journalistic investigations within the context of Kazakhstani society. The research objectives are to identify their perceptions of the risks and benefits of using anonymous information in journalism.

To achieve these objectives, a survey was conducted among 100 respondents from various social groups not directly involved in journalistic activities. The study included questions regarding the significance of journalistic investigations, attitudes toward anonymous sources, trust in investigative results and opinions on the sufficiency of legal protection for journalists and their sources in Kazakhstan. An analysis of the results has shown that most of the respondents support the use of anonymous sources, but they express concerns about potential manipulation, information distortion and loss of trust in the media.

Notably, 70% of the respondents consider the protection of journalists' and anonymous sources' rights in Kazakhstan to be insufficient, highlighting the need for legal reforms to improve safety and confidentiality.

The article also offers recommendations for improving journalistic practice, including enhancing legal protection for journalists, increasing transparency and information verification, as well as adhering to ethical standards when using anonymous sources. The findings of this study are significant for media professionals and lawmakers who seek to ensure a balance between freedom of speech and source safety.

**Keywords:** ethics; anonymous source; journalistic investigation; trust; protection of journalists' rights; Kazakhstan



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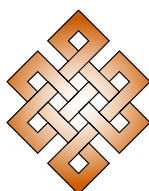


**ATAY, Shynggys Akzholuly**, PhD student, Department of Print and Electronic Media, Faculty of Journalism, Farabi University. Postal address: 71/27 Al-Farabi Ave., 050000 Almaty, Kazakhstan. E-mails: atay\_shynggys2@live.kaznu.kz, darksmerty@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-5830-4141

**BURKITBAYEVA, Aizhan Shalabaykyzy**, PhD student, Department of Print and Electronic Media, Faculty of Journalism, Farabi University. Postal address: 71/27 Al-Farabi Ave., 050000 Almaty, Kazakhstan. E-mail: burkitbayeva\_aizhan3@live.kaznu.kz

ORCID: 0009-0001-4494-3022



Статья

## Этика использования анонимных источников в журналистских расследованиях: восприятие казахстанцами

**Шынгыс А. Атай, Айжан Ш. Буркитбаева**

Казахский национальный университет им. аль-Фараби, Казахстан

В данной статье рассматривается этика использования анонимных источников в журналистских расследованиях на основе восприятия казахстанцев. Современная журналистика часто сталкивается с необходимостью работы с анонимными источниками, что поднимает вопросы о достоверности, этичности и безопасности такой практики. Целью исследования является анализ отношения граждан к использованию анонимных источников в журналистских расследованиях в контексте казахстанского общества. В рамках исследования были поставлены задачи по выявлению восприятия гражданами рисков и преимуществ использования анонимной информации в деятельности журналистов.

Для достижения поставленных задач был проведен опрос среди 100 респондентов, представляющих различные социальные группы, которые не связаны с журналистской деятельностью. В ходе исследования были поставлены вопросы, касающиеся важности журналистских расследований, отношения к анонимным источникам, уровня доверия к результатам расследований, а также мнений о достаточности правовой защиты журналистов и их источников в Казахстане. Результаты показали, что большинство респондентов поддерживает использование анонимных источников, при этом они выражают определенные опасения по поводу возможных манипуляций, искажений информации и потери доверия к СМИ.

Отдельно следует отметить, что 70% респондентов считают защиту прав журналистов и анонимных источников в Казахстане недостаточной, что подчеркивает важность реформ в законодательной сфере для улучшения безопасности и конфиденциальности.

**Ключевые слова:** этика; анонимные источники; журналистские расследования; доверие; защита прав журналистов; Казахстан



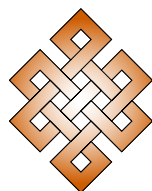
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**Атай Шынгыс Акжолулы** — докторант кафедры печати и электронных СМИ факультета журналистики Казахского национального университета им. аль-Фараби. Адрес: 050000, Казахстан, г. Алматы, пр-т аль-Фараби, д. 71/27. Эл. адреса: atay\_shynggys2@live.kaznu.kz; darksmerty@gmail.com

**Буркитбаева Айжан Шалабайкызы** — докторант кафедры печати и электронных СМИ факультета журналистики Казахского национального университета им. аль-Фараби. Адрес: Казахстан, 050000, г. Алматы, пр-т аль-Фараби, д. 71/27. Эл. адрес: burkitbayeva\_aizhan3@live.kaznu.kz



## Introduction

Modern investigative journalism plays a crucial role in democratic societies by uncovering corruption, human rights violations and other hidden issues (Jaisal, 2024). An important tool for journalists is the use of anonymous sources. These sources often provide information that is the only way to uncover facts inaccessible through traditional means. However, the use of anonymity in journalism can sometimes raise ethical concerns (Goniak, 2023).

This issue is of particular importance in Kazakhstan, where the level of trust in the media and information sources remains a subject of public debate. Firstly, journalists in Kazakhstan and Central Asia face significant challenges in reporting, particularly on sensitive topics like conflicts and political issues. They operate under state restrictions, government pressure and a widespread self-censorship, which hinder the development of independent journalism (Mussa, Myssayeva, 2024). In Kazakhstan, while investigative journalism is seen as crucial for democracy and freedom of speech, it remains a challenging field (Kurak et al., 2022). Such an environment compels journalists to resort to anonymizing their sources, as the fear of retaliation or legal repercussions can compromise the safety and security of both the journalist and the source. This practice, while protecting the individuals involved, can also undermine the credibility of the journalistic process itself.

In the World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders<sup>1</sup> (RSF), Kazakhstan's rank has notably declined, moving from the 134th place in 2023 to the 142nd in 2024. This highlights the growing challenges to media freedom and the increasing risks faced by journalists in the country. Such a decline in the ranking reflects the broader trend of state control over media narratives and the suppression of independent journalism, further reducing public trust in the media.

Moreover, the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan affirms the freedom of the media, which is essential for reflecting social processes. Unfortunately, the freedom of information formally enshrined in the law is not supported by real mechanisms for its implementation (Grabelnikov, Mambetova, 2015).

On the other hand, alongside the challenges posed by external pressures, Kazakhstan's media landscape is also affected by instances of misinformation and breaches of journalistic ethics. Recent studies highlight the prevalence and impact of disinformation in the Kazakh media space. During the COVID-19 pandemic, false information spread through various channels, including social media and newspapers (Rakhymzhanova, Alzhan, 2023). The spread of fake news undermines public trust in media institutions and poses significant challenges (Aigelova, Ishanova, 2023). This duality — on the one hand, the suppression of investigative journalism, and on the other, the presence of unethical media practices — creates a complex environment where trust in the media is eroded from multiple directions, making the issue of anonymous sourcing both a necessary and controversial tool in contemporary Kazakhstani journalism.

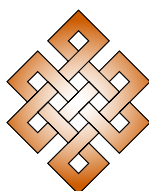
Ethical aspects of using anonymous sources in investigations in Kazakhstan remain underexplored, providing an opportunity for further academic inquiry. It is important to note that the perception of anonymous sources and their ethical use depend not only on professional standards and journalistic principles but also on the cultural, social and political realities specific to the country.

The aim of this study is to investigate Kazakhstani citizens' perceptions of the ethical aspects of using anonymous sources in journalistic investigations. This includes analyzing public opinion on the role of anonymous sources in ensuring objectivity and accuracy in journalistic content. It also involves assessing the level of trust in such sources within the current media landscape of Kazakhstan. The study will explore how the sociopolitical situation and attitudes toward the authorities influence the perception of anonymity in journalism.

The research objectives include:

- 1) Analyzing ethical issues related to the use of anonymous sources in journalism.
- 2) Examining Kazakhstani citizens' views on the role of anonymous sources in investigations.
- 3) Identifying factors that influence trust in anonymous information within the context of Kazakhstani society.

<sup>1</sup> Index. *Reporters Without Borders*. Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/index> (accessed 20.01.2025).



The theoretical and methodological foundation of the study is based on theories of journalistic ethics, trust theory and mass communication. The theories of journalistic ethics are significantly influenced by a work by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, who emphasize such principles as truth, verification and independence (Sylvie, 2001). Their book *The Elements of Journalism* outlines ten guiding principles for journalism, including accuracy, fairness and obligation to monitor those in power (Ibid.).

Furthermore, the concept of trust in media is explored in the works of Niklas Luhmann. His theory of trust, reconceptualized as a connection medium, mediates between different levels of sociality and can inspire current research on trust in contemporary society (Morgner, 2018).

Additionally, Denis McQuail's book provides a comprehensive analysis of mass communication theory, examining the evolution of media and its societal impacts (McQuail, 2002). He explores various theoretical approaches, from traditional to critical paradigms, and discusses key concepts such as media effects, audience reception and the role of media in shaping public opinion and culture. The transition from old to new media and its implications for communication processes are also addressed (Ibid.). These theories form the backbone of the study, helping to frame the analysis of the role of anonymous sources in journalistic investigations in Kazakhstan.

In the context of using anonymous sources, the focus is on the principles of objectivity, honesty and responsibility, which are central to journalistic practices. Trust theory plays a key role in understanding how Kazakhstani citizens perceive anonymous sources and the level of trust they place in information based on such sources. The study also takes into account the sociocultural and political realities of Kazakhstan that influence the perception of anonymity in journalism. Methodologically, the research relies on a survey that allows for the collection of quantitative data on how Kazakhstani people evaluate anonymous sources. The survey for this research was conducted with 100 participants. It was administered online to ensure broad access and diverse demographic representation. The questionnaire included both closed- and open-ended questions, allowing for the collection of quantitative data and qualitative insights into public perceptions of anonymous sources in journalism. The data were analyzed using statistical methods. This approach provides objective and representative results that reflect public opinions on the issue.

The object of the study is the public perception of the ethical aspects of using anonymous sources in journalistic investigations in Kazakhstan. The subject of the research is the attitudes of Kazakhstani citizens toward the use of anonymous sources in journalism, their trust in information obtained through anonymity and the ethical and moral issues that arise in this context.

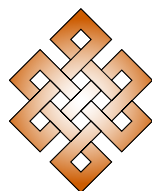
### **Literature review**

The topic of using anonymous sources in journalism, along with the related ethical issues, has been widely studied in both academic literature and practical contexts. Researchers emphasize that anonymity and source protection are crucial for journalists, especially when dealing with confidential information that may put sources at risk (Banisar, 2007). On the other hand, the use of anonymous sources raises concerns about trust in journalism, as it can allow for the manipulation of facts or the misuse of anonymity to promote political or corporate interests. The use of unnamed sources can both assist and impede public knowledge, leading to journalistic triumphs and humiliations (Carlson, 2010).

The debate surrounding source protection and transparency in journalism is complex and multifaceted. While transparency is central to journalistic identity and professional practices (Allen, 2008), there is a growing need to safeguard sources, particularly "disruptive sources" who may face legal consequences for their disclosures (Wasserman, 2017). The European Court of Human Rights has established that interference with journalists' right to protect sources can only be justified in exceptional circumstances, even when national security or public safety are at risk (Biriņa, 2019).

An important aspect is the perception of the audience and public attitudes toward the use of anonymous sources. Studies show that perceptions of anonymity in journalism can vary significantly depending on cultural and social contexts. Journalists from Western countries tend to be less interventionist and more adherent to universal ethical principles, while those from non-Western backgrounds are often more flexible in their ethical views and supportive of promoting particular values (Hanitzsch et al., 2011).

Furthermore, numerous studies demonstrate that in countries with limited press freedom, journalists often become targets of both governmental and non-governmental actors (Gohdes, Carey, 2017). Many



journalists consciously put themselves at risk, facing persecution for their professional duties and political commentaries (Garling, 1979). For example, in Asian countries, journalists often experience threats, surveillance and imprisonment, with censorship and self-censorship being common practices (Gokhale, Mate, 2024). This makes the use of anonymous sources almost unavoidable. In such conditions, the ethical dilemmas surrounding the use of anonymous sources become particularly complex.

Research on anonymity in investigative journalism reveals profound effects on credibility and trust. While anonymity technologies can help build professional identity and facilitate source relationships for journalists (Biscop, Décary-Héту, 2022), they may also undermine source credibility and influence in computer-mediated communication (Rains, 2007). Studies have shown that the use of anonymous sources negatively impacts “readers’ perceptions of story credibility” (Sternadori, Thorson, 2009: 54). Factors influencing an individual’s perception of online anonymity include gender, income, education, social networking habits and experience with compromised identity (Devaraj et al., 2015). These findings suggest a delicate balance between the benefits of anonymity for journalists and sources, as well as the potential drawbacks in terms of public trust and credibility.

Another important aspect is the impact of anonymity on the perception of investigative journalism as a whole. As noted by Marína Urbániková and Klára Smejkal, audiences trust public media when they believe the information is objective, reliable and free from sensationalism, and when journalists are viewed as professionals (Urbániková, Smejkal, 2023). Investigative journalists face significant risks in their work, including physical threats, legal battles and surveillance (Bisilki, Opoku, 2018; Di Salvo, 2022; Etumnu et al., 2024). In such cases, anonymous sources may be seen as the only means to combat corruption and abuses. In this context, anonymous sources are often justified as a tool that helps uncover hidden information, despite the risks and potential ethical issues associated with their use.

However, opposing views also highlight anonymity as a threat to the quality of journalistic work. In his studies, Hoyt Purvis argues that the prevalence of unnamed sources in major news stories still raises concerns about their proper use and impact on journalistic integrity (Purvis, 2015). K. Tim Wulfemeyer notes that journalistic ethics codes stress the importance of naming sources, with experts cautioning against overuse of anonymity to maintain public trust (Wulfemeyer, 1983). To avoid these negative consequences, the authors suggest implementing additional safeguards, including mandatory fact-checking, stricter internal editorial standards and limiting the use of anonymous sources to exceptional cases only.

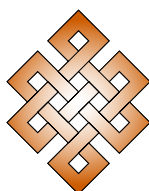
Therefore, the analysis of existing scholarly and practical research suggests that the ethical issue of using anonymous sources in journalistic investigations does not have a clear-cut solution. It depends on many factors, including the political situation in the country, the level of trust in the media and legal institutions, and the nature of the information disclosed by anonymous sources.

The issue of press freedom in Kazakhstan is a critical factor in the use of anonymous sources in journalism, but it remains underexplored in research. The country’s media environment is heavily influenced by government control and journalists face significant risks, including legal threats and political pressures. The transition from a post-communist system to democracy has influenced the development of civil society and freedom of expression in Kazakhstan (Akessina, Dyussenbekova, 2024). The media landscape still bears remnants of Soviet-era structures that hinder independent journalism (Ryskeldinova, Sak, 2021). While the Kazakh Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, broadcasters cannot fully prepare and air programs without restrictions (Tazhibayev, 2023). Journalists in the region often use pseudonyms or fake names when writing not only on politically sensitive topics, but also on trivial matters (Kurambayev, Myssayeva, 2023). Thus, while the global discourse on anonymity is well-established, Kazakhstan’s unique political and media landscape adds complexity to this issue.

As a result, studying Kazakhstani citizens’ perceptions of the ethical aspects of using anonymous sources in journalistic investigations is an important step in understanding how society reacts to such practices. It also sheds light on the cultural and social factors that shape the perception of information in a context of limited press freedom.

### ***Materials and methods***

A survey method was chosen for the study because it allowed for the collection of data on public perceptions of the ethical norms surrounding the use of anonymous sources in journalistic investigations. The sur-



vey targeted the general population, enabling an exploration of how society at large views anonymity practices in journalism and the moral and ethical norms associated with the use of anonymous sources. The survey involved 100 participants, providing a sufficient sample size for the analysis. It was conducted between October and December 2024. A questionnaire was developed to collect data, including both closed- and open-ended questions. Closed questions facilitated the collection of quantitative data, while open-ended questions provided deeper insights into respondents' opinions and perspectives. The survey was administered online, ensuring broad access to participation and allowing for data collection from various demographic groups. The questionnaire focused on exploring participants' attitudes toward the anonymity of information sources in the context of journalistic investigations and assessing their views on the importance of ethical norms in this matter. The collected data was analyzed using statistical methods.

The survey was administered in the Russian language to ensure accessibility for the majority of participants. The respondents filled out the questionnaire independently. They were selected through convenience sampling by sending invitations to join the survey in a specific social media group (Telegram). A link to the survey was shared on the open channel (Angime chat), which had more than 31 thousand subscribers at the time. Out of them, 100 individuals responded to the survey. Although the participants were drawn from a range of sociodemographic backgrounds, it should be noted that the sample was not representative of the general population. The main social and demographic parameters of the respondents, including regional distribution, are outlined in the table below.

*Table 1. Demographic characteristics of survey participants*  
 Таблица 1. Демографические характеристики участников опроса

Characteristics	Categories	Number of respondents
Gender	Male	42
	Female	58
Age group	18–25	21
	26–40	33
	41–60	36
	61+ years	10
Ethnic group	Kazakh	72
	Russian	17
	Other (including Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Karakalpak, etc.)	11
Region	Almaty Region	37
	Karaganda Region	22
	Akmola Region	14
	Kyzylorda Region	11
	West Kazakhstan Region	16
Occupation	Teacher	21
	Student	17
	Doctoral candidate (PhD student)	2
	Taxi driver	14
	Cook	11
	Waiter	15
	Bank employee	3
	Lawyer	2
	Entrepreneur/self-employed	7
	Retired	2
	Mother on maternity leave	6

**Results**

The first question was about the importance of journalistic investigations for society. The responses were collected in order to assess the respondents' awareness and opinions on the significance of investigative journalism in the functioning of modern society (see Fig. 1). This includes its role in maintaining public order,

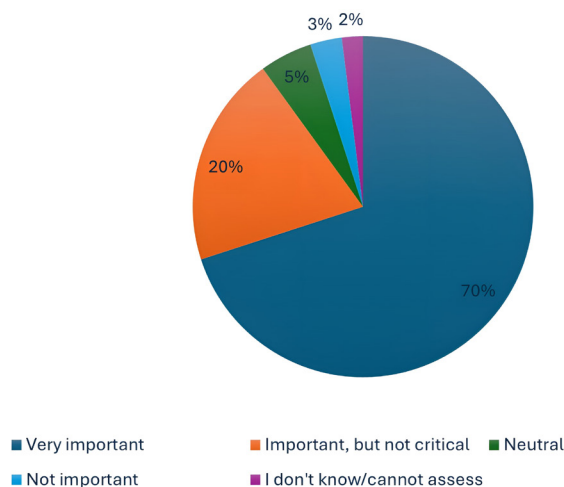
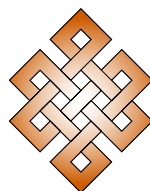


Fig. 1. Assessment of the importance of investigative journalism for society among the respondents  
 Рис. 1. Оценка важности журналистских расследований для общества среди респондентов

exposing corruption and ensuring transparency. The question was phrased as follows: “How do you evaluate the importance of journalistic investigations for society?”

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of the respondents (70%) believe that journalistic investigations are very important for society. This supports the view that the public recognizes the role of journalism in identifying issues such as corruption, human rights violations and ensuring transparency and accountability in government.

20% of the participants consider journalistic investigations important, but not critical, which may suggest some underestimation of their impact on daily life. A small proportion of the respondents (5%) expressed a neutral position, not seeing a clear influence of investigations on public processes. This may be linked to a lack of awareness or distrust in the media. Only 3% of the respondents consider journalistic investigations unimportant, indicating that a relatively small number completely disregard their significance. Meanwhile, 2% of the participants were unsure how to answer the question, suggesting uncertainty or insufficient knowledge in the topic.

The results demonstrate a high level of awareness and recognition of the importance of journalistic investigations among the majority of the surveyed participants. This supports the significance of these practices for maintaining democratic institutions and ensuring transparency in society. These findings can later serve as a basis for analyzing the perception of anonymous sources in investigations, as well as for studying attitudes toward the ethical aspects of journalistic work.

The second question asked participants about their attitudes toward the use of anonymous sources in journalistic investigations (see Fig. 2). The question was phrased as follows: “What is your opinion on the use of anonymous sources in journalistic investigations?”

The results show that most respondents (60%) support the use of anonymous sources in journalistic investigations. 30% of the participants expressed a neutral stance. This may indicate doubts about the universality of this practice and a need for additional guarantees regarding the credibility of such information.

Only 7% of the respondents do not support the use of anonymous sources, believing they could be used to spread false or manipulative data. 3% of the participants were unsure how to evaluate the issue, suggesting a lack of knowledge or uncertainty in their perception of the matter.

These results indicate that despite potential concerns most of the respondents acknowledge the necessity of using anonymous sources in journalistic investigations. This is important for protecting informants and ensuring transparency in society.

In the third question, we asked the participants about their views on whether journalists should disclose their sources of information, provided this does not threaten safety or human rights (see Fig. 3). The question was phrased as follows: “Do you believe journalists should disclose their sources of information if it does not threaten safety or human rights?”

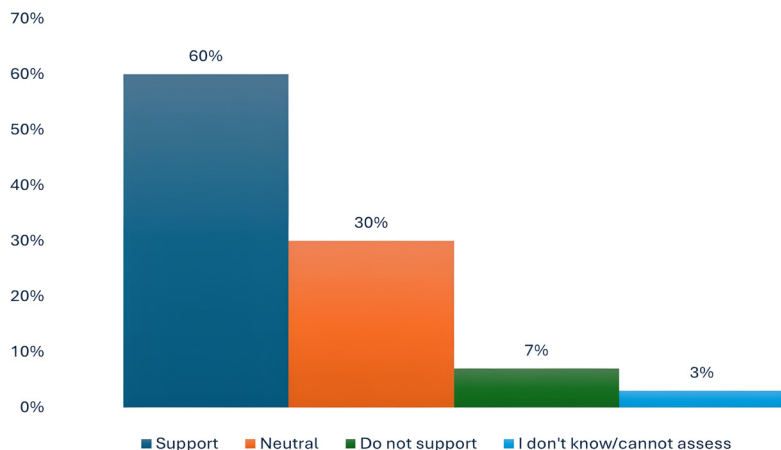
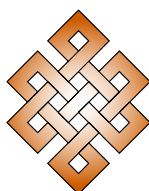


Fig. 2. The respondents' attitudes toward the use of anonymous sources in investigative journalism  
 Рис. 2. Отношение респондентов к использованию анонимных источников в журналистских расследованиях

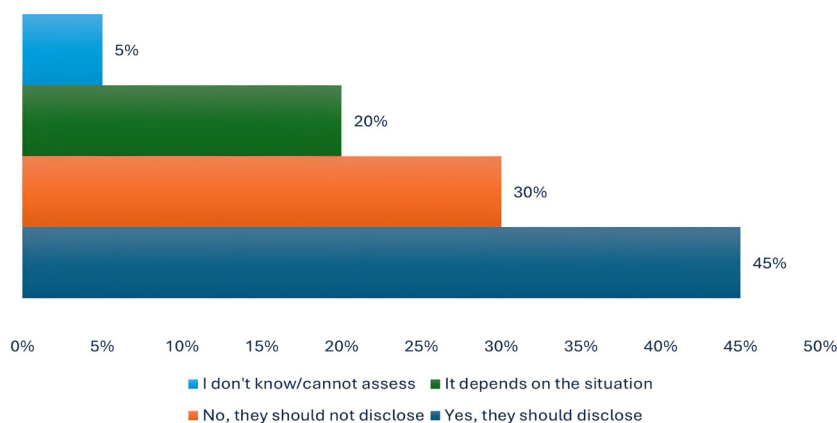


Fig. 3. The respondents' attitudes toward journalists' disclosure of information sources, provided this does not threaten security or human rights  
 Рис. 3. Отношение респондентов к раскрытию источников информации журналистами, если это не угрожает безопасности или правам человека

According to the survey results, 45% of the respondents believe that journalists should disclose their sources if this decision does not threaten safety or human rights. However, 30% of the participants think that journalists should not disclose their sources, even when safety or human rights are not violated. These respondents are likely concerned about potential consequences for press freedom and the rights of informants, even if the disclosure does not lead to a potential hazardous situation in terms of their safety.

20% of the respondents believe the decision to disclose sources should depend on a situation, indicating flexibility in their approach to such issues and the consideration of specific circumstances. A small proportion of the respondents (5%) were unsure how to answer. This may suggest uncertainty about the issue or a lack of awareness regarding journalistic practices.

Consequently, the results demonstrate that the public holds varying views on the necessity of source disclosure in journalism. This reflects the balance between transparency and the ethical principles of source protection.

The fourth question asked the participants about their trust in the results of journalistic investigations when they rely on anonymous sources (see Fig. 4). The question was phrased as follows: "How much do you trust the results of journalistic investigations if they rely on anonymous sources?"

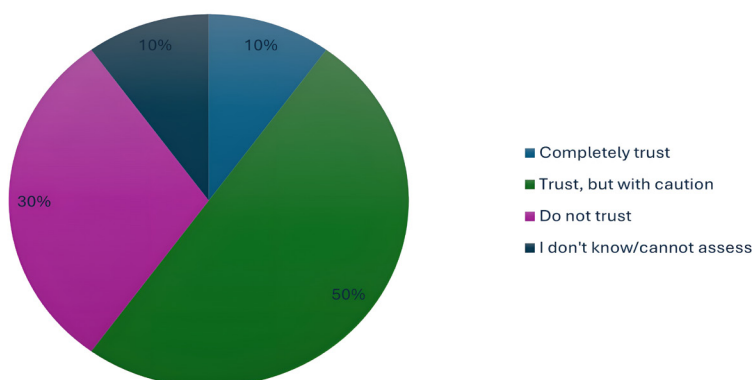
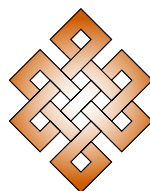


Fig. 4. The respondents' level of trust in the results of investigative journalism based on anonymous sources

Рис. 4. Уровень доверия респондентов к результатам журналистских расследований, основанных на анонимных источниках

The results show that 50% of the respondents trust the results of journalistic investigations that rely on anonymous sources, but with caution. This approach reflects an awareness of the potential for manipulation or lack of transparency when using anonymous sources.

30% of the respondents do not trust investigations based on anonymous sources. Only 10% of the respondents state that they fully trust the results of investigations relying on anonymous sources.

Another 10% of the respondents are unsure how to evaluate this issue, indicating uncertainty or a lack of awareness about the practice of using anonymous sources in journalism.

Thus, the results demonstrate that trust in investigations based on anonymous sources ranges from cautious trust to complete distrust. This suggests the existence of public concerns and doubts about the reliability of such sources.

The fifth question was open-ended and addressed the risks that the respondents associated with the use of anonymous sources in journalistic investigations (see Fig. 5). The question was phrased as follows: "What do you think are the risks associated with using anonymous sources in journalistic investigations?"

The responses were diverse and covered several key aspects. Based on the analysis of open-ended answers, several main risks were identified by the participants in relation to the use of anonymous sources. These risks were classified as follows:

1. low reliability of information;
2. manipulation and influencing public opinion;
3. damage to the media's reputation;
4. violation of journalistic ethics;
5. loss of trust in the media.

The figure shows that 55% of the respondents consider a low reliability of information as the main risk. This indicates concern about the possibility of facts being distorted or inaccurate information being provided due to the anonymity of sources.

40% of the respondents mentioned manipulation and the shaping of public opinion as significant risks. This suggests that anonymous sources may sometimes be used to spread deliberately false or subjective information in order to influence public opinion or political situations.

35% of the respondents noted that damage to the reputation of the media was an important risk. If investigations based on anonymous sources prove to be false, they can have serious consequences for the media's reputation and lead to a loss of audience trust.

15% of the respondents pointed to violations of journalistic ethics as a potential risk. Another 15% expressed concern that using anonymous sources could lead to a loss of trust in the media as a whole.

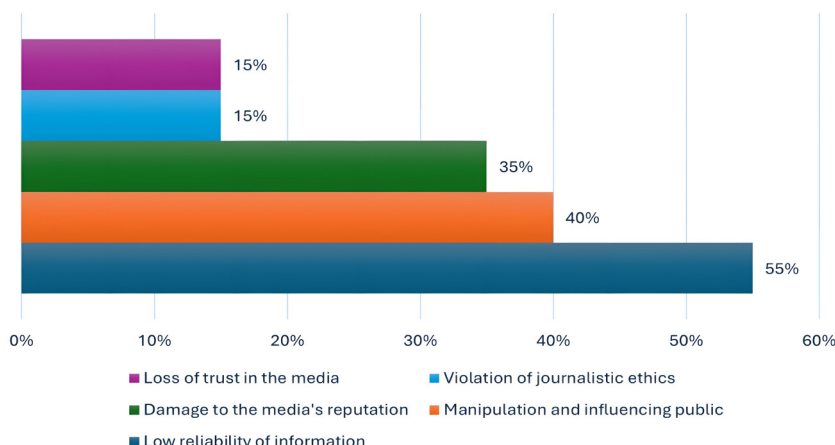
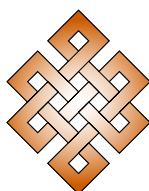


Fig. 5. Risks associated with the use of anonymous sources in investigative journalism, according to the respondents

Рис. 5. Риски, связанные с использованием анонимных источников в журналистских расследованиях, по мнению респондентов

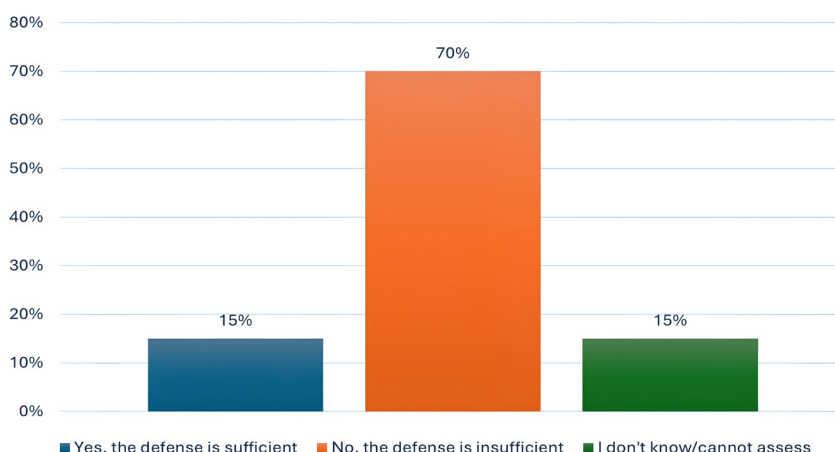


Fig. 6. Assessment of the protection level for the rights of journalists and anonymous sources in Kazakhstan

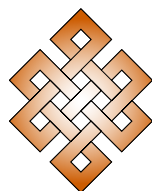
Рис. 6. Оценка уровня защиты прав журналистов и анонимных источников в Казахстане

Therefore, while the importance of anonymous sources is acknowledged, the public perceives several serious risks associated with their use that can undermine trust in journalism and affect its reputation.

The sixth question posed to the survey participants concerned the level of protection for journalists' and anonymous sources' rights in Kazakhstan (see Fig. 6). The question was phrased as follows: "Do you think that there is sufficient protection for the rights of journalists and anonymous sources in Kazakhstan?"

The results show that 70% of the respondents believe that the protection of journalists' and anonymous sources' rights in Kazakhstan is insufficient. This opinion may be linked to a sense of inadequate legal protection and potential threats to journalists and their sources, especially in the context of restrictions on freedom of speech and the press that may exist in some countries. 15% of the respondents expressed the view that protection was adequate. Another 15% of the participants were unsure how to assess the issue. This may indicate a lack of awareness or uncertainty on the matter.

The survey results highlight public concern about the level of protection for journalists and anonymous sources. This suggests a need for improvements in the legal framework and the implementation of additional mechanisms to ensure the safety of these groups.



## Discussion

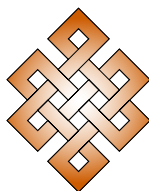
The study has shown that for the majority of the respondents who took part in the survey, investigative journalism is important for ensuring transparency in society and uncovering corruption. Given the high level of threats to investigative journalists in Kazakhstan, it has become known that the use of anonymous sources is in most cases well perceived by society. However, the results were somewhat different from those in other countries. According to a study by Ivanka Pjesivac and Rachel Rui, American and Chinese readers believe that articles with anonymous sources are less reliable (Pjesivac, Rui, 2014). Although anonymous sources are distrusted by the public, they have been found to play an important role in American journalism by promoting diversity of ideas (Blankenburg, 1992) and are frequently used. For example, a study conducted by Na Yeon Lee et al. compared the frequency of anonymous sources in Korean newspapers and *The New York Times*, finding that the American newspaper used more contexts in which anonymous sources were mentioned (Lee et al., 2021). And, according to Malaysian journalists, the use of anonymous sources in publishing breaking news is considered proper despite the impact on public trust (Wilson, 2010). Such findings highlight the complex nature of the use of anonymous sources in global journalism.

In our research, important pieces of information are the risks associated with the use of anonymous sources in investigative journalism. These risks include misrepresentation of facts, dissemination of inaccurate information, manipulation and undermining the reputation of the media. In addition, a study conducted by Bahtiyar Kurambayev and Eric Freedman on Central Asian countries has found that the use of anonymous sources leads to ethical violations (Kurambayev, Freedman, 2020). The study demonstrates that in the journalism of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan there are cases of knowingly false information. Based on this, it can be said that the use of anonymous sources negatively affects the credibility of materials (Pjesivac, Rui, 2014). A study conducted on three daily newspapers shows that there are several risks associated with the use of anonymous sources. One of them is the loss of trust in the media (Purvis, 2015). Therefore, journalists are advised to openly reveal sources unless their identification can lead to a difficult situation (Wulfemeyer, 1983). Even in the survey we conducted, the majority of the respondents felt that it was right to openly reveal sources if journalists do not face danger and their human rights are not violated.

It is worth noting that there are threats to journalists, including investigative journalists. According to many researchers, investigative journalists face risks such as physical threats and lawsuits while working (Bisilki, Opoku, 2018; Di Salvo, 2022; Etumnu et al., 2024). One of these threats is the lack of legal protection for journalists and their informants. As a result of our research, we can say that the majority of the respondents noted the insufficient development of the legal framework in Kazakhstan. According to Nazerke Mussa and Karlyga Myssayeva, due to censorship and pressure from the state, Kazakhstani journalists face significant difficulties in covering conflict topics (Mussa, Myssayeva, 2024). According to David Banisar, many countries including Belgium, Mexico, Sweden, New Zealand, Australia, Angola, Luxembourg and El Salvador have adopted special laws to protect journalists' sources (Banisar, 2007). Compared to the above-mentioned countries, Kazakhstan has an imperfect legal framework for the protection of journalists' identities and sources. As a result of such gaps, the free dissemination of information by Kazakhstani journalists, including investigative journalists, is hindered and they have to use anonymous sources.

Furthermore, the issue of freedom of the press and journalistic integrity in Kazakhstan cannot be discussed without considering the cultural and social factors that shape public perception of information. These factors are crucial because they provide insight into how societal attitudes toward trust, transparency and authority influence the way information is received and understood in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's media landscape is shaped by its Soviet past, resulting in complex relationships between the government and the press (Utemissov, Koshkenov, 2021). The legacy of state-controlled information and the centralization of power in the hands of the government have created a culture where the flow of information is often seen through a lens of skepticism. Yariv Tsfati argues that "skepticism towards the media moderates agenda setting effects", with skeptics showing weaker correlations between the media and public agendas (Tsfati, 2003: 157). In a society where media outlets have traditionally been under state control, there is a strong cultural tendency to view independent or investigative journalism cautiously, especially when anonymous sources are involved.

Social factors also play a significant role in shaping how anonymous sources are perceived in Kazakhstan. The collectivist nature of Kazakhstani society, with an emphasis on loyalty to the community and



respect for authority, may contribute to a reluctance to openly criticize or challenge those in power. This cultural tendency can explain why many Kazakhstani citizens are more accepting of anonymous sources, as they may feel that the safety and well-being of individuals providing sensitive information outweigh the potential risks of misinformation. In contrast, in more individualistic societies like the United States, where there is a stronger emphasis on personal accountability and freedom of expression, anonymous sources are often met with greater scrutiny. In nations with higher press freedom, anonymous sources are often viewed skeptically, as they can reduce the credibility of news stories (Pjesivac, Rui, 2014).

Additionally, the sociopolitical environment in Kazakhstan, characterized by a relatively restricted media landscape, reinforces the idea that anonymous sources are necessary for investigative journalism to take place. With limited access to independent media and the constant threat of censorship or governmental pressure, journalists and their sources in Kazakhstan may have little choice but to rely on anonymity as a shield. This dynamic creates a social environment in which the use of anonymous sources is not only understood but is often seen as a necessary mechanism for truth-telling in a constrained media ecosystem.

### Conclusion

The research shows that the majority of the respondents in Kazakhstan have a positive attitude towards the use of anonymous sources in investigative journalism. However, the respondents believe that information from open sources is appropriate if it does not pose any threat. The reason is that the use of anonymous sources can lead to several risks. Also, during the research it has been noted that the legal framework for source protection in Kazakhstan is imperfect. Drawing from the findings, we have formulated several recommendations on the use of anonymous sources in investigative journalism.

First, it is necessary to improve legislation on the part of the state aimed at protecting the identities of journalists and their sources and ensuring their safety and confidentiality.

Second, when using anonymous sources in journalistic practices, journalists should verify the reliability of information and strictly observe ethical standards to avoid manipulation and distortion of facts.

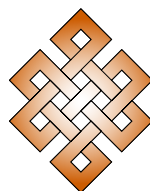
Third, when using anonymous sources, it is necessary to have evidence that confirms its credibility and does not cast doubt on the results of a journalistic investigation.

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