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**“No Heart Attack”: How satire mediates civic cultures and cultural citizenship in
polarised society - case study on ArmComedy**

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Abstract

The Thesis examines how political news satire functions within Armenia's hybrid political regime by analysing ArmComedy, a well-known satirical show. Current scholarship on political satire mostly focuses on Western, developed democracies and examines effect-based questions of knowledge, mobilisation, engagement, and participation, leaving a gap in understanding how political satire functions in systems marked by limited public and institutional trust, polarisation, and post-war trauma. The thesis situates ArmComedy within Armenia's media and political environment by exploring how satire can reinforce civic cultures, support cultural citizenship, foster belonging, construct identities, and facilitate emotional processing.

The thesis combines Joke Hermes's notion of cultural citizenship with Peter Dahlgren's framework of civic cultures to research ArmComedy not merely as an entertainment or information source, but as a space where values, identities, trust, and practices of civic cultures are negotiated in everyday media use. Methodologically, it uses a qualitative, case study design, employing in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the show's two hosts and eleven audience participants. Then, it employs thematic analysis and open coding to integrate production and reception perspectives.

The thesis shows that hosts understand their work in hybrid terms, balancing roles as watchdogs, commentators, and satirists, while navigating the pressures of polarisation, accusations of bias, and self-censorship amid post-war trauma. The audience members, in turn, engage with ArmComedy to digest information and politically charged news. Audience gains knowledge about politics and experiences a sense of “we-ness”, while also recognising its contribution as limited and even superficial.

To sum up, the thesis argues that ArmComedy functions as a modest yet meaningful site of civic cultures and cultural citizenship in Armenia's polarised media landscape, pushing forward debates on satire, democracy, and effect-based engagement beyond the Western-centric effects framework.

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Table of contents

Abstract	1
Acknowledgements	2
Table of contents	3
Introduction	4
Literature Review	9
Satire and satirist roles	9
“Pessimist” vs “Optimist”: Cynicism And Kynicism	12
Satire and Political Knowledge	14
Civic engagement and public trust	16
Hermes and cultural citizenship	19
Dahlgren and civic cultures	20
Methodology and Methods	22
Research design and sampling	24
Analysing the data	26
Ethical Considerations and Limitations	27
Analysis	30
Satirist roles and democratic values	30
Self-censorship and public frustration	35
Bridging polarisation, building public relief	38
Knowledge, trust, belonging and cultural citizenship	42
Conclusion	51
Findings	52
Limitations	56
References	59
Appendices	71

Introduction

In contemporary democracies, the boundaries between political news, humour, satire, and entertainment have become increasingly porous. Late-night political comedy and satirical news programmes do not merely comment on politics from the sidelines; they participate in public debate, shape political discourse, and offer audiences ways to make sense of complex events. At the same time, many countries face deepening political polarisation, media distrust, and crises of democratic communication. In such contexts, satire can appear as both a symptom of disillusionment and a potential resource for critique, community, and civic engagement.

Political satire is a hybrid genre that combines comedy, news, and opinion (Baym, 2005). Also, political satire occupies a special place in that hybrid media environment (Chadwick 2017; Koivukoski & Odmark, 2020). It has plenty of roles and faces that entertain and educate, provoke and bridge, criticise and advocate. Humour and satire can function either as instruments that intensify, polarise, and radicalise public, political, and social issues or as a bridge that facilitates democratic processes: dialogue, debate, the articulation of problems, and the search for solutions. All of these processes take place in the political arena, where politics serves as a pervasive sphere that simultaneously unites and divides people through shared values and norms.

Although research on political satire has expanded internationally, most of it still centres on Western contexts and relies on effects-based studies. Scholars typically ask whether satire mobilises or demobilises people, whether it produces cynicism or cynicism, knowledge, and whether it polarises or connects people. As a result, there are several gaps to fill:

First, pay attention to small post-Soviet hybrid regimes such as Armenia, where the media is politicised, civic institutions are weak, and political trust shifts quickly. Second, to examine how producers and audiences make sense of satire in their everyday lives. Third, to explore how satire might act as a space for cultural citizenship: A place where people negotiate belonging, identity, and civic cultures within time.

The satirical news show ArmComedy occupies a unique position. Launched in 2009 as an online programme and later broadcast on TV, ArmComedy has become Armenia's well-known political satire show and is now available only on YouTube. Hosted by Narek Margaryan and Sergey

Sargsyan, it blends a traditional news-style format with humorous commentary, parody, and sketches about politicians, parties, and public issues. ArmComedy is the Armenian version of The Daily Show, yet it is firmly rooted in local political culture and in the news and media environment. For many younger viewers, ArmComedy is one of the most recognisable mediated spaces where politics, humour, and everyday life intersect. According to ArmComedy's YouTube channel bio, it is:

“Dubbed in press as Armenia's version of The Daily Show, through 10 years of existence it satirised National Assembly, Government and Presidents from Serge Sargsyan to Nikol Pashinyan”.

The Armenian news environment is defined by diversity, polarisation, and the struggle between financial stability and editorial independence (Zinc Network & Jnomics, 2024). It is also characterised by pluralism and free expression. This plurality often manifests in a highly polarised political environment that does not necessarily foster constructive democratic dialogue (Galstyan & Sukiasyan, 2026). Concerns about Armenia's media freedom, independence, and censorship have persisted for many years. Political and media polarisation reinforce one another, and real independence remains limited. Scholars argue that the main news outlets are aligned with political parties and politicians. As stated by Izquierdo-Iranzo and Sayadyan, “Political and media polarisation feed back into each other” (Izquierdo-Iranzo & Sayadyan, 2024, p. 11). It can be argued that the growing importance of political news satirists is directly linked to the crisis of democratic communication, driven by populism, polarisation, and media distrust.

Since the Velvet Revolution of 2018 and the 44-day war in 2020 with Azerbaijan, Armenian society has undergone rapid political change, war-related trauma, and growing affective polarisation. Revolution's democratic promises were neglected after the 44-day war in 2020. COVID-19, war defeat, and ethnic Armenians cleansing in Artsakh have destroyed social unity and solidarity, divided people into groups, sought those responsible for the defeat, led to hatred of politicians, and deep distrust of the political system (Galstyan & Sukiasyan, 2026). As a result, political and media elites are widely perceived as antagonistic, and public trust in institutions remains fragile. Questions such as how citizens get political knowledge, how they

make sense of politics emotionally, and how they imagine their own civic agency must be addressed urgently.

Moreover, the role of political satire in small post-Soviet countries with hybrid regimes, such as Armenia (Freedom House, 2025), remains under-researched. Previous research has shown that political satire can influence citizens' political knowledge, discussions, and engagement, but it must be noted that the research was conducted mainly in Western developed democracies and measured individual-level effects. Much less is known about how satire teaches and supports informed citizenship and media engagement in hybrid-regime democracies. This thesis, therefore, investigates the functions of political satire in the above-mentioned contexts and examines how ArmComedy operates within Armenia's fragile civic and media environment. I aim to contribute to the research on the role of political satire in supporting informed citizenry and media engagement in developing democracies with hybrid regimes.

In the Armenian context, it is essential to understand if ArmComedy cultivates a shared, reflexive political community or consolidates a narrower, like-minded partisan audience. Also, it is important to understand whether audiences with different, sometimes extreme, political positions approach satire already preconditioned or prefer a more inclusive direction. In the last scenario, political news satire can play a valuable role in bringing people together, building community, sharing values, and offering a vision of belonging and empowerment. I am more of an optimist about the role of the satirist, the influence of political news satire and its applications for the audience.

This thesis addresses these gaps through a qualitative case study of ArmComedy during the 2026 parliamentary election campaign. Drawing on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the show's two hosts and eleven audience members, it investigates how political news satire functions as a site of the public sphere for cultural citizenship and civic cultures. According to Hermes, cultural citizenship is "the ways in which we frame sociality and negotiate a sense of belonging and of identity in today's world in unreflected-on, everyday media use" (Hermes, 2020, p. 315).

The study is guided by two research questions:

1. *How do ArmComedy's hosts negotiate satirist roles?*
2. *How does ArmComedy contribute to audiences' political knowledge, sense of belonging, and cultural citizenship?*

The thesis brings together two conceptual lenses to address these questions. Joke Hermes's notion of cultural citizenship treats popular culture, including television and comedy, as a legitimate arena in which people make sense of who they are, what they care about, and how they feel about being part of a community. Hermes stresses that "Cultural citizenship, rather than citizenship generally, is the term that analyzes the democratic potential of popular culture, even though it lacks formal structures of guaranteeing rights or enforcing duties and obligations." (Hermes, 2005, p. 4). Meanwhile, "popular" Hermes defines as "of and for the people", and "culture" is "both how we understand the world, as where and how we live our lives" (Hermes, 2005, p. 4). Peter Dahlgren's concept of civic cultures emphasises the values, knowledge, practices, identities, and communicative spaces that support civic agency in everyday life. Together, these frameworks allow ArmComedy to be examined not simply as entertainment or as a set of media effects, but as a communicative space where political meanings are created, contested, and collectively interpreted.

Empirically, the thesis is based on semi-structured interviews with ArmComedy's hosts and a purposive sample of the audience, focusing on how both producers and the audience describe the show's roles, constraints, and democratic significance. Rather than measuring causal effects, the analysis focuses on how satire is used to acquire political knowledge, process emotions related to war and conflict, and build or resist feelings of belonging. This paired approach of production and reception is unique in satire studies and aims to fill one of the research gaps in the scholarship. Meaning-making has never been a one-way process but rather a unique dialogue between creators and their audience.

This approach, combining the study of producers and audiences, is one of Annette Hill's core arguments. Hill argues that an integrated approach is crucial: if we study only audiences, we treat them as if they exist in a vacuum. If we only study producers, we treat media like a one-way

messaging. This approach, which Hill calls “Push-pull dynamics,” describes the relationship between producers and audiences: “cultural production pushes audiences into content” and “audiences are pulled into the here and now of storytelling” (Hill, 2019, p. 4). By engaging with and researching both sides, the study aims to expand understanding not only of how ArmComedy operates but also of how political satire functions as a cultural institution within the audience of polarised news media environments and democratic challenges.

The thesis structure consists of several parts. The introduction describes the research aim, establishes the main research questions, and highlights its contribution to the field of media and communication studies. The Literature review chapter reviews existing research on political satire as a hybrid genre, political knowledge, civic engagement, and cultural citizenship, with particular attention to debates on cynicism versus cynicism generally and in the Armenian media context. The literature review concludes by elaborating on the concepts of cultural citizenship and civic cultures that guide the analysis.

The methodology chapter outlines the qualitative case study design, interview sampling, researcher positionality, and thematic analysis.

The analysis chapter presents empirical findings across six thematic sections that together address the research questions and integrate host and audience perspectives.

The concluding chapter synthesises the findings, discusses their implications for understanding political satire in hybrid-regime democracies, and suggests directions for future research.

Literature Review

Satire and satirist roles

Scholars typically define satire as a form of moral critique, distinguish parody as imitative mockery, and define irony as saying one thing while meaning another (Feldman, 2024, p. 2). In this perspective, *ArmComedy* combines all three. So to speak, it uses moral critique to mock the shortcomings of authorities and to criticise politicians, the opposition, and the ruling parties. As mentioned above, it follows the Western-style news-satire subgenre of satirical television, inspired by *The Daily Show*. *The Daily Show* has nonetheless become an influential template for political satire in many parts of the world; we can safely say that Armenia and *ArmComedy* are no exception. This is what Lipson and colleagues called the glocalisation of *The Daily Show* (Lipson, Boukes & Khemkhem, 2023).

Parallel work in European contexts focused on the intentions, agency, and roles of satirists, showing how they navigate multiple communicative functions (Koivukoski & Ödmark, 2020; Lichtenstein et al. 2021). Also, the contemporary media environment enables hosts to create direct relationships with audiences and to adopt a range of roles, from commentator to advocate (Ödmark & Nicolai, 2024; Ödmark & Harvard, 2021). In this sense, satire hosts serve as influential opinion-makers, drawing on the ethos of opinion journalism and engaging more explicitly with political issues to resonate with their audiences. Hence, this development aligns with what Waisanen (2018a) terms “satire advocacy,” in which political satire guides viewers through social and political issues and encourages their engagement in the public sphere. Under this framework, satire is understood not only as entertainment but also as a communicative practice that can support informed, participatory, and mature democratic life.

Amy Becker (2025) examines the role of political satire in today’s polarised US media environment, questioning whether political comedy still has the capacity to create social bonds and promote inclusive engagement, or whether it deepens existing divisions among people. She argues that in 2025, it remains uncertain whether entertaining political content encourages

audiences to become more informed, responsible, and civically engaged, or simply reinforces existing political echo chambers.

In a polarised media environment, audiences often seek a sense of justice, and satire provides it by mocking those they hold responsible for political failures, social problems, or collective losses. Laughter, as a form of social interaction, is inherently ambiguous. Drawing on Bakhtin's idea of carnival, scholars suggest that contemporary satire serves as a space where everyday humour can challenge authority. Satire provides a setting in which people can mock power in a socially acceptable way. Besides, Bakhtin notes that "laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 12). This ambivalence also shapes satire: through laughter, satire can both elevate and diminish its object. It can expose something to ridicule and criticism, or, conversely, affirm and glorify it. Because of this dual quality, satire functions as a double-edged sword. Engaging with social norms and political life can influence them in negative ways, generating cynicism, disappointment, or feelings of helplessness, or in positive ways, by encouraging, educating, and motivating collective action. According to Hariman, modern laughter helps us cope with and critically negotiate life in a complex, mass-mediated civic environment. Hariman suggests that "political humour and particularly its core modality of parody are essential for an engaged, sustainable, democratic public culture." (Hariman, 2008, p. 248).

According to Meyer, humour has dual potential "to unite or divide (and sometimes do both at once)" (Meyer, 2000, p. 324). Hence, satire can function as a unifying force: it tempers extremes, encourages distance and perspective, and enables people to recognise shared flaws with a degree of lightness rather than hostility. Satirists play a crucial role in this process, as they must navigate this ambiguity and duality between humour, criticism, and entertainment. Research on the journalistic role of satirists' performance shows that different understandings of journalistic identity coexist. While some scholars argue for a relatively unified journalistic identity (Weaver & Willnat, 2012), others emphasise a more fragmented and diverse position (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Mellado & Hermida, 2021). Ödmark and Nicolai, for instance, empirically identify six roles of journalistic news satire, emphasising their hybridity, mutual inclusiveness, and frequent overlap. These roles include the reporter, advocate, watchdog, civic educator, comedic

interlocutor, and loyalist (Ödmark & Nicolai, 2024, p. 2320). Satire is inherently ambivalent and highly versatile, and the roles the satirist performs reflect this flexibility.

Audience research adds another layer of understanding. It argues that citizens still expect journalism to be factual, nonpartisan, and civically oriented (Karlsson & Clerwall, 2019), yet they also increasingly value subjectivity and emotion in news work (Chong, 2019). Recent explorations of journalistic practices have broadened rigid understandings of detached, neutral reporting by demonstrating how journalistic work can productively incorporate forms of emotions and joy (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019; Parks, 2021). Wahl-Jorgensen criticises the Habermasian public sphere concept as limited, not only rational, and argues that the “emotional turn” in media studies has opened up a more nuanced appraisal of the role of subjectivity and personal stories in the articulation of the common good (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p. 1).

Scholarship further suggests that satire and irony can simultaneously intensify polarisation and discontent, yet also function as potent tools for activism, capable of “capturing attention, producing pleasure and engagement, and strengthening feelings of community and shared understanding” (Day, 2011, p. 42; Doona, 2016, p. 15; Doona, 2020). This duality resonates with Simon Critchley’s account of “true humour” as a mode that reveals who we are, illuminates the conditions in which we live, and gestures toward possibilities for transformation (Critchley, 2002, p. 11). Geoffrey Baym stresses that *The Daily Show* employs humour “as the license to confront political dissembling and misinformation and to demand a measure of accountability” (Baym, 2005, p. 268). And the same can be said of other famous TV shows, such as *The Colbert Report* (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009, p. 126; Amarasingam, 2014; Jones, 2010).

The “emotional turn” can be relevant for ArmComedy hosts in the given context of polarisation and societal tensions. ArmComedy operates as a shared cultural space through which audiences forge community, cultivate belonging, and socialise as they collectively navigate public challenges. Satire emerges as a multifaceted practice: for producers, it facilitates varied forms of engagement and political commentary, while for audiences it provides emotional release, involvement, and a framework for interpreting politics. Satirists present societal issues and critiques of those in power in an easily understandable way, which can resonate emotionally and

rationally with the audience, without limiting themselves to a balanced, more traditional journalistic approach.

“Pessimist” vs “Optimist”: Cynicism And Kynicism

Most of the satire scholarship and research is effects-based. It helps to recognise what satire does to audiences, but not how audiences make sense of satire, how they evaluate the knowledge acquired by satire shows, specifically, the quantity and quality of knowledge received, necessary to be a citizen. While this body of research has been important in showing that political satire can shape knowledge, attitudes, and participation in complex and sometimes contradictory ways, it remains largely effects-driven and dependent on survey-based methods. Much of it focuses on what satire “does to” audiences, rather than on how producers and viewers themselves understand satire’s place in their everyday civic lives.

Academic literature on the social function of humour and satire can be broadly divided into two major groups. The first group can be called “pessimists”. The “pessimist” group highlights the satire functions of entertainment and enjoyment and argues that humour and satire, especially in their entertainment-oriented form, foster cynicism and apathy among audiences, as well as depoliticisation and feelings of powerlessness. Under the “cynicism” category, they consider general disengagement, which promotes powerlessness and distances people from social and political processes, leading to apathy (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Hart & Hartelius, 2007; Gray, Jones & Thompson, 2009).

In this thesis, I draw on insights from both the “pessimist” and “optimist” camps, but shift the emphasis from measuring attitudinal outcomes to examining meaning-making. I explore how ArmComedy’s hosts and audiences negotiate satire’s ambivalent functions within a specific hybrid-regime context, and how they interpret their civic roles in practice.

From this cynicism perspective, satire is seen as making citizens more neutral and disengaged, ultimately harming democratic processes. Baumgartner and Morris describe what they call “The Daily Show Effect”, arguing that while satire can reach otherwise inattentive audiences, it may

also reduce support for political institutions among people already inclined to disengage (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006, p. 341). According to this line of research, humour and satire tend to oversimplify complex political processes and trivialise serious issues. This can contribute to the depoliticisation of citizens by framing politics as entertainment rather than a domain requiring informed judgement or civic action. Scholars further warn that constant critique of politicians, institutions, and political life may erode public trust in democracy and its institutions (Koivukoski & Ödmark, 2020).

The second group may be described as the “optimists,” who argue that satire plays a key role in maintaining healthy public relations and a democratic environment. According to Edgerly, for decades, news and entertainment have been considered fundamentally different in quality and impact. News was associated with more mature, serious, political consumption, while entertainment was considered uninformative, emotional, and to pull citizens away from their civic duties. (Edgerly, 2017, p. 1066). On the contrary, political satire highlights problems, exposes social shortcomings, and keeps political actors under public scrutiny, encouraging them to remain vigilant and accountable. Satire, in this sense, serves as a “gateway,” stimulating attentiveness to politics and encouraging viewers to seek out additional information from traditional news sources (Baum, 2003; Feldman & Young, 2008; Xenos & Becker, 2009; Long, Jeong, & Lavis, 2021). Many scholars from this “camp” distinguish between democratic cynicism and apolitical, apathetic “cynicism” (Jones, 2010; Day, 2011; Higgie, 2014; Waisanen, 2018b; Doona, 2021).

Kynicism bears an optimistic intention that truth is central and satire is a public antidote to cynicism, which cares about the common good, highlights the failures of politicians, and suggests better alternatives. They see satire as an alternative to traditional journalism, often ignoring balanced journalistic ideals and using a strong-opinion journalism mode (Baum, 2003; Xenos, Moy & Becker, 2011). In this thesis, I argue that ArmComedy’s satire and the satirist roles performed by its hosts align with what the literature describes as an “optimist” approach to political satire. Although the programme’s specific aims and effects will be examined in later chapters, the hybrid nature of satire, as a form situated between comedy, entertainment, humour, and elements of journalistic practice, suggests that the influence of both the show and its satirists,

including their contribution to political knowledge, is difficult to overlook. Recent studies argue that, alongside their critical commentary, the satirical shows also include a notable amount of constructive content, where satirists go beyond simply criticising those in power and instead offer guidance on what the power holders should be doing and positive social changes (Bode and Becker, 2018b; McClennen, 2024; Feldman & Borum Chattoo, 2019).

Lee and Kwak suggest that frequent exposure to political humour filled with criticism and sarcasm can do more than entertain audiences. It can strongly influence their emotions. This type of humour can shape how viewers feel about political candidates by provoking reactions such as amusement, dislike, or distrust, which may ultimately affect their political opinions (Lee & Kwak, 2014, p. 311). Some researchers even introduce the concept of “affective shifts” in political comedy, a rhetorical strategy that allows political comedy to “discuss serious topics and voice critique, while building trust between the viewers and the host” (Kraxberger & Prakken, 2025, p. 2). Day (2011) argues that “satire serves as a 'safety valve,' where laughing at power helps to release powerlessness and aggression, thereby freeing them from the direct necessity of political participation and organisation.

Satire and Political Knowledge

Youth political participation in Armenia remains alarmingly low. According to 2024 data from the International Republican Institute (IRI), 76% of young people aged 18–35 do not trust any political or public figure. Simultaneously, content makers are forced to adapt to new realities, changing their communication strategies for general visibility and other social media platform metrics (Bossetta, 2018, p. 472). Effect studies show that people do learn from this type of satire, but the quantity and quality of learning depend on how people perceive the content: as news, entertainment, or both (Feldman, 2013). Baum (2003) underscores the distinction between hard and soft news, arguing that soft news influences the attitudes of politically inattentive citizens by providing informational shortcuts that enable them to form reasoned political judgments without requiring a large store of factual knowledge.

For inattentive citizens, soft news serves as a primary source of information shaping their political worldviews. Baumgartner and Morris (2006) found ambiguity in the effects: on the one

hand, *The Daily Show* viewers showed considerable gains in political knowledge, while on the other hand, they showed increased political cynicism. Hence, we can confidently say that consumption of political satire is positively related to knowledge gain. I argue that this line of argumentation is relevant to the Armenian case and, in particular, to the ArmComedy audience.

Satire can support citizens' knowledge acquisition, media consumption, and civic engagement. Some studies have shown that viewers of political satire demonstrate higher political knowledge, a greater likelihood of discussing politics, and a stronger sense of political efficacy. This tendency is especially seen among younger audiences (Feldman, 2007; Feldman & Young, 2008; Becker & Bode, 2018). Political satire, in particular late-night comedy programs, is an integral part of our political culture, media environment, and democratic society. For decades, scholarship on democratic theory has suggested that a well-functioning democracy requires informed, politically knowledgeable, and involved citizens. Well-informed citizens, engaged in information seeking and politically active, are the cornerstones of democratic processes (Rosanvallon, 2008).

Researchers have shown that the consumption and acquisition of political information varies across sources. Citizens need information and knowledge about politics to make decisions, interact with each other, and discuss topics that may influence their lives. Hereafter, I use the definition of political knowledge defined by Carpini & Keeter as “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory” (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 10). Not only the knowledge itself, but also the quality is important. Besides, it is necessary to understand how much citizens know about politics, through which channels, what they know, and how knowledge is distributed (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 3). Discussing the meaning of being a good citizen and the role of knowledge in democratic societies, Thorson states that there are “sets of expectations” for good citizens in democracies, such as: “to gain political knowledge, to engage in reasoned political debate, to vote, to join voluntary associations, and so on” (Thorson, 2012, p. 70).

The sources people use for political information now range widely, from traditional newspapers and broadcast news to satirical programmes, late-night comedy, and stand-up performances

(Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011, p. 184). The relationship between political knowledge and information acquired from satirical TV and late-night comedy has been examined from multiple angles (Baum, 2003; Prior, 2003; Becker & Waisanen, 2013). To capture this blend of news and entertainment, scholars have introduced terms such as infotainment and soft news to describe media that sit between the two categories.

Civic engagement and public trust

The scholarship on late-night comedy and political satire has been dominated by research on the United States and Western audiences. Burgers and Brugman (2021) note that 88.6% of satire studies have been conducted in the U.S., leaving other contexts comparatively underexplored. At the same time, a growing body of work has begun to examine satirical programmes across diverse societies and political environments (Echeverria & Rodelo, 2021; Zekavat, 2026; Ryabinska, 2025; Boukes & Hameleers, 2020). This emerging research suggests that processes of liberalisation and democratisation in post-authoritarian settings can expand opportunities for satirical expression and public critique.

Within this broader shift, scholars highlight the expanding social and political role of political comedy in contemporary media systems. Becker (2025) argues that humour and comedy can educate the public, draw attention to societal problems, and give voice to marginalised groups. Other studies emphasise how satirists gain social credibility and audience empathy by positioning themselves as concerned and responsible commentators (Kraxberger & Prakken, 2025; Waisanen, 2018a). Research has also examined satire's capacity to counterbalance populist narratives, as seen in analyses of Ukraine (Ryabinska, 2025) and the Netherlands (Boukes & Hameleers, 2020).

All of the above-mentioned research is conducted in mature, developed Western democracies, especially in the USA, whose case and media environment, despite current challenges, has had a strong civil society and public sphere in the Habermasian understanding: a place for consensus and dialogue. But what happens in a society where civic institutions are weak, the media is partisan, and political trust is an unstable value? That is the Armenian case.

The media landscape in Armenia is diverse, including television, radio, print, and online platforms. Private media outlets have contributed significantly to this diversity by providing alternative perspectives and content. The media landscape is rapidly evolving, particularly thanks to online media outlets, which offer alternative platforms for disseminating news and information. In contrast, traditional media outlets face economic challenges, including limited advertising revenue and financial sustainability issues. Media consumption in Armenia has changed dramatically, shifting from traditional television to online resources (Internews, 2024, p. 7). Furthermore, several studies indicate a decline in public trust in the news media in Armenia (Internews, 2023).

Public service TV and other TV channels are still dominant from a political information-accusation perspective, have high ratings, and especially attract 56+ audiences in regions and rural areas. According to a recent survey by the International Republican Institute (IRI), public broadcasting TV channels remain the most trusted source of political information (IRI, 2026, pp. 72-74). Similarly, television is cited as the primary source of information by 34% of respondents (CRRC, 2024).

Dahlgren argues that democracy depends not only on formal institutions and participation but also on a broader cultural foundation comprising values, practices, identities, and emotions, which he terms civic cultures. These cultures matter because democratic structures only work when they are inhabited by people who hold democratic orientations. From this perspective, media engagement is a key lens for understanding how citizens actively participate in civic life. It encourages us to rethink civic cultures as dynamic and participatory, rather than viewing audiences as passive consumers of popular media. Dahlgren's framework is effective in focusing on the quality of engagement that political satire can provide. Building on Hermes' concept of cultural citizenship and Dahlgren's civic cultures, Doona's work on political comedy engagement shows how young adults use news satire to negotiate political identity, cultural citizenship and civic motivation, rather than a simple "inform versus entertain" medium (Doona, 2016; Doona, 2018; Doona, 2021). Together, these frameworks will broaden our understanding, rather than the "inform versus entertain" dichotomy, towards civic and cultural practices of belonging, identity, and agency. Taken together, these perspectives allow ArmComedy to be examined not merely as

entertainment but as a cultural space where political meanings are created, contested, and collectively interpreted.

The interrelations and influences among political satire, civic engagement, and political efficacy have been carefully examined (Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Becker, 2011; Becker, 2013; Baumgartner & Lockerbie, 2018; Doona, 2021; Doona, 2018; Martineza & Atouba, 2021). Research has long suggested that political comedy and satire can invest in citizens' discursive practices, informed decision-making, civic engagement, and participation, thereby strengthening democracy. I follow the definition of "Civic engagement," defined and employed by Dahlgren, which is "forms of voluntary activity aimed toward solving problems in the community and helping others, while 'political engagement' is reserved for activity oriented toward influencing governmental action in some way." (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 58). According to Barabas et al. (2014), factors connected to political knowledge are linked to three basics: ability, opportunity, and motivation, meaning how citizens are able to process the information, opportunity to gain the information and desire to learn.

Discussing the relation between political satire and democratic processes by citizens, Baym argues (Baym, 2005, p. 272-273) that *The Daily Show* (TDS) and other late-night political comedy shows have the power and possibility to influence deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy, as understood by Habermas, involves and engages discussion by politically mature citizens that seeks to find consensus about the idea of the common good. Following Habermas, Dahlgren (2009) examines key pillars that shape citizenship and civic agency. Discussing six dimensions of civic culture, he argues that information and political knowledge gained from the media are essential for civic agency and, therefore, for users' citizenship and engagement. He stresses that one cannot act successfully and in complex ways as a citizen without political knowledge (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 76). Moreover, according to Becker and Bode (2018a), the positive influence of political satire news programs on viewers' political engagement can be attributed to various factors. One is that the rise and abundance of satire shows lead to political discussions among viewers. This, in turn, leads to civic engagement and, likely, political engagement or even political participation (Baumgartner & Lockerbie, 2018).

Moreover, political satire news consumption can generate negative emotions. Besides, some of the shows can advocate for certain issues and even suggest a specific call to action to their viewers, encouraging civic or political engagement; however, with limited impact (Becker & Bode, 2018b). Research has shown that people generally tend to engage in small actions when they are easy, such as signing petitions and attending political talks and discussions (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2018). Bode and Becker found that: “it matters when political comedy hosts ask their audiences to engage in an activity. A call to action promotes specific engagement in that activity, but not necessarily broader engagement on the issue or a sense of efficacy as a result” (Becker & Bode, 2018b, p. 1579).

Hermes and cultural citizenship

Drawing from the “optimist camp”, we employ a more optimistic approach, arguing for the civic potential of political satire (Baym, 2010; Chattoo & Feldman, 2020; Day, 2011; Jones, 2010). This approach often aligns with cultural studies that emphasise the critical and active dimensions of consuming popular culture for civic engagement and active citizenry. Joke Hermes states that popular culture helps us to understand: “who we think we are, to how we understand our responsibilities and rights, how we hold out hope for the future, or how we are critical of the state of things in the environments in which we move and of which we feel we are part.” (Hermes, 2005, p. viii).

Hermes continues this line of argument, emphasising the role and functions of cultural citizenship, noting that watching, discussing, and sharing media such as TV shows, news programs, fandom, and other forms of media create a sense of belonging, identity, and participation in public life. Hermes argues that popular culture is not only a sphere where people find entertainment and leisure but also a crucial environment for meaning-making, a sense of belonging, and civic and cultural identity-building. In this perspective, the concept of cultural citizenship extends the boundaries of understanding of democratic theory from formal participation to the everyday practices through which people use media to construct belonging. The cornerstone of this approach is that it rethinks and reshapes the concept of citizenship, and the formal and classical practices of citizenship: voting, rights, and institutions. Hermes suggests a viewpoint for examining how ordinary audiences use culture to build communities of interest.

It is a sphere of humour, where we reflect, “where we distinguish between ourselves and others, where we emphasise our values” (Doona, 2016, p. 30), and think politically through media and entertainment.

Political news satire and late-night TV shows, like television and radio before them, provide citizens with the means to rethink and exercise their citizenship. From the perspective of cultural citizenship, Hermes and Kopitz argue that, especially in audience research, the idea of “belonging” is important (Hermes & Kopitz, 2023). Hence, the concept of cultural citizenship refers to how media and popular culture allow us, as an audience, to connect with others (belonging) by sharing thoughts and ideas about the world we live in, the socio-political context, and the cultural background we inhabit. It is not only the understanding of how media influence the audience, but predominantly about the question of “*how people shape their worlds with the help of media and how media are important to them*” (Hermes & Kopitz, 2023, p. 15).

Thus, political news satire, as a form of popular culture, provides attractive, affective, and accessible entry points for audiences to engage in civic life, form communities, and become active participants in meaning-making processes. Hermes argues that popular culture connects the public and the private spheres. It vanishes the borderline more than any other institution or practice. Hermes suggests, following Fiske and Hartley, that “popular culture may be understood as democracy at work” (Hermes, 2005, p. 2). In this view, it is “*the most democratic of domains in our society*” (Hermes, 2005, p. 3), shaping the audience's idea of belonging.

In this thesis, I argue that in the case of ArmComedy, the audience does not just “consume” political news satire and jokes; it interprets political events and builds communities, using satire to make sense of elections, politicians, events, and political and public life in general. Hence, ArmComedy is positioned as a form of cultural citizenship in action: its audience feels part of a community through the consumption of satire, entertainment, criticism, and discussion.

Dahlgren and civic cultures

In addition to the Hermes approach, I employ another core concept by Peter Dahlgren: civic cultures and their six dimensions. Dahlgren's (2009) civic culture model argues that democracy

requires not just institutional structures but a living cultural substrate. He names it "civic cultures." Civic cultures are the everyday practices that make citizens feel knowledgeable, capable and powerful for democratic participation. Dahlgren's model identifies six interdependent dimensions of civic culture: knowledge, values, trust, spaces, practices, and identities. Dahlgren argues that civic agency cannot emerge in a vacuum and needs a culture that makes civic engagement and political participation meaningful and possible (Dahlgren, 2009). Dahlgren stresses that, especially for young citizens political participation is less well characterized as sustained activity and better understood as the flow of everyday life (Dahlgren, 2009). As Dahlgren argues: "*Civic cultures, to the extent that they are compelling, are internalized, intersubjective, operating at the level of being taken for granted, everyday realities, empowering and supporting civic agency.*" Dahlgren, 2007, p. 9). He also mentions the role of communicative spaces in which "*civic cultures can develop and flourish, and in which the political can be developed, and where politics can be pursued*" (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 116).

We chose the theoretical frameworks and concepts of cultural citizenship and civic cultures by Hermes and Dahlgren for this thesis because they provide a strong, useful framework for research, audience, and production analysis. Hermes and Dahlgren move citizenship from the traditional participatory-electoral understanding toward everyday cultural practices. While Hermes emphasises cultural citizenship as belonging, recognition, and participation through popular culture, Dahlgren adds to that understanding of civic agency within civic cultures that support democratic participation. Hermes and Dahlgren combine to show complex relations among popular culture, cultural citizenship, civic cultures, and civic agency, in which cultural citizenship describes the cultural experience of the audience as part of a community. In contrast, civic cultures explain the supporting environment that builds the experience into agency.

Based on the aforementioned concept and theoretical perspectives, I argue that ArmComedy functions as a site of cultural citizenship by creating a sense of belonging and supporting audiences' meaning-making. It is also a component of civic culture, as long as it supports knowledge, trust, practices, and identities that enable civic agency. This combined approach is especially useful for examining political news satire during election periods, when humour can

function simultaneously as a tool for information-gathering, a source of political knowledge, a means of community bonding, and a form of political sense-making.

Finally, the thesis argues that ArmComedy has the potential to foster civic agency by providing audiences with a familiar space to understand and interpret politics and to imagine their political efficacy as informed, knowledgeable citizens. This approach will be especially useful, given the timing of the thesis and the data I gathered through interviews with hosts and audiences to study satire during elections and its applications for both entertainment and the building of civic agency and cultural citizenship.

Methodology and Methods

The chapter describes methodological strategies and approaches for researching and analysing the production and audience reception of political news satire in the context of Armenian society.

The research itself is in a constructivist, interpretivist paradigm, according to which knowledge is not uncovered but co-created between researcher and informant, and meaning is not inherent in the text but produced through interpretation (Burr, 2003). Accordingly, Burr argues that “the task of the researcher therefore becomes to acknowledge and even to work with their own intrinsic involvement in the research process and the part that this plays in the results that are produced.” (Burr, 2003, p. 152). A deductive approach is also employed in the research, whereby themes and topics are mapped in advance based on previous research, theories, concepts, and experiences (Seale, 2018, p. 878).

The thesis employs Flyvbjerg's case study approach with special focus on “less likely” cases (Flyvbjerg, 2001). I am guided by that principle (as evidenced by data from our interviews) and believe that this approach is a strategic method for our case selection, designed to achieve the necessary level of generalisation from a single case study. The ArmComedy show is primarily seen as entertainment in the Armenian media environment. The case study approach, according to Flyvbjerg, is a research strategy characterised by in-depth, context-dependent analysis, and the *“case study method in general can certainly contribute to the cumulative development of*

knowledge” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 86). As Flyvbjerg argues, practical, nuanced knowledge is valuable for understanding human affairs, where context-dependent knowledge is crucial.

This thesis does not aim to produce a case-specific account, but rather to investigate a complex, multi-dimensional social phenomenon while drawing on the strengths of the case study approach. As Flyvbjerg cautions, “a truly explanatory and predictive science must operate independent of context,” yet in the study of social life “, context-independence seems impossible” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 46). This perspective underscores the value of context-sensitive inquiry for understanding how satire operates within particular media and political environments.

The case study approach enables the examination of complex real-life phenomena, making it well-suited for analysing political news satire, its functions in Armenian society, and the challenges surrounding its production and reception. This thesis focuses on ArmComedy, a long-running and widely viewed satirical news programme with a substantial audience in Armenia and the diaspora. Although satire has been extensively studied internationally, the Armenian context remains comparatively understudied, with limited research on both production practices and audience experiences. This study addresses this gap by bringing these two perspectives together within their local and broader media environments. As Flyvbjerg argues, the “background conditions in the social world” matter, and context is central to social inquiry (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 45). Guided by this understanding, the thesis employs qualitative methods to develop a nuanced account of political news satire in Armenia.

In the following sections, research design, sampling, and analytical methods are introduced. Then, the data collection and data analysis processes will be explained. To build the analysis, data are gathered through interviews with hosts of political news satire programs and audience engagement interviews. This will represent narratives from hosts and audience members, analyse their meaning-making processes, goals, and interpretations. The chapter concludes with discussions, ethical considerations, and highlights limitations.

Research design and sampling

To research and analyse how Armenian political news satirists interpret their work and construct their roles as satirists in general, and especially during the parliamentary elections of 2026, a series of semi-structured interviews was conducted. Data were collected, analysed, and interpreted in relation to existing research and the conceptual framework guiding this thesis. The study investigates how the ArmComedy hosts construct their satirist roles during the 2026 Armenian parliamentary elections, and how audiences engage with the programme's political news satire as they make sense of their own civic agency. To answer these questions, 13 people, 2 hosts and 11 audience members (5 millennials and 6 Gen Z, respectively) were interviewed in-depth (Appendix 4). Interviewees were engaged, showing a strong willingness to share their thoughts, reflections, experiences, and evaluations. One of the main reasons why I chose qualitative interviews for the thesis research is that they are an especially suitable method for evaluating multifaceted issues such as values, understanding, identity building, and belonging. It allows informants to speak in their own voices, in their own language, and in their own suitable form and content (Seale, 2018, p. 469).

From a production-interview perspective, the creators of the most prominent late-night satire shows were approached. The interviews with them were conducted via WhatsApp, and audio was recorded on the researcher's personal smartphone; each interview lasted 60 to 90 minutes. We first agreed on the date and time of the interview, obtained their verbal consent to record it, later transcribed it, and used it for the research data analysis. The interviews are an advantageous and appropriate method for exposing participants' values, identity formation, and advocacy by both sides of the informants: creators and audience members. This method (Seale, 2018; Bazeley, 2013; Jensen, 2012) enables the use techniques, such as in-depth, semi-structured interviews with show hosts and audience members, which will serve as the basis for data collection by exploring the meaning-making processes of both sides.

Although Hermes argues that structured interviews “*leave little room for the notions and ideas interviewees would like to bring to the conversation*” (Hermes & Kopitz, 2023, p. 28), semi-structured interviews allow for a combination of these two approaches. For the interview methods, I followed Byrne (Seale, 2018, pp. 462-96). As Bazeley argues, “*The structure of*

conversation and turn-taking is important” as well as the *“details of how people understand and feel and respond”* (Bazeley, 2013, p. 72).

The interview questions were guided by Dahlgren and Hill’s (2020) five parameters of engagement: motivations, intensities, contexts, modalities, and consequences. The question guides were made for both the interviews with the hosts and the audience. The guide for the hosts (Appendix 1) focused on key topics and themes based on previous research and the thesis’s research questions. The main topics are framed around how they see themselves and their audience as citizens. While preparing the main topics, it was ensured that the semi-structured method provided participants with space to share and present their own narratives, a crucial condition for inductive research. It investigates hosts’ role identities, editorial practices, imagined audiences, strategies for acknowledging and navigating polarisation, and self-understanding in the pre-election period. Some direct questions about what they believe or what their goals are were asked, as the interview approach was inductive.

The interviewees for this research were recruited through a snowball sampling technique (Seale, 2018) and an open call on my Facebook page, with recruitment conducted voluntarily ([see](#) Appendices 2 and 4). Edwards and Holland describe that the *“sample must provide the data you need to produce answers to your research questions, and this process is theory driven”* (Edwards and Holland, 2013, p. 6). To begin with, I asked my acquaintances and friends who have been watching ArmComedy for years. I reached out to a more diverse group of people, including those with different political views, ages, and interests, via my Facebook page and gathered volunteers from those who responded. The sampling rationale is that the audience of ArmComedy (as confirmed by the hosts and their statistics) comprises 20- to 50-year-old followers with diverse social, financial, and educational backgrounds.

Before starting the interviews, verbal consent was obtained, and the purpose of the study, participants' rights, and the process were explained. At the same time, I agreed to obtain their written consent, and all confirmed it (Appendix 3). In addition, they were informed that, even after the interview and before publication, they had the right to withdraw from it and their data would be destroyed immediately (Seale, 2018, pp. 476-477). The final version of the question

guide outlined the main themes and directions within the framework of the research questions and prior research.

As Byrne claims, the most compelling benefit of qualitative interviewing is the ability to achieve depth and complexity that are limited in other approaches, particularly survey-based ones (Seale, 2018, p. 470). Saturation is achieved after the eighth or ninth interview. Saturation was determined following Edwards and Holland's approach of the “range of meanings that should determine numbers of interviewees in a study” (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p.65), that is, when interviewers continue sampling and identifying cases until their interviewees are not telling anything that the researcher has not heard before.

In addition, although the text and research have limitations in translation, for the comfort and immediacy of the participants, the interviews were conducted in their native language, Armenian. All interviews were first listened to, then manually transcribed, and finally cleaned of vocal and linguistic clutter.

Analysing the data

After all interviews were conducted, it was time to organise, develop and interpret the vast amount of data collected. As Jensen proposes, we should bear in mind that statements from individual interviewees, focus groups, or survey responses are not pure representations and are not valid or reliable for understanding what people think. He argues that all the data gathered are actions in a context, products of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Therefore, the data obtained from the interviews “become sources of information through analysis, and of meaning through interpretation” (Jensen, 2012, p. 270).

To analyse 13 interview transcripts, totalling approximately 400 pages, thematic coding (Seale, 2018), also known as thematic content analysis, was employed. Qualitative content analysis allows the creation of themes and topics accordingly, interpreting the hosts' and the informants' insights in relation to the research questions of the thesis. The developmental process of generating code themes provides an opportunity to demonstrate the quality, validity, and reliability of the research and its findings (Seale, 2018, p. 876). Through the inductive, open

coding process, I recognise meaningful segments of the data and combine them to form further parts. The combination of inductive and deductive coding is significant for navigating from general ideas to more detailed, empirically oriented insights (Seale, 2018, 882).

This approach does not require coding every sentence or paragraph; instead, it involves grouping and generalising the material to ensure that no key topic or observation is overlooked in the initial stage of transcription and listening (Seale, 2018, p. 881). Deductive codes are identified first, followed by open coding through which inductive codes and themes emerge. For each interview transcript, similar codes were then highlighted and organised into broader categories and themes.

Once all the themes and categories had emerged and been cultivated, I used them to compare with the descriptive codes. I established analytical categories based on previous studies and the current study's research questions, and compared the themes to the thesis's theoretical frameworks. In this way, precise themes are empirically suggested by the data. These around 10-15 categories (Appendix 5) were then grouped into six broader themes: values, identities, knowledge, belonging, polarisation, and censorship, which form the basic structure of the main analysis.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

As an Armenian media researcher who knows the show and the socio-political context well, I am not a neutral observer of ArmComedy. I share many of the generational experiences, media habits, and post-war frustrations expressed by my interviewees. Knowing the context facilitates research, but it also risks taking assumptions about the topics and content discussed with hosts and audiences for granted. To address this, I tried to ask follow-up questions when participants used phrases like “you know how it is” and wrote reflexive notes after interviews when I recognised similarities and peculiarities between their narratives and my own views. In the analysis, I focused on making participants’ meaning-making explicit rather than assuming shared understanding.

All participants, whether through snowballing or open-call methods, initially received a letter describing the research goals, targets, and the format of their participation, which consisted of interviews. Moreover, we agreed on the day and time of the interview in advance, and at the very beginning, I reiterated the research goals and targets and detailed their rights and anonymity. It was explained that their data would be retained until publication and that the research team had the right to change their minds and decline to allow its use.

Trust is the most important factor here, but it is also essential that, by overcoming these obstacles, the interviews go more open, inclusive and friendly, in a less official way. To build trusting and friendly relationships, a safe space and common sense are vital. To conduct research successfully, it is vital to ask questions and engage with open, informed informants, as the best way to find out what people think is to ask them. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, participants' names were anonymised.

Apart from that, it is necessary to acknowledge that, regardless of the qualitative methods chosen for the research, interviews also have limitations. First, interviewees themselves were actively interpreting, reflecting, and understanding as they faced questions and ideas they had not considered before. When participants are asked certain questions, they sometimes pause, note that they had never considered the issue in that way, and take a moment to reflect before responding. This illustrates that interviews do not simply reveal pre-existing thoughts but actively shape and construct responses in the moment.

On the other hand, from the interviewer's perspective, it is not an easy task either. Since the semi-structured method limits full management and control over every aspect of the interviews, especially the processes of conducting interviews and interpreting responses in real time, much of the work happens quickly and unconsciously. Because this study does not include a content analysis of the show's episodes, an approach beyond the scope of the research, I cannot assess in detail how the programme handles production choices, thematic selection, or other editorial nuances.

On the other hand, for both creators and audiences, it is difficult to say what was not said or what was avoided (Koivukoski & Ödmark, 2020, p. 737). In any case, as Jensen thoughtfully notes,

“there is no way around language when it comes to studying communication and culture” (Jensen, 2012, p. 271), and I explore the viewpoints, answers, and reflections on the data and experiences they chose to share with me.

Analysis

This chapter begins by examining how the hosts understand their own role, primarily as "watchdogs" who use humour to pressure those in power and promote democratic values. Additionally, the subchapter includes insights by the audience and their perception of that role, and how they recognise it. The chapter then addresses the tensions around self-censorship and editorial balance that the hosts navigate, particularly in the aftermath of the 2020 war, when maintaining critical distance became especially difficult. It then explores the "gateway hypothesis," asking whether satire offers an accessible entry point to political awareness for audiences who have largely lost trust in traditional media. It then turns to satire's social function, its capacity to release collective frustration, soften political hostility, and create a more inclusive space in an otherwise deeply divided media environment. The chapter ends with audience perspectives, showing how viewers build knowledge, trust, and civic identity through their engagement with the show, while also acknowledging the limitations of what satire alone can provide politically. Throughout, the analysis draws on Dahlgren's civic cultures framework and Hermes' cultural citizenship theory, arguing that political satire in a non-Western, post-conflict context requires its own, somewhat different analytical approach.

Satirist roles and democratic values

During the interviews, ArmComedy creators described their ambivalence about their roles as journalists, satirists, civic actors, and engaged citizens who are not indifferent to public, social, and political issues. They explained that as one of the principles: serving and acting as "watchdogs" whose primary goal is to point out the shortcomings of the authorities and those in power. The aim is to highlight problems that can serve as a restraining factor for powerful politicians, the ruling party, and the opposition, and to show their audience the crucial issues, while also serving an educational function by transmitting knowledge and values that people should use to guide their judgments.

One of the hosts, Narek, when asked to describe his role and aim, explains and reflects on his own self-perception:

Those values, such as ‘corruption is bad’ or ‘freedom of speech is very important’ run like a red thread from the very beginning [of the ArmComedy show]. Wherever there is something bad, exposing it at least makes its repetition more difficult. I’m not claiming that if we do a lot of this, [bad things] will disappear, of course not, but that pressure increases. And in many cases, various politicians have even said in their speeches, ‘this will be shown on ArmComedy,’ and things like that. I think that’s the point: making many things public in a bold, unrestrained way creates public pressure. So basically, some kind of restraining mechanism. Of course, it can’t be that we have no leverage at all to influence things, but in that way, they try more to align with public expectations. To shame poor governance so much that we avoid bad governance as much as possible. (Interviewee Narek, 43, host)

Sergey, the second host and co-founder of the project, also speaks about his role and the function of their program as one that restrains the system, highlights problems, and serves as a mechanism of checks and balances appropriate to a democratic system:

A satirist, a political commentator who looks for flaws in the system and constantly applies pressure so that whenever something goes wrong, or is flawed, or inefficient, it is noticed and commented on, and in that way provides a balance of checks and counterbalances. (Interviewee Sergey, 44, host)

Hosts state that their primary goal is to entertain, to satirise. They also add that whatever news they collect to discuss, their primary goal is to be attractive and to present the material to people with satire. They emphasised that there are important political or social topics they cannot ignore. Entertainment and satire are ambiguous in this case because one cannot skip important topics, and satirising them can be perceived as entertainment. They speak of their primary goal as satirists, yet they cannot ignore the material they work with, the important issues and news they filter for their audience. Thus, on one hand, they describe entertainment as their main purpose, but at the same time, they remain dependent on the news and political context, as well as on topics they cannot overlook or avoid. This is because their audience has come to see satire not only as entertainment but also as a digest, in which content matters just as much as form. This ambivalence, as previous research shows, emerges when satirists understand their journalistic and comedic work as a form of hybridisation (Koivukoski & Ödmark, 2020, p. 737) and their hybrid roles.

I have already mentioned six dimensions of civic cultures by Dahlgren: knowledge, values, trust, spaces, practices, and identities. Discussing interrelations among these dimensions, Dahlgren argues that “all of them potentially impact on each other, and each of them in turn is shaped by developments in the other five” (Dahlgren, 2009). So to say, reflecting on their identities and democratic values, hosts define their journalistic identities as "watchdogs" and political commentators who seek out systemic flaws to ensure a balance of counterweights, but also as satirists who need to entertain and be humorous. Moreover, when they speak about their civic background, they mention that they are both from the civil society sector and that civic identity and civic values are very important to them and are present in their work. They mentioned that they embrace their civic responsibility that comes with their show, and with regard for their audience's expectations. If the press was once considered the ‘fourth estate’ that performed a watchdog function, then over time, satirists of political news have, willingly or unwillingly, also taken on that role (Ödmark & Koivukoski, 2024; McClennen, 2024).

The “watchdog” function allows them to promote essential democratic values and principles among their audience by pointing out shortcomings in an accessible, easily digestible way. It is also about balancing fun with satire and criticism. For satire to work, it must balance criticism on a fine line, avoiding insults and remaining healthy and constructive. Narek confirms this notion:

... About 70% of whatever you do is about the authorities at that moment, because whatever happens, they are responsible for their decisions, that’s how I see it, and it has always been like that. The ‘dose’ should be healthy, roughly 70% criticism of the authorities, and about 30% of different opposition-related things ... (Interviewee Narek, 43, host)

This is notable, especially considering the current state of Armenian politics as a developing democracy. In the current political situation, a single party holds an absolute majority in parliament and the government. At the same time, the bias and politicisation of the press serving the interests of parties and powerful groups, and political news satire in this case, can, and does, play that watchdog role, of course, within its limits, which the hosts of the program themselves acknowledge. This indicates that their roles as satirists are grounded in democratic values and shaped in part by their personal backgrounds. Sergey mentioned his work experience

before entering the media field. He worked for three US-funded organisations that supported election administration, democratisation, and anti-corruption programs. Through these roles, he gained extensive experience and an insider perspective on political processes. They helped shape what Dahlgren would call “substantive and procedural” values (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 111), which are a necessary precondition for a viable democratic system. And their audience recognises their efforts and shares those values, as we will see in the following parts.

Compared with developed democratic societies, where parliaments are governed by coalitions and multiparty systems are competitive, satirists there do not necessarily need to target those in power. There is almost no systematic work on political news satire in Armenia or the South Caucasus, particularly regarding hybrid political regimes, polarisation, and the roles of satire in these systems. ArmComedy hosts recognise their roles in criticising both government and opposition actors, and modelling a less hostile, more reflexive political discourse that can soften the edges of polarisation without pretending to be neutral, which is especially crucial in post-conflict societies during pre-election periods. It can be argued that in a polarised political environment, satire becomes even more appealing because of its essential nature as an equalising force. Satire does not discriminate in its targets of criticism and holds everyone accountable. In this context, satirists' apparent bias can actually make it seem more neutral, precisely because it operates within an atmosphere of broader societal polarisation. Hence, the show acts as a safe public sphere for its audience, where people avoid partisan views and engage in a less hostile, less polarised, and more inclusive environment.

Another interesting observation from Sergey is that entertaining audiences and being humorous remain their primary goals, and that he does not favour the shift among liberal Western satirists toward becoming more overtly political and increasingly focused on expressing their personal opinions. This observation is especially interesting against the backdrop of the advocacy satire and opinion journalism observed among Western satirists (Becker, 2025; Waisanen, 2018a). A satirist's role of simply highlighting problems and acting as a “watchdog” can sometimes transform into advocacy satire (Waisanen, 2018), especially in the form of lobbying social and political issues that are essential for them as creators and their audience.

Sergey seems to try to maintain the traditional direction, stay close to the origins, first of all being funny, and then exercise opinion journalism and more hard-line political satire. Nevertheless, the ambiguity and contradiction of his role are evident here. On the one hand, he speaks of “traditional” satire and considers himself traditional in the sense that he does not move further into opinion journalism, instead viewing humour and satire themselves as the core of that traditional approach. And yet, even though satire has already become a hybrid genre that inherently includes subjectivity and a lack of neutrality. However, the scope and depth of this depend on the platform, the satirists, and the context (Koivukoski, 2022, p. 31).

Satirists also discuss their proactive motivation to effect change based on their democratic values. Sergey even jokes that he has a “mission to civilise the world”:

Basically, by pointing out these flaws, especially since we have a social advertising page, that was exactly the purpose. There are shortcomings in public behaviour that you need to bring out, almost by mocking them. (Interviewee Sergey, 44, host)

The importance of values is undeniable in civic cultures. Dahlgren notes that “This passion for democratic values is, in a sense, the foundation of civic virtue, the guidelines that define ideal civic behaviour” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 112). That passion to share values, to “civilise” as put by Sergey, can be effective in a sense, and can bring pleasure and satisfaction to satirists and their audiences. My interviewees recognise the hosts’ motivation to address public shortcomings by highlighting problems and proposing possible solutions. They appreciate this aspect of the programme, and all participants noted that the segment devoted to critiquing public issues is important both for the show and for them as viewers.

Hence, I argue that *ArmComedy*, as a cultural institution, generates pleasure and a sense of power and belonging for its audience by raising public issues and advocating for change. The audience recognises and agrees with these satirical lines, thereby participating in positive social change. Hermes argues that cultural citizenship “is thus bound up with producing the pleasure of popular culture” with a certain amount of reflection on that bonding and community building (Hermes, 2005, p. 10). The show also encourages its audience to demand a more accountable political culture. Local politicians’ fear of being on *ArmComedy* signals that they recognise the

programme's capacity to shape public perception and exert informal pressure. I therefore argue that the show offers citizens a modest sense of agency by leveraging this "public pressure" on officials, even if only within the limits that the hosts themselves acknowledge.

Self-censorship and public frustration

When speaking about editorial roles in decision-making processes, topic evaluation, news filtration, and structuring each episode, Sergey and Narek emphasise that it is often difficult to balance public expectations, heated debates, polarisation, and the journalistic ethics of objective positioning. This dynamic becomes especially visible during intense political moments, particularly in pre-election campaigns, when people quickly group into opposing sides and divide into "us" and "them." In such an atmosphere, any opinion, news item, or commentary that does not align with their preferences or expectations is met with scepticism. The hosts, willingly or not, remain attentive to this polarised environment and foresee possible reactions. Moreover, public tension and polarisation were particularly acute after the war, and the hosts admit that they were not uninvolved. Sergey reflects on this in terms of "emotions" and "objectivity":

After 20 [the 2020 Armenian-Azerbaijani war and Armenia's defeat], we were also very emotional, very polarised, and I myself didn't care, I don't know, about public opinion or any kind of complete objectivity; I was just expressing my opinion. And at that time, as I think about it now, it was very often one-sided, often so sharp, well, maybe it was justified, because the lies had accumulated a lot. I also felt so deceived by the war, by the promises, by everything. I felt deceived. And at that time, I might not have noticed the opposition's shortcomings very much; I didn't focus on them; all my attention was on the government's shortcomings. Then, at some point, I realised that the opposition was pointless and that thinking should simply bring about a general balance. (Interviewee Sergey, 44, host)

These evaluations by the host are not just observations. They document a unique moment in which political satirists publicly narrate their temporary loss and reflect on the restructuring of their critical distance in a post-conflict societal setting for their own audience. From the perspective of satire studies, this case study of ArmComedy's case is particularly distinctive. Most existing work on news satire focuses on pressures usually discussed in terms of market and political economy and broadcasting limitations (Koivukoski & Ödmark, 2020; Waisanen, 2019;

Echeverría & Rodelo, 2021), rather than on post-war trauma or the fear of being labelled unpatriotic.

In contrast, Sergey's account shows how satirists can be temporarily drawn into one-sided critique before deliberately working their way back toward a more balanced, multi-directional form of humour. This combination of affective overwhelm, patriotic self-censorship, and later self-correction is largely absent from the existing satire literature, and it is here that the thesis tries to offer a genuinely novel contribution. In the Armenian case, the self-censorship point is unique because, in satire studies, self-censorship is generally studied and understood from a political, oppressive perspective. For instance, in Hungary, satire targets political elites, yet is muted or ambiguous when directed at official government policy (Lampland & Nadkarni, 2015; Imre, 2012). The same goes for self-censorship in Putin's Russia (Semenenko, 2018).

Sergey also links his reflections to the current political moment. When discussing the pre-election period and the ongoing peace-building process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, he acknowledges the broader polarised environment and the alternating patterns of “tension” and “relaxation” that shape public life.

Now, too, it's a camp situation, just more light, because the wounds have healed a little, and then the effect of some relative peace has taken its toll. It's one thing when they're constantly shooting; then there's more division, more people blame the authorities. But relative peace brings a sense of general relief and solidarity. (Interviewee Sergey, 44, host)

Sergey's reflections align with what satire scholar Dannagal Young calls the objectivity trap, describing what happens when satirical show hosts start doing the truth-telling work that journalists avoid because they feel bound by norms of balance. She argues that many journalists simply present “both sides” rather than clearly stating who is lying, so audiences turn to satirists as “arbiters of the truth” instead. But once satirists are seen this way, they also feel pressure to look neutral and “hit everyone equally,” which can weaken their criticism and limit how sharply they can target those in power. (Young, 2008, pp. 245- 246).

Narek reflects on it by mentioning the self-censorship problem:

Now there is a growing demand among audiences for opinion journalism, and satirists also try to express their civic stance. But in many cases, they become constrained. For example, within the logic of liberal media, satire suffers; it turns into self-censorship. (Interviewee Narek, 43, host)

Sergey also notes that they cannot always remain neutral or detached. He describes their roles to channel public frustration:

During tense times, we change the format. That's how it is, we still keep some lightness, but it becomes more "serious." For example, during the war, it became more about identifying misinformation, targeting the international community, adding international context, and analysing reactions from different countries. We still did it emotionally, but without humour or laughter, more like a tool to channel people's frustration and anger rather than just entertainment. All the accumulated anger and sense of injustice, we were channelling it emotionally. (Interviewee Sergey, 44, host)

This constitutes one of the central findings of the research: In a post-war, highly polarised context, political satire cannot be understood as merely "being funny," even when hosts themselves initially frame their work in those terms. Satire provides viewers with a safe space to process frustration and collective shock, not only offering comic relief. This resonates with existing research, which argues that political satire works through negative emotions and suggests that these affective responses can be channelled into engagement and critical reflection rather than apathy.

This approach is recognised by most of their audience. Milena remembered that, especially after the 44-day war and Armenia's losses, the hosts of ArmComedy showed frustration in the same way as their audience:

After the war, their narrative was already going on as if in tune with the people: it was wild, furious, unabashedly negative, and I felt that there was no censorship [self-censorship, she meant] at all. (interviewee Milena, 44, producer).

In another part of the interview, when discussing (mostly negative) public reactions and audience expectations, Sergey contradicts his earlier comments by claiming that he “doesn’t care” about them.

If such cases (negative reactions) had happened 10 years ago, when we were still new to the business, you would have been much more upset. So let's do something like that to make this or that impression go away, okay, but now I don't care. Then I don't care at all about public opinion, the opinions of different groups, those who complain, those who criticise, I don't care at all, and I'm so happy with that feeling of mine. (Interviewee Sergey, 44, host)

And he then added that: “If 100 people have the same opinion, I don't care at all. I do it for people like me.” This is a particularly vital observation from an interview that highlights contradictions and variability. In other words, although Sergey claims indifference to audience judgments in the abstract, he simultaneously describes a context in which political tension, legal risks, and accusations of bias are impossible to ignore, and in which the team adopts a very cautious, self-monitoring editorial stance. The apparent contradiction highlights the multiple, conflicting roles that political satirists inhabit in the polarised media system: on the one hand, they assert creative autonomy; on the other, they are deeply aware of the emotional environment and the pressure to appear balanced. In this sense, Sergey’s “I don’t care” functions less as a literal statement and more as a protective narrative that coexists with editorial practices.

Bridging polarisation, building public relief

The research material, including interviews with ArmComedy hosts and audiences, shows that the drive to unite people, promote inclusion, and pursue a shared positive agenda is stronger, and that one of the goals is to overcome the obstacles posed by a polarised society.

Satire functions as a valuable democratic tool by providing public relief from the pressures of a polarised political situation and serving as a bridge across ideological divides through symbolic levelling and narrative transportation. The Daily Show's prominent host, Jon Stewart, describes his role and his team's work as a “therapeutic endeavour” aimed at relieving public tension and alleviating people's negativity (Jones, 2010, p. 249). I observe similar dynamics in our

conversations with the ArmComedy hosts. Narek explicitly frames their work as a kind of “therapy,” describing humour as a defence mechanism that allows people to “hide some trauma or at least find a way to engage with it”. He suggests that cynicism is “like a litmus test for truth”: if you can laugh at problems, “there’s truth underneath,” and you “end up perceiving problems more lightly.”

That is to say, Narek understands satire as affective work: by transforming fear and frustration into laughter, satire helps audiences mitigate political problems without being emotionally overloaded:

Humour acts like therapy... yeah, in that well-known sense, therapy where you’re either hiding some trauma or at least finding a way to engage with it. Cynicism, becoming cynical, is like a litmus test for truth: if you can laugh at problems, there’s truth underneath. It’s a good defence mechanism; you end up perceiving problems more lightly. (Interviewee Narek, 43, host)

Sergey also points out the important aspect of consuming humour and its relief function:

It’s kind of satisfying, it’s like watching a revenge movie and going through it yourself, processing your own feelings. In tense situations like that, instead of humour, we basically create a sense of emotional justice, some kind of feeling like that. (Interviewee Sergey, 44, host)

Narek characterises cynicism as both “a defence mechanism” and “a litmus test for truth,” suggesting that humour allows audiences to confront political problems without being overwhelmed. For him, the ability to laugh at an issue signals that “there’s truth underneath,” and that satire makes difficult realities more bearable. Sergey extends this idea by describing the viewing experience as akin to watching a revenge film, an emotionally charged sense of “going through it yourself.”

During the interviews, the audience members share a sense of belonging to what they watch and observe, and they are not indifferent. Henri, a 23-year-old student, said it is worthwhile to listen to this kind of healthy, humorous show for about twenty minutes every few days. Another

interviewee also recognises this pattern. She considers it positive how different people, sometimes with opposing opinions to her, like the show and how she feels being part of something inclusive and bigger:

Different people can watch ArmComedy, for example, someone I don't associate myself with at all can watch it and have the same feelings as me, but before I thought that all the people who watch it were just like me. (Interviewee Emmi, 22, student).

Interviews show that the audience is engaged; they are not distant and feel a sense of belonging and being part of a community, as evidenced by their reactions and communication. Mamikon, a 24-year-old student, describes his love and devotion to the show, and even his direct connection to the creators, with the following incident as an example:

We were sitting in a cafe. I was drinking water; the guy was drinking a mojito. I took a photo of the water, then sent it to Narek and Sergey, and said, "See, I'm drinking water so that your Patreon¹ has money left." There have been moments like that. (Interviewee Mamikon, 24, student)

The respondents also admit that the show's success and its impact on people and society are important to them, that, in many cases, they have approached the hosts with suggestions and requests regarding topics and style, and that they would like to meet with the community at the offline meeting. This aligns with Hermes observations, what she calls "taking responsibility": "Cultural citizenship is taking responsibility for (one's piece of) popular culture. We take responsibility for popular culture by judging it" (Hermes, 2005, p. 16).

On the other hand, hosts view audience criticism as a sign of balance, finding the golden mean; if they are accused of being biased and of belonging to different political camps, then they are successful in their role as the president's son-in-law and balanced. The hosts told me they constantly receive negative comments accusing them of being aligned with different political camps. As Sergey explained, after almost every episode, someone writes "You're with Kocharyan," (opposition leader), others insist "No, you're with Serzh," (opposition leader), some claim "This is all Mishik's story," (former president's son-in-law). In contrast, others are sure

¹ Patreon is a financial supporters of the show by the "Patreon" platform.

“You’re working for Civil Contract,” (ruling party), illustrating how viewers project every major faction onto the show in turn. They acknowledge that many politicians are unlikable, unpleasant, and disgusting in real life, but they try to be impartial so that their personal feelings are not communicated to their audience. That approach helps them “round off the corners” of political hostility by using humour as a form of relief or catharsis. The show allows citizens to engage with their political rivals, find common ground, distance themselves, and focus on the content rather than the form. Sergey reflects on the strategy of producing balanced content and representing all political forces, especially in the tense and polarised pre-election situation:

You want to balance it, because it's also public, like you're doing something of importance, you want people, voters, to know more or less equally about all the important players. It's just that, there, some party might get more publicity; there might be more of them, but we're trying to make sure that the other parties appear before the elections anyway, so that people know, okay, this is what it's proposing. (Interviewee Sergey, 44, host)

They strive to criticise without dehumanising, aiming to protect the basic dignity of political actors even as they mock them. As Narek explains, they consciously avoid “mean” humour that fixates on a person’s flaws or humiliation, because they believe satire is only sharp and effective when it is grounded in truth. In this way, hosts try to balance pointed critique with a bridge-building, corner-softening tone that can speak across partisan lines, even if doing so inevitably exposes them to accusations of subjectivity and political bias.

Audience members reflected on the show’s attempts to remain inclusive and to avoid deepening political divides. Emmi, for instance, appreciates the hosts’ efforts not to personalise critique and to maintain a degree of lightness in their approach. As she explains, they “have a hard time getting in people’s faces,” sometimes taking issues “a little lightly,” which she interprets as part of their stylistic lightness. At the same time, she expresses disappointment that the hosts can occasionally become “too soft.” Yet this softness is also what, in her view, enables the programme to bridge polarisation: it creates a kind of neutral space in which different partisan perspectives can coexist. As she puts it, ArmComedy is “one of those unique places where that polarisation somehow comes together.”

Another interviewee, Nina, similarly emphasises the show's perceived neutrality, which comes from the hosts' deliberate ambiguity: "They phrase their words in such a way that you can't imagine what's going on, which side they're on. That's why, in my opinion, they're more neutral." This suggests that the hosts' strategic ambiguity serves as a form of role performance, allowing them to navigate a polarised environment while maintaining broad audience appeal.

Together, these accounts show how viewers interpret the hosts' stylistic choices, lightness, ambiguity, and non-personalised critique as mechanisms that both limit confrontation and create a shared space where political differences can be negotiated.

Knowledge, trust, belonging and cultural citizenship

Although the interviews did not explicitly ask about it, participants consistently noted that political news satire offers an easy, accessible way to follow current events, learn about politicians and political processes, and make sense of the pre-election period. Most interviewees viewed this as the show's strongest contribution. Nearly all interviewees said they watch it primarily to get a summarised, digestible overview of the week's important news and events. They also noted that if something significant happens, or if an important political figure or party participates in the elections, the show probably will cover it, even if it is relatively small or seemingly insignificant. From a media consumption perspective, this type of political news satire seems to affect audience members who are not deeply engaged or highly interested in politics but still want a general level of awareness and are not indifferent to the political processes taking place in the country. From this point of view, political news satire, presented in a summarised, weekly format, is a convenient and appealing format for their media consumption.

In political satire scholarship, this phenomenon is commonly referred to as the gateway hypothesis. Xenos and Becker argue that political satire could generate an indirect but noticeable impact on news consumption (Xenos & Becker, 2009). It proposes that exposure to political content within entertainment media, especially through soft news or political satire, can, in turn, stimulate interest and encourage audiences to seek out additional information from traditional news outlets. Hence, for citizens who are normally passive or inattentive, entertaining media use

can serve as a gateway to the public sphere, political engagement, and possible participation (Baum, 2003; Long, Jeong & Lavis, 2021; Young & Esralew, 2011, p. 101).

I argue that during polarised and fragmented pre-election periods, when political tension, group alignment, and public distrust intensify, people often seek information that feels more neutral, less biased, or at least easier to process. In such contexts, political satire becomes especially appealing as a gateway: it offers a filtered and accessible way for audiences to stay informed, form opinions, and make sense of competing political actors and parties. This dynamic is closely tied to the structure of the Armenian media system. As Izquierdo-Iranzo and Sayadyan note, Armenia exhibits several features of Hallin and Mancini's polarised pluralist model, including a majoritarian political culture, legal pressures on media owners, and high levels of clientelism (Izquierdo-Iranzo & Sayadyan, 2024, p. 5). In such an environment, satire's perceived neutrality and digestibility make it an attractive alternative source of political orientation for audiences navigating a highly charged pre-election landscape.

In media environments like Armenia, often described as “degraded and polarised” and marked by low public trust in traditional news, political news satire takes on an especially important role. Several audience members in my study perceive ArmComedy as impartial and neutral. This perception is reinforced by the fact that the show does not produce its own news content; instead, it relies on established and trusted news outlets, transforming their reporting into satire accompanied by the hosts' commentary. Viewers interpret this practice as a sign of credibility and neutrality, making the programme a more trustworthy and accessible source of political information. Emmi explained her view of trustworthiness and reliability of the show:

I think they are more trustworthy in the media field. They are definitely not a tabloid press, nor are they propaganda for any party. Rather, they really have a position that is definitely anti-government but not specifically pro-opposition, which, I think, is the position of almost all normal media in Armenia. (interviewee Emmi, 22, student)

Narek reflects on satire, explaining their role and the work of the show as a “service” for the public good in a polarised media environment:

The value of the service is probably in the fact that everything is very polarised, and to understand anything, you need to look at the same event from at least several perspectives: how it's presented on TV channels, how it's presented on websites. So we look at all of that on everyone's behalf and present it. (Interviewee Narek, 43, host)

Dahlgren, following Chadwick, explains knowledge as one of the pillars of civic cultures. He suggests understanding of knowledge as a process of “appropriation of information – integrating it in relation to one’s existing frames of reference and thereby making it personally meaningful” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 109).

Satire offers audiences easily digestible political information, making subsequent coverage in “real” news more cognitively accessible and recognisable. Interviewees, however, differ in how they evaluate this function. Those who are less politically engaged or who do not regularly follow the news are satisfied with this lighter, soft-news style and feel that they gain useful knowledge from it. Milena, who follows the news only from ArmComedy, describes it as a “weekly digest”, which allows her to follow politics and get necessary information, without a “heart attack”:

It's a format like a digest, where the most important news of the week is. Now people read things on Telegram channels. Here, you just get some very superficial information, no deep analysis, nothing, just facts that are already digested and presented to you in a way that doesn't give you a heart attack. (interviewee Milena, 44, producer, manager).

Milena's definition of the “heart attack” is what satire and humour are famous for: making people feel comforted and providing content with “softness” without stress, which is important to her. This also shows how a show can bridge polarisation, how it “rounds the corners” when presenting and digesting news in a way that makes it “bearable”. This explanation, in a way, goes against the “echo-chambers” concept (Baumgartner, 2024, p. 253) and shows that satire not only is able to reinforce partisan views but also to diminish echo-chambers and presents unpleasant politics to audiences, making them more tolerant, more inclusive, and helping to strengthen democratic processes.

By contrast, more politically attentive viewers, those who read in-depth and multi-sided news, tend to regard the information provided by the show as superficial and primarily humorous. Their reflections show that satire reinforces existing preconditions: more engaged people are less satisfied with the knowledge they gain, yet they acknowledge its lightness and accessibility and appreciate satire and humour. They even suggest that the issue may lie with their own higher expectations. Meanwhile, those who prefer lighter, more easily digestible information are fully satisfied by satire. The same idea is mentioned by Nina, a 23-year-old student from Yerevan. She recognises the hosts' goal of educating and informing their audience. According to Nina, they do that, but not enough or as expected by her:

They (hosts) might talk about it within the program, for example, that young people should be more interested in politics, that it should matter to them, that things like the pre-election process shouldn't be irrelevant for youth, and so on. They do talk about it, but in my opinion, not as strongly or as thoroughly as they could; they could place much more emphasis on it. (Interviewee Nina, 23, student)

She admits that the program is informative and important, covering the main candidates and teams in the election race, and that it teaches something, but also highlights the “superficial” nature of the political content it provides. Another interviewee, Mamikon, a 24-year-old student studying in Sweden, maintaining ties with Armenia and interested in Armenian life, society issues and politics in general, says that information gained by the satirical show is important if you are not deeply interested in politics and do not follow other news resources:

During the pre-election period, they always bring everyone up; in those phases, they cover almost all figures, and that's actually good. If you're only familiar with one or two people, this way you get to know others as well. They usually approach it from a humorous angle, through their own commentary, but it's deliberately included so their followers don't miss it. (Interviewee Mamikon, 24, student)

Arman, a 24-year-old student in New York, is lightly interested in Armenian politics, explains that comedy helps you to find new information about new politicians campaigning and joining the 2026 parliamentary elections:

I heard about Guren Simonyan (a new, young, relatively unknown political candidate) from them. That got me interested in him—like, how he suddenly “appeared out of nowhere.” Then I went and watched him with Petros (the most well-known interviewer on Armenia’s Public TV and the host of a leading political program). What I mean is, for example, he might appear in a comedy segment for just one minute, but if you’re an interested viewer, you figure out what to look into further. In that sense, it also works as a kind of filtering mechanism. (Interviewee Arman, 24, student)

Information becomes knowledge through education, through examples from history, and through teaching politicians about political history. This aspect of the show was highlighted by other younger audience members as well, when they described why they like the show and how the hosts enlighten them and help them discover political parties during this electoral campaign. Another interviewee likes the way show hosts create their content, using old materials about “new” parties that joined the electoral race:

One of the very good things is that when they quote old things, they insert some old videos into their reportage, which you may not know about at all. For example, they recently formed a “Strong Armenia” alliance, I think with the “United Armenians” party, and in a 2012 video, they showed that they had participated again. There are also such interesting approaches that you may not be aware of something, but they, since they have been in this process for 15-20 years, are fully aware.” (interviewee Henri, 23, student).

However, some audience members also note that the programme offers limited critical analysis, which they see as a shortcoming:

It's just a humorous program, which you don't really report on politics, just, as if you know, what happened this way, what happened that way. Still, you often don't analyse those connections or provide a critical analysis. Most people who watch have their own opinions; they just watch for some entertainment. (interviewee Emmi, 22, student).

What political satire shows is important for the audience. As they easily digest the information gained and put it into their social and political context, it transforms into knowledge, empowering them and making them feel knowledgeable; however, with certain limitations. One of my repatriated informants acknowledged that, at first, when she watched the show about 10 years ago, she didn't like it because she wasn't in the context; she didn't live permanently in

Armenia, but nowadays everything goes well, as she has been living there permanently for years. She explains that satire is highly contextual, especially in political news satire, and that recognition and understanding are deeply rooted in the social and political context. Then she adds that the satire format helps to digest news:

I'm not ready to take current politics, not even Armenian politics, but in general, in any other way, very seriously; I have to digest it somehow. (interviewee Milena, 44, producer, event manager)

To make genuinely informed, knowledge-based decisions, citizens must also understand the power relations that shape these actors' past trajectories and political behaviour. Arman mentions the importance of having one's own understanding of the politicians' paths, in short, to process the information, to be doubtful, develop one's own knowledge and understanding and not fully rely on information from the show. Being doubtful and having one's own opinion can help evaluate politics and politicians and navigate a chaotic, multi-party pre-election environment.

You have to have your own opinion, so that you don't constantly be told something and just follow it. In other words, in the case of a citizen, you should at least have your own opinion and be informed. Whether you watch the news alone or have been watching the news for a while, it's also important to understand the path a politician has taken now. (Interviewee Arman, 24, student)

Dahlgren emphasises that citizens need forms of knowledge that enable civic agency within existing power relations, arguing that “trust with a built-in antenna for scepticism seems prudent” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 114). This “scepticism” is also evident among my interviewees: even when they feel informed, a basic layer of distrust remains, one they see as healthy and necessary for democratic engagement. When discussing shared democratic values and the conditions for meaningful communication, Arman highlights how generational differences shape the ability to interpret and contextualise satire. For him, older generations, especially those who lived through the Soviet period, tend to hold more rigid expectations of political behaviour, whereas younger audiences are more flexible and attuned to contemporary political dynamics. As he explains:

“People who have seen the Soviet Union have more hardened approaches... It seems to me that our generation is more flexible, because the world is very flexible now.” (interviewee Arman, 24, student)

Together, these insights show how sceptical trust and generational context shape audiences' interpretations of political satire and their engagement with political information in a polarised environment.

This sense of being “flexible” also intersects with the forms of trust people hold. In Dahlgren’s terms, thin trust, revisable trust suited to civic life, is essential for sustaining a democratic culture. Arman’s description of his generation’s “flexibility” aligns with this thinner, more adaptive mode of trust. By contrast, he suggests that the older, Soviet-era generation relies more on thick trust: a more rigid and conservative form of trust that is less open to revision (Dahlgren, 2009, pp. 112–113). This contrast highlights how generational experiences shape not only political expectations but also the interpretive frameworks through which audiences engage with satire.

The audience trusts ArmComedy for their approach: not to target politicians or politics, but to maintain distance and be trustworthy. One of the interviewees especially underscores that: “It’s about building trust, knowing that they won’t cheat or manipulate you like that.” (interviewee Emmi, 22, student).

This trust is also an essential precondition for building a community where people trust each other, trust hosts, and feel part of it. One of my interviewees talks about how he likes the politics of the comedy because it doesn’t fight, it’s about politics, but the conflict doesn’t stay, it stays about news and events, in a closed, non-conflict way. It allows the audience to feel like they’re part of a whole, a community, without conflict and political confrontation.

I don’t talk or discuss politics or religion with people. Because I don’t like politics, even though I love it so much, I follow it so much, what I don’t like the most is that it seems like a topic that stirs up conflict. (Interviewee Arman, 24, student)

Understanding the depth of the dual relationship between satire and politics is supported by this observation: if you follow politics, you are a member of the community; you belong to it by following and watching political satire news; you have friends, but what you consume feels safe, non-conflict content. Political belonging and community recognition empower them to feel

engaged and to participate in bonding and bridging, even when they realise that the audience is diverse and not all of them share the same political perspective. They also acknowledge the show's role in helping them make informed decisions and gain knowledge, while recognising and demonstrating its limitations.

Cultural citizenship is inseparable from belonging, community, and questions of identity. Dahlgren argues that identities are “the centrepiece of civic cultures” and that they are built on knowledge and values, reinforced through trust, and enacted in particular spaces and practices (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 119). Audience identities, in this sense, involve how people reflect on who they are and how they make meaning from the popular culture they consume and engage with. Belonging thus becomes a subjective understanding of oneself as a meaningful participant in democratic life and as someone who occupies a place within a wider civic community.

This perspective is central to cultural citizenship because it rejects a one-dimensional, predefined notion of what it means to be a citizen. Instead, it recognises that there are multiple ways of enacting citizenship and contributing to democratic life (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 119). Moreover, cultural citizenship is an ongoing process: it involves continual reflection, everyday meaning-making, and the negotiation of identity. As Hermes puts it, it requires us to ask, “What identities do we forge for ourselves?” (Hermes, 2005, p. 5). In this way, belonging, identity, and civic participation are not fixed attributes but evolving practices shaped through media engagement and lived experience.

Practices are also a major pillar of civic cultures and are important for civic engagement, especially when they are not abstract but rather embedded in people's daily lives, helping them connect with and join the community (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 117). I follow Dahlgren's definition of community as “a minimal sense of commonality among citizens in heterogeneous late modern societies” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 121). Being part of a community shaped through media influence is central to how audiences experience popular culture. This is precisely where the power of a satirical political news show lies. It helps constitute a sense of shared belonging and collective identity, making the programme meaningful not only as entertainment but as a cultural space that audiences inhabit together.

Hermes explains that popular culture is inclusive in that sense; it extends the invitation to belong, to be part of “we-ness” (Hermes, 2005, p. 11). According to Emmi, satirical shows help her to build her sense of belonging to the ArmComedy community and “smart humour” supports the idea of becoming part of that special group:

The ArmComedy was so interesting for me to watch because it seemed like, as a teenager, I understood what was going on, I was aware of everything, and I felt a little more special that I could understand such clever humour. I also felt part of a group, hearing that I was among those who understood that humour. (Interviewee Emmi, 22, student)

According to Emmi, the uniqueness of the show is that you have to follow them closely, be part of the community, to understand the humour, the “mood,” which also conveys a unique sense of “kinship”:

It's not the strongest humour, but when you get into that mood or that habit, hearing the news that way, or you've already thought about it, even guessing what they're going to say about it, and laughing at it, I don't know, it's a kind of kinship. (Interviewee Emmi, 22, student)

Emmi’s reflections illustrate how cultural citizenship can empower audiences in their identity-building processes (Doona, 2020), particularly when a shared “mood” fosters a sense of kinship. Most interviewees initially imagine the show’s audience as people similar to themselves in age, class, and interests. Emmi notes that she once held this assumption as well, but later realised that the programme attracts a far more diverse audience.

Different people can watch ArmComedy, let's say, someone I don't associate myself with at all, can watch it and have the same feelings as me, but before I thought that all the people who watch it were just like me. (Interviewee Emmi, 22, student)

A similar pattern emerges when other interviewees describe who they imagine the show’s followers to be. One millennial informant, for instance, initially assumes that the audience consists of people “like her,” remarking that it is “especially the millennials” who watch the programme (interviewee Milena, 44, producer). This tendency, shared by both Millennial and

Gen Z participants, to picture the audience as composed of people from their own social circles, generations, and cultural taste communities, reveals how viewers position themselves within a broader imagined group. They assume that those who share their humour, interests, and values must also be the show's audience. Such imagined communities are crucial for understanding how belonging and identity are mapped. By recognising familiar patterns in others and situating themselves within the same symbolic circle, interviewees articulate a sense of collective identity that is shaped not only by media consumption but also by generational experience and shared cultural preferences.

Doona discusses certain limits of political comedy in its recognition of democratic values as both rights and responsibilities (Doona, 2020, p. 543). Recognising and respecting others who do not share the same political preferences, and who may differ in many other ways, yet still accepting them as part of the same community, is a significant achievement of political news satire. It demonstrates how such programmes can help cultivate an inclusive, democratic sense of belonging by bringing diverse viewers into a shared cultural space. It is the power of belonging provided by a political news satire show. The sense of community is vital for the audience to function democratically (Doona, 2020, p. 536). The interviewees recognise their belonging to the community by sharing certain democratic values, but they do not overstate the show's role or importance for its audience.

Conclusion

This thesis argues that ArmComedy, as Armenia's best-known and most politically satirical news show, serves as a site of civic cultures and cultural citizenship within the Armenian media environment, which is characterised as polarised. The thesis investigates how show hosts and the audience use satire to build a sense of belonging, gain civic and political knowledge, and realise their civic agency in the context of the 2026 parliamentary elections. The research concludes that ArmComedy neither systematically recreate negative cynicism nor directly achieves the optimistic “gateway” hypothesis. Rather, it functions as a hybrid communicative public space in which watchdog journalism, therapeutic emotional management and community-building are continually negotiated in an environment shaped by post-war trauma, partisan media, and democratic fragility.

Bringing into dialogue Dahlgren's civic cultures and Hermes's cultural citizenship, enriched with Doona's work on political comedy engagement, the thesis illustrates that the case of ArmComedy is most effectively conceptualised as not a simple provider of information or entertainment, but as a cultural institution where political meanings are co-constructed by hosts and audiences. With the help of political news satire shows, civic dispositions are nourished in non-partisan, inclusive and sometimes paradoxical ways. The thesis offers a theoretically informed, empirically grounded account of what political news satire can do in developing, hybrid-regime democracies such as Armenia, and how it supports modest and meaningful forms of civic agency that navigate structural limitations created by polarisation and fragile institutions.

Findings

RQ1: How do ArmComedy's hosts negotiate satirist roles?

The first main discovery is how ArmComedy's hosts balance the roles of satirists, journalists, civic actors, and entertainers in a post-war era. The hosts highlight the essential role of the "watchdog" identity: they act as guardians by uncovering hypocrisy, exposing corruption, blaming poor governance, and proposing restraining mechanisms for those in power, particularly the government, as a major stakeholder in political change. They do so by making their shortcomings and failures public and "shaming" them into more accountable behaviour. This reflects the way satire scholarship describes the power and influence of late-night satirists in developed democracies as a fourth-estate function associated with traditional journalism, known to satire and satirists alike. Satirists have taken on a new cultural role: they act as influential commentators who use emotionally engaging humour to help audiences interpret political issues and stay connected to public life.

In parallel with these broader developments, the hosts consistently emphasise that their primary aim is to be funny and to offer viewers a sense of softness and lightness. They describe the programme as a joyful, easy-to-digest alternative to traditional news formats, effectively transforming a polarised and antagonistic political news media into a weekly "digest" that feels accessible and appealing. At the same time, they acknowledge that some topics, especially during election periods, are "too important not to cover," which underscores the show's hybrid character as both entertainment and a form of opinion journalism.

This hybridity is marked by an ongoing internal tension. The hosts aim to balance humour with substantive political engagement: they maintain what they describe as a healthy distribution of criticism, roughly “70% government, 30% opposition”, while deliberately avoiding “mean humour” that humiliates or dehumanises political actors. Alongside entertaining their audience, they also stress the importance of providing reliable, fact-checked information when political relevance demands it. Their work extends beyond simply “being funny”; it reflects a more substantial approach to political news satire that blends comedic form with civic-oriented content.

The research on the post-war emotional state of the hosts and their audience adds an important layer to the analysis. Sergey underlines the moment of being “very emotional,” aligned with their 'audience's emotions after the 2020 war and national losses, temporarily annulling concerns about objectivity and neutrality by focusing almost entirely on government and ruling party failures. This highlight stresses how patriotism affects, and how public and personal traumatic experiences push satirists toward one-sided critique, even though they realise their weak position and the betrayal of journalistic values. This simultaneously helped them realise the importance of their position and balance their future course into more multi-directional satire. This evolution of the affective turn, patriotic self-censorship, and, as a result, self-correction is mostly absent from existing satire scholarship, which generally examines challenges for satirists and their shows from the perspective of political economy, market logic, or platform nuances rather than post-conflict trauma and self-censorship.

To conclude, the thesis highlights the paradox in the hosts' discussion of public expectations. In one respect, they assure creative autonomy: “I don’t care about public opinion; I do it for people like me”, Sergey says. However, in the same interview, he and his colleague reiterate the importance of double-checking, considering legal risks, and adopting a format and tone of language in nervous and tense times to channel public frustration rather than make fun of it or be humorous. This shows that the “not caring” proclamation is rather a protective narrative of theirs, coexisting with an acute awareness of audience tastes and partisan pressures, highlighting the multifaceted roles of satirists in Armenia's polarised hybrid media environment.

RQ2: How does ArmComedy contribute to audiences' political knowledge, sense of belonging, and cultural citizenship?

The thesis argues that ArmComedy functions as a gateway to political knowledge and a soft mode of political engagement. This role is particularly significant for younger viewers and those less inclined to follow traditional news. At the same time, the analysis acknowledges the show's limits in depth and critical scrutiny, thereby reaffirming established insights in satire scholarship.

Interviews with audience members consequently describe the show as a twice-a-week digest of the most booming, widely discussed events. It portrays the show's satire as a convenient way to maintain general awareness of politics without being overwhelmed by the negativity and complexity of traditional news coverage.

Interviewees emphasise that ArmComedy helps them navigate the principal actors (parties, alliances, new politicians), learn political history through episodes featuring archival clips, and gain basic knowledge. They feel it is necessary to be aware of political processes, follow the election campaign, and form an opinion about the candidates. The data show that, especially among the Gen Z interviewees in this study, ArmComedy is the primary or sole regular source of information on Armenian politics. For millennials, meanwhile, it functions as a filter that “prevents the heart attack” by depicting politics in a bearable way. This enriches the “gateway hypothesis” literature, which argues that the distribution of political content in “soft news” formats can activate interest and motivate further information search. This works especially among an otherwise inattentive, neutral audience.

Nevertheless, the interview data qualify this narrative by showing that several interviewees recognise the knowledge obtained as superficial and that relying solely on the show could not be enough to remain informed. Notably, the thesis demonstrates how this gateway function is shaped by the Armenian media environment and in a media environment characterised as “degraded and polarised”, ArmComedy is perceived by the audience as more neutral and

trustworthy than the rest of the other news outlets, especially when they do fact-check and provide a satirical filter.

Some interviewees emphasise that the show does not operate as propaganda for any partisan camp; on the contrary, some even describe it as “definitely anti-government,” which they interpret as a credible and appropriate stance for what they consider “normal media” in the Armenian context. This reveals a distinctive dynamic: in tense political moments and developing democracies, satire can be perceived as relatively neutral even when it directs more criticism toward one side. In such environments, its gateway function becomes especially visible, offering audiences a form of political orientation that feels independent, trustworthy, and not aligned with entrenched partisan interests.

Bridging polarisation

Another key finding concerns ArmComedy's role in managing emotional outcomes of war, defeat and societal distrust. The show's service to bridge polarisation is invaluable. Hosts and audiences alike describe the show as a form of “therapy,” a channel for transforming anger and frustration into laughter and a sense of emotional justice.

The producers' reflections reveal how they understand cynicism and emotional processing as integral to the satirical mode. Together, these insights show how satire provides audiences with a mediated space for emotional coping and truth-seeking: it transforms frustration into shared humour, and cynicism into a manageable, even empowering, interpretive stance.

Audience, similarly, recognises this affective function. Interviewees observe that, after the war, the show mirrors public anger and gives people the feeling that “they are like us”. In parallel, audience members value satire for “rounding off the corners” of political tensions, filtering out the “crap” of the pre-election time and making politics “more bearable”. For some interviewees, the “how” allows them to avoid political confrontations. From the perspective of satire research,

this finding supplements existing debates on whether satire deepens echo chambers or fosters democratic inclusiveness.

The audience data suggest that for some interviewees, satire serves as a symbolic leveller, reducing polarisation and creating emotionally safe spaces where politics is bearable. Audiences still disagree about the show's content, tone, emphases, and topic choices. Yet these moments reveal a modest but meaningful contribution to tolerance and inclusiveness. In a post-war, traumatised society, even limited forms of shared humour and co-presence can create small pockets of civic openness where disagreement does not preclude coexistence. Political satire, in this sense, offers a fragile but valuable space in which people with different views can recognise one another as part of the same community.

Limitations

The thesis acknowledges its methodological and analytical limitations, which should be noted when discussing its contributions.

First of all, it is a single case study, focused on one show in a particular national context, relying on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with two hosts and eleven audience members (5 millennials, 6 Gen Z) within a specific timeframe and small scope. Second, the sample is self-selected, recruited via snowballing and an open Facebook call. Yes, saturation was reached after eight or nine interviews, but the perspective was still limited by the network of enthusiasts and even by the fandom of the show's financial supporters. Moreover, translation is always a linguistic and semiotic barrier, with the context, tone, and flavour of language conveying meaning, especially given linguistic nuances.

Contributions

First of all, there is almost no systematic work on political news satire in Armenia or the South Caucasus, and very little on hybrid regimes and post-war trauma. Hence, the thesis's uniqueness contributes to satire scholarship by showing how ArmComedy operates as a public space for civic cultures and cultural citizenship in a polarised, post-war hybrid regime, using an unusually

rich, paired focus on producers and audiences. It shifts satire research from consolidated Western democracies to a small post-Soviet hybrid regime, Armenia, marked by war trauma, polarisation, and low institutional trust. The thesis also shows how satire's ambivalence plays out under conditions of post-conflict trauma and affective polarisation, including self-censorship framed not only as political constraint but also as patriotic, emotionally protective self-censorship.

The thesis shows how political satire adapts to changes, challenges, and opportunities in a specific media context and political climate. In this media environment, ArmComedy transformed from television to a YouTube show, highlighting not an easy distribution choice but a meaningful step toward overcoming the limitations of broadcasting and reaching a younger audience that ignores or distrusts traditional news sources. This contextualisation opens space for future comparative analyses of how satire operates across regime types and media systems.

From the theoretical point of view, the thesis contributes to the field beyond the familiar “inform vs entertain” dichotomy and the binary “cynicism vs kynicism” debate. It demonstrates that satire can provide limited political knowledge while still fostering democratic attitudes, establishing trusted communicative spaces, and cultivating identities. And all of this, even when audiences explicitly engage with the show as a means of avoiding conflict and emotional overload. Another notable contribution is the deliberate pairing of producer and audience interviews, treating meaning-making as a dialogic process rather than a one-sided game. Satire studies tend to focus either on textual analysis or on audience effects. Research attempts to combine these two approaches are unique. Hence, the study contributes by illuminating both convergences and tensions.

For future research, it will be interesting to compare satirical programs in comparable countries. How their shows and hosts navigate polarisation, post-war trauma, and democratic backsliding. Understand when these types of satire shows become watchdogs, or when they act as emotional repair mechanisms? Another prospect that will interest me is content analysis of the episodes, with special timing such as pre-war and post-war, to trace how tones, targets, and critiques change over time and how self-censorship works. In short, to say how editorial regimes and

satirists' roles change in an affective environment. How these changes shape ideas of traditional and opinion journalism, objectivity and emotional engagement.

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Appendices

This section provides additional materials used and referenced throughout the thesis. It includes details on recruitment and the consent form, participants' details, the interview guide, and a codebook example.

Appendix 1: Guides for interviews

Host's questions:

Tell me about your background and career path, and describe your current role and work routine.

What is your understanding of humour, satire, and political news satire?

Who is your role model, why humour, why this way, style, and intent?

How and why did you start the project?

What are your primary goals? experience in TV and YouTube?

Who is your average viewer?

For whom do you make the show?

What's your view of today's political situation?

How will you describe Armenia's media and political environment?

Is there anything else you would like to say about ArmComedy that we have not already talked about? Something I might have missed?

Audience questions:

Tell me about yourself: education, age, career, news diet (if so)?

How would you describe ArmComedy to someone who has never seen it?

How did you start watching ArmComedy?

Can you think of a moment when ArmComedy helped you understand politics, such as an event or a politician?

When you watch ArmComedy during this pre-election period, do you feel informed and knowledgeable enough to form an opinion?

Describe the Armenian media landscape, where you get information, read news, and how you position ArmComedy?

Who do you imagine the typical viewer of ArmComedy to be?

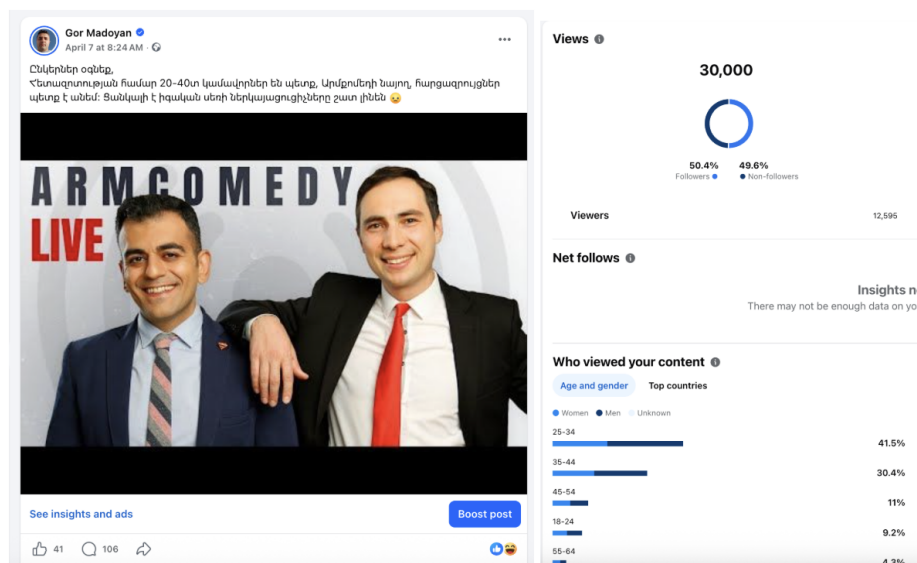
Have you ever discussed the show with anyone, maybe an episode with someone with a different political view?

Is there anything ArmComedy avoids, skips, or gets wrong, politically or socially, that you wish it would address?

Is there anything else you would like to say about ArmComedy that we have not already talked about? Something I might have missed?

Appendix 2: Open call

The post shown below from my public Facebook page. I also included stats of post viewers. About 100+ people reacted, the post reached 30.000 people, mainly Gen Z and Millennials, and I chose some of them to participate.



Appendix 3: Consent form



Consent to participate in a Master's Thesis at the Faculty of Social Sciences

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this Master's Thesis student project on the topic of Armenian political satire, “ArmComedy and Civic Culture in Armenia”, which takes place from January 2026 to June 2026. This consent form is to help you better understand the study and your rights as a participant. Information obtained through this research will be tentatively used in the write-up of the compilation of the Master's Thesis in Communication and Media Studies. The research will be conducted by Gor Madoyan from the Department of Communication at Lund University, Sweden.

Your Participation:

1. **What is the purpose of the study?** The study examines how political news satire functions as a democratic actor in a non-Western, post-conflict context, using ArmComedy, an Armenian satirical show, as a case study. While existing research on political satire is largely focused on consolidated liberal democracies such as the United States and Western Europe, this study shifts its focus to Armenia, a developing democracy with a polarised media environment and low levels of institutional trust. By combining interviews with the show's hosts and audience members, the study explores how satire serves as a watchdog, a source of political knowledge, and a space for civic identity and community building, ultimately arguing that its democratic role goes beyond

entertainment and warrants more serious scholarly attention.

2. **Request for participation:** You have been asked to participate in this study due to your engagement and experience with the ArmComedy political news satire show and your age criteria, based on research methodology.
3. **How many people will participate?** 2 hosts of the show and 11 audience members will take part in this study.
4. **How long will it take to participate in this study?** If you agree to participate, your involvement will last for 30 to 90 minutes.
5. **What will happen during the study?** During this research study, the researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews. The interview questions relate to your engagement with and experience of the ArmComedy show. The researcher has a set of questions to help you relate your perspective. During the interview, additional clarifying questions may be asked. Throughout the interview, you can refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the research process at any time. Participation is not mandatory, and you may justify your withdrawal if you choose to. The interview will be conducted in English via WhatsApp, and the audio will be recorded on the interviewer's smartphone.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

All of your information and data will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will be able to access any identifying information associated with you. Your name and other identifying information will not be associated with any part of the research. However, your background information, such as your nationality, age, gender, education and profession, will be used in the research's appendix as a detailed book. All your responses will be anonymised; your name will be removed and replaced with a code name. The final thesis will be published with open access.

The consent form is not a contract. It explains what the study does and what your participation entails. By signing, you indicate that this research study has been explained to you and that you voluntarily agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

You have the right to receive information about the personal data we process about you. You also have the right to have inaccurate personal data about you corrected. If you have a complaint about how we process your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer at dataskyddsbud@lu.se. You also have the right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory

authority (the Data Protection Authority, IMY) if you believe that we are processing your personal data

Incorrectly.

I agree to participate in the “ArmComedy and Civic Culture in Armenia” research study.

Location	Signature
Date	Name clarification

Appendix 4: Hosts and interviewees' details.

The table contains the hosts' and participants' data. Their names are encrypted. Their age, profession, and method of recruitment are also listed.

1	Code	Age	Gender	Nationality	Occupation	Education	Location	Date	Mode	Duration	Sampling
2	Narek (host)	43	M	Armenian	Show host, satirist	PhD in linguistics	Armenia	16.03.2026	WhatsApp	01' 02" 37"	Direct, volunteer
3	Sergey (host)	44	M	Armenian	Show host, comedian, satirist	Brusov State University, linguistics	Armenia	18.03.2026	WhatsApp	56' 51"	Direct, volunteer
4	Mamikon	24	M	Armenian	MA Student	Biology and IT	Sweden	25.03.2026	WhatsApp	48' 07"	Snowball
5	Arman	24	M	Armenian	MA student	IT and architecture	USA	28.03.2026	WhatsApp	59' 53"	Snowball
6	Henri	23	M	Armenian	BA student	Politics and Governance	Armenia	08.04.2026	WhatsApp	32' 36"	open call, volunteer
7	Emmi	22	F	Armenian	MA student	Media and Communication	Sweden	07.04.2026	WhatsApp	42' 58"	Snowball
8	Nina	23	F	Armenian	MA student	Sociology	Armenia	09.04.26	WhatsApp	29' 32"	open call, volunteer
9	Emin	36	M	Armenian	Businessman	PhD in law	Armenia	08.04.2026	WhatsApp	31' 27"	open call, volunteer
10	Mika	35	M	Armenian	MA student	Strategic Communication	Armenia	28.03.2026	WhatsApp	45' 33"	Snowball
11	Alex	40	M	Armenian	Businessman	BA in Architecture	Armenia	08.04.2026	WhatsApp	23' 27"	open call, volunteer
12	Tea	28	F	Armenian	Project manager	MA in political science	Armenia	08.04.2026	WhatsApp	21' 34"	open call, volunteer
13	Nea	32	F	Armenian	Teacher	MA in linguistics	China	10.04.2026	WhatsApp	27' 17"	open call, volunteer
14	Milena	43	F	Armenian	Producer, event manager	Master of Business Administration	Armenia	07.04.2026	WhatsApp	34' 39"	open call, volunteer

Appendix 5: Codebook

	A	B	C	D
1	Themes	Codes' Name	Description	Example (data fragment)
2	Hosts' roles and identities	Watchdog role	Hosts depict themselves as exposing shortcomings and restraining power.	"Wherever there is something bad, by exposing it you make its repetition more difficult."
3	Hosts' roles and identities	Entertainment first	Humour and enjoyment framed as the primary goal.	Choosing "the funny" over "the important" unless an issue is impossible to ignore.
4	Hosts' roles and identities	Balancing criticism	Trying to keep a healthy dose of criticism across government and opposition.	About 70% of criticism directed at authorities, 30% at opposition.
5	Audience knowledge and engagement	Satire as news digest	Show used as a weekly summary of key political events.	Viewers rely on ArmComedy to catch the week's most important news.
6	Audience knowledge and engagement	Superficial knowledge	Awareness that knowledge from satire alone is limited.	Enough to follow politics, but not enough to vote based only on the show.
7	Belonging and cultural citizenship	Felling part of community	Sense of belonging to a community of viewers.	Different people watch ArmComedy and feel the same about it; feeling part of something bigger.
8	Affect, war and relief	Satire as therapy	Humour described as emotional relief and coping mechanism.	Humour acts like therapy, a defence mechanism to engage with trauma.
9	Media system and trust	Hybrid regime media context	Armenian media described as polarised, clientelist, and hybrid.	Media and political polarisation reinforcing each other in a hybrid regime.
10	Media system and trust	ArmComedy is trustworthy	Show seen as more trustworthy than many mainstream outlets.	Perceived as neither tabloid nor propaganda for any party.
11	Polarisation and democracy	Bridging polarisation	Satire partially softens or bridges divides between camps.	People from different political sides can laugh at the same content.
12	Polarisation and democracy	Symbolic levelling	Satire levels hierarchies between elites and citizens.	Turning powerful politicians into figures that ordinary viewers can laugh at.