

More informed citizens have a more positive perception of politicians

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Consumption of political information is linked to more moderate and positive opinions about the sector, according to a study by the University of Navarra. The results show that scientists are the most trusted profession, and politicians are the least.

"The more they read, listen and see political information, the less negative and more balanced the citizen's views of politics and politicians" Jordi Rodríguez Virgili, political communication lecturer at the University of Navarra (UNAV) explained to SINC. This is the conclusion of the study published in the journal *Comunicación y Sociedad* by the researchers Esteban López-Escobar and Antonio Tolsá.

The authors crossed media intake data with perceptions of politics and politicians. They carried out 950 personal interviews in Navarra in the homes of registered citizens that have the right to vote.

Before the interview, the researchers held several discussion groups to collect usual statements regarding politics and politicians. In the questionnaire they asked the level of agreement or disagreement with these statements. People who consumed less political information at the time of the interview were those who agreed more with the judgements along the lines of "all politicians are corrupt" or "all politicians are liars".

The authors also analysed data from the Barometers of the Sociological Research Centre (CIS) from May 1985 to January 2011 to conclude that Spaniards perceive politicians to be part of the problem and not part of

the solution. "This phenomenon is not new, nor is it exclusive to Spain. It is global, but in recent years it has heightened" Rodríguez Virgili states.

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Negative perception of politicians is shown in that 66.7% state that politicians are not concerned by what the public think. Furthermore, 87.2% believe that politicians are more interested in what the party says rather than what the public say, and 70% of the interviewees would not like their children to work in politics. The results show that the majority link politicians with lies and their equivalent, and secondly with putting their own interests first, and thirdly, with corruption.

In the study, 62% of the participants said they referred to national politicians, 17% referred to those of their autonomous region and 15.4% their local council. Around 6% stated that they were referring to international politicians.

The least valued as a professional group

What also caught the experts' attention is the "vicious circle" regarding the assessment of different professions. Researchers asked the interviewees to rate on a scale from one to ten, the level of trust they had for twelve different professional groups, including teachers, doctors, judges, soldiers, civil servants, members of religious orders, politicians and journalists.

Of those, the least valued were politicians, and the most trusted were scientists. Journalists were around mid-table, with a score of 5.5.

"If the public have a negative perception of the two basic pillars of democracy, politicians and the media, this can reduce the quality of democracy in the country", the expert points out.

This article is part of a wider study on the perception of [politicians](#) and politics away from the current general crisis situation. Participants were chosen according to the 'sex', 'age' and 'location' variables. Eighteen interviewers carried out the surveys, with an average duration of 16 minutes, over 16 days, between 28 May and 12 June 2009. The level of trust is 95%.

More information: Jordi Rodríguez-Virgili, Esteban López-Escobar, Antonio Tolsá, "Media use and public perception of politicians, politic and political parties". *Comunicación y Sociedad XXIV* (2): 7-39, 2011.

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