

Societal Perceptions of the Conflict in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh

Hrant Mikaelian



© 2017 Caucasus Institute, Yerevan

Policy Paper

www.c-i.am



Caucasus Institute Policy Paper

Yerevan, December 2017

Author: **Hrant Mikaelian**, Research Fellow at the Caucasus Institute

Editors: **Nina Iskandaryan, Liana Avetisyan**

This policy paper is part of a project on *Engaging society and decision-makers in dialogue for peace over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict* implemented by the Caucasus Institute with support from the UK Government’s Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. The project is aimed at reducing internal vulnerabilities created by unresolved conflicts and inter-ethnic tension, and increasing the space for constructive dialogue on conflict resolution, creating capacities and incentives for stakeholders in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh for resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, reconciliation and peace-building.

Opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and may not reflect the views of the Caucasus Institute or any other organization, including project sponsors and organizations with which the authors are affiliated. All personal and geographical names used in this volume are spelled the way they were spelled by the authors.

SOCIETAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONFLICT IN ARMENIA AND NAGORNO-KARABAKH

War or Peace? Public Opinion and Expectations.....	4
Residents of border regions are prone to believe that the war still goes on	4
Growing scepticism toward a peaceful settlement.....	7
Readiness for the war and militarization of society.....	11
War and Migration	15
Interethnic Relations: Basis for Long-term Peace?	18
Quantitative data on Armenian-Azerbaijani interethnic attitudes	18
Mistrust is a key negative factor affecting Armenian attitudes towards Azerbaijanis.....	19
Diverging attitudes toward Azerbaijanis	21
Public opinion distinguishes Azerbaijanis and Azerbaijan’s authorities	22
Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Scenarios, Status and Territorial Dispute	24
The Status of Nagorno-Karabakh	24
The Status of the “territories”	26
Readiness to adopt a compromise plan.....	32
Summary	34
Appendix. List of experts	36

Since the 1994 ceasefire, there has been little progress in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Despite political efforts and active civil-society peace building, the conflict began escalating again since March 2008, culminating in the April 2016 four-day outbreak of hostilities that claimed hundreds of lives on both sides. As part of the same trend, joint peace building and trust building activities of Armenian and Azerbaijani civil societies gradually became impossible. The confrontation has been escalating within the societies, in media discourses and political campaigns. Non-compromising attitudes have become mainstream in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. These attitudes jeopardize the prospects of peaceful resolution. As long as negotiations are at a standstill, the mutual isolation of societies and the mistrust between them will continue growing. Hence, there is the need to constantly work with the societies to mitigate radical approaches, raise awareness of the need for peace and build capacity for compromise.

Existing data reflects negative trends at the level of society and decision-making in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. In 2016, 95.3% of Nagorno-Karabakh residents were against any territorial concessions in exchange for peace.¹ The level of concern over the unresolved status of the conflict is low in Armenia: in 2013, only 2.4% of Armenia's residents considered Nagorno-Karabakh issue a main problem of the country,² and in 2015, after a series of escalations, the number increased to just 6%.³ On a political level, peace is no longer even on the table. The main content of the negotiations within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group was reduced to the prevention of violence.

This policy paper is part of a project on *Engaging society and decision-makers in dialogue for peace over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict* implemented by the Caucasus Institute with support from the UK Government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. The project is aimed at reducing internal vulnerabilities created by unresolved conflicts and inter-ethnic tension, and increasing the space for constructive dialogue on conflict resolution, creating capacities and incentives for stakeholders in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh for resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, reconciliation and peace-building.

One of the goals of this project was to ***consolidate data on attitudes, perceptions and visions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its resolution prospects***

¹ Opinion polls in Nagorno-Karabakh: Comparative results from 2015 and 2016, November 2016. Institute for Political and Sociological Consulting (IPSC), 2016. <http://ipsc.am/en-nagorno-karabakh-comparative-opinion-polls-2015-2016/>

² Government Success Index #2, 2013. IPSC. <http://ipsc.am/en-government-success-index-june-2013/>

³ Caucasus Barometer-2015. Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), 2016. <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2015am/codebook/>

among the civil society, expert community and general population of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. This required collecting new qualitative and quantitative data as well as consolidating pre-existing data. Prior to this project, public opinion on conflict resolution options was last polled in Armenia in 2004 by ACNIS, in 2011 by CRRC. There was the clear need for a new opinion poll as well as qualitative research. All in all, the study included the following components:

- Five questions included in a national representative opinion poll of 1600 respondents in Armenia conducted by IPSC in summer 2017 (referred to below as 2017 IPSC/CI poll),
- 6 focus groups with local residents, mainly youth, including 4 in Nagorno-Karabakh and 2 in Armenia,
- 16 interviews with experts, including 6 in Nagorno-Karabakh and 10 in Yerevan,
- 10 interviews with women in Nagorno-Karabakh,
- 2 closed meetings with leading journalists and chief editors in Yerevan and Stepanakert,
- study trips to Nagorno-Karabakh and regions of Armenia bordering on Azerbaijan.

The publication of this policy paper pursues the following aims:

- to draw the attention of the media, civil society, the scholarly community, political party representatives and decision makers in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh to current trends in perceptions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its resolution options and raise their awareness of it to transform their attitude to the conflict.
- to involve the societies, civil society and expert community of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh in dialogue on peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict
- to create tools for sustaining this dialogue in the future.

War or Peace? Public Opinion and Expectations

Residents of border regions are prone to believe that the war still goes on

For over two decades, the “no peace, no war” situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has made people feel insecure about the present as well as the future. The goal of this study has been to assess how people in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh perceive the chances for peace and the need for peace. The study aims to gauge the public’s attitude toward the status quo, to understand whether people view the status quo as peace, and how (if at all) they imagine life after a final peaceful solution (e.g. a peace treaty).

One of the results of the study has been that perceptions vary depending on proximity to the border. In regions of Armenia and Karabakh located near the line of contact with Azerbaijan, many people view the status quo as a state of war and have difficulty imagining what peace could look like:

We do not know what peace is. I think it is when our sons go to military positions in the morning and come back home alive and healthy in the evening.

Female, 45, Drmbon village, Nagorno-Karabakh

Respondents’ age is also a factor. Just like Drmbon in Nagorno-Karabakh, the town of Berd in the Tavush province of Armenia is situated close to the line where the troops stand face-to-face and skirmishes regularly occur. Participants of a mixed-gender focus group of young people in Berd characterized the current situation as “war” and said that they expected escalations to happen any time.

This is not peace; every day a soldier loses his life to maintain this situation. <...> When the Ministry of Defence of Armenia speaks about “adequate response” to incidents, this does not console a mother of a soldier.

Male, 30, Berd town, Tavush province, Armenia

After each escalation, we phone our male relatives serving at military outposts. They always say that everything is alright, and only when they return home do they tell us about the horrible things that really happened.

Female, 28, Berd town, Tavush province, Armenia

The war still goes on. Several months ago, they shot at my roof, there is a bullet hole. <...> Part of our land is in the hands of the Azerbaijanis. We have held on to the highlands but the lowlands remained under their control after the war, and now I don’t have a land plot.

Male, 60, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

Compared to Nagorno-Karabakh, very little investment was made in the last decades into Armenia's Tavush province. Residents consider their socioeconomic situation to be below Soviet level, and are rather pessimistic.

There are not enough jobs in the village, it is dying, people are leaving. <...> We were suffocated by taxes, and then the former prime-minister visited our village and promised to abolish them. He kept his promise and now it is a little bit easier. <...> A person living here [in the border region] should be the centre of [the government's] attention. They must appreciate that we stay here. There are no factories any more. In the Soviet times there were 36 factories in the region.

Male, 60, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

In Nagorno-Karabakh, opinions were diverse. The most common point of view was that current state of affairs is "not war", although since the April 2016 outbreak people have felt more at risk. For instance, a resident of Shushi emphasized during the interview that:

Contemporary youth did not see the war. One cannot expect an explosion every day, he calms down. Youngsters want to leave; there is no job, no job market, nothing to do. It is difficult to do business.

Female, 55, Shushi town, Nagorno-Karabakh

In Stepanakert, public attitudes toward the current situation were generally positive. One of the experts said,

We now live normal peaceful lives.

Expert interview, July 2017

We try to live and be happy in spite of the war. We often forget about the war but reality brings us down to earth. We strive for happiness and try to do our jobs as well as possible.

Female, 30, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

I am satisfied with my everyday life and try to make each day meaningful. <...> This is a very good place to live. The only problem is that people are not able to get on more stable financial ground.

Female, 32, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

We have never lived so well. You must have seen our clean busy streets. The youth here feel determined, we have jobs, and all children go to school. The only thing left is to see our children play outside without fear of being hit by a projectile.

Female, 48, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

Difference in perceptions of reality between residents in Armenia and in Nagorno-Karabakh is a phenomenon well known to social scientists in Armenia. According to one of the experts, it includes perception of living standards:

Poverty is an interesting phenomenon. In Armenia the majority of those who are just above the poverty line consider themselves poor, here [in Nagorno-Karabakh], in contrast, most of the poor do not see themselves as such.

Expert interview, July 2017

Respondents' opinions varied concerning the current situation and the impact that constant violent outbreaks are having on their daily life. For example, there was strong contrast between the views of people in Karabakh in areas affected by shelling, and those in the Tavush province of Armenia that borders on Azerbaijan and parts of which are also shelled. In the town of Berd, which is not affected by the shelling, and in the neighbouring village of Movses, which is, most people said that they and their children are always under stress because of regular bombardment.

Life is unbearable, they shoot at us all the time, we can hear machine guns and missiles. The worst thing is that they shoot mainly at the church and the school, you can see the traces. Children live in fear but life goes on: they continue to play in the street and in the field next to school, which is within reach of the shelling.

Female, 36, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

Recently a bullet rebounded off the wall of the school, then from under the feet of my son, he miraculously escaped injury.

Female, 40, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

This shelling is awful. Once we hear the cracks of a machine gun one after another, we prepare for the worst. And there is almost nowhere to hide. A few days ago they shot but missed, we only heard the sounds. Once, my roof was destroyed, I barely survived.

Female, 80, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

8 out of 10 conscripts from border villages suffered from nerve diseases: they were born and grew up in basements. It causes depression and creates problems that affect the rest of life.

Female, 30, Berd town, Tavush province, Armenia

However, some respondents in Movses said that shelling didn't happen often and their impact on everyday life in the village was exaggerated.

It is not true that our children are nervous because of the shelling. Following renovation, you can't hear the shots in our kindergarten. If the children are outside and hear shots, they come inside. An additional wall is being built in front of the kindergarten to protect it from the projectiles. Our children are fine, they are happy and well nourished. The Armenian Fund provides the kindergarten with food, furniture and everything we need.

Female, 40, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

Local residents like to complain about frequent shelling that makes life unbearable. In reality, the last time that shots hit the village was almost a year ago, last September [2016]. To fight the external enemy, we must overcome ourselves first: I teach children not to litter the playing field and we clean the streets together.

Male, 38, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

During a focus group discussion in the town of Berd, one of the participants expressed an opinion that reflected the behaviour of some local residents as well as their attitude to the “no peace, no war” situation. In her opinion, people in Tavush expect the war to resume any minute and have stopped planning their lives. Instead of engaging in activities that would make their lives better, e.g. repairing their homes, they postpone everything until the settlement of the conflict or migration from the region.

The war does not influence our life in Berd as much as in the border villages. It is bad when one is afraid of turning on the light in one’s own house. During the Karabakh war, there was warfare here. We know why it is happening: people fight for the territory. We live in constant expectation. People do not plan anything, do not renovate their houses. I came back after graduating from university in Yerevan because I had a sense of duty, but the majority do not return. <...> If there is a shooting somewhere, no one is able to work during the rest of the day.

Female, 30, Berd town, Tavush province, Armenia

Growing scepticism toward a peaceful settlement

Questions included in a national opinion poll conducted in summer 2017 by IPSC on the request of the Caucasus Institute (2017 IPSC/CI poll) showed that residents of Armenia consider resumption of large-scale war to be more probable in the mid-term than peaceful settlement. Three out of four respondents do not think that it will be possible to reach peaceful settlement of the conflict in five years’ time. The shift in public opinion from optimism to pessimism with regard to the conflict started at least ten years ago, and we can now conclude that the conflict is viewed in Armenia as unsolvable.

Table 1. Which settlement option among those listed below do you consider the most realistic in the coming 5 years?

	% of total	Excluding DK/RA
Settlement of the conflict through peaceful negotiations	23.5	25.3
Resumption of large-scale hostilities	26.8	28.9
Preservation of the current situation (status-quo)	42.5	45.8
Don't know/ Refuse to answer	7.3	
N (number of respondents)	1622	1504

Source: 2017 IPSC/CI poll

Comparison of this data with the findings of the previous polls indicates that the level of optimism significantly decreased during the last six years. The 2011 Caucasus Barometer by CRRC showed that 38% of the residents in Armenia assessed the chances for peaceful settlement of the conflict in the nearest five years as “high” and 23% thought that peace was “rather likely”. Only 21%, with varying degrees of confidence, believed war to be more likely. Hence, the number of those who believed in the likelihood of a peaceful settlement – over 60% - exceeded the number of those who expected war almost by a factor of three. In Azerbaijan the situation was different back then: 51% considered peaceful settlement of the conflict to be likely and 42% saw war as a more realistic option (CRRC CB 2011).

Among the factors that caused pessimism in Armenia with regard to the conflict, the April 2016 escalation may have been quite significant. Polls conducted in Nagorno-Karabakh a year before and three months after the escalation showed an increase from 8% to 28.5% of respondents who assessed the likelihood of a large-scale escalation as “very high”. The overall number of residents who considered military escalation possible reached 70% after April 2016 (IPSC NK 2015 and 2016).

Reasons for the decrease in the number of people who expect negotiations to result in a peaceful settlement in the mid-term may include the growing number and scope of escalations and the futility of negotiations. Meetings between presidents in the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group are held less and less often. Measures to establish trust and prevent incidents have in fact become the main topic of the negotiations, even though these have been ineffective so far.

Experts interviewed by the Caucasus Institute had varied opinions about the probability of a new war. None of them believed that Armenia or Nagorno-Karabakh would start a war, and all considered a war scenario with Azerbaijan as the aggressor to be more likely. Consequently, they focused on Armenia’s potential reaction and what the rest of the world could do to prevent war.

One of the experts argued that the probability of a large-scale war was not high:

At this moment, Azerbaijan does not pursue military goals. Apparently, they are experiencing problems with stability and decision-making due to financial difficulties caused by slumping oil prices. It will be hard in the nearest future; Armenia needs to hold out until the situation stabilizes.

Expert interview, July 2017

Another expert stated that the chances for war and peace were equally low, and the most realistic option was the preservation of the status-quo and continuation of the deterrence

policies implemented by parties in conflict.

There is the risk of crossing the red line, escalations are likely. Both parties will try to force the adversary to make concessions.

Expert interview, August 2017

Another expert was more sceptical and characterized Azerbaijan’s behaviour as preparation for war, pointing out that Armenia needs to undertake countermeasures:

The situation is such that Azerbaijan has made the decision to shoot without paying attention to the international community. It is necessary to elaborate defence strategies, strengthen troops, defence, invest more money into the field and stop relying on external actors.

Expert interview, July 2017

In our 2017 poll, youth was the most pessimistic about a peaceful settlement. Only 22% of respondents aged under 34 think that peaceful settlement is possible, whereas 31% consider war to be the more likely option. Pessimistic moods are especially common in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan, while in small towns, especially in villages, expectations of peace are much higher.

Based on the data of the 2011 Caucasus Barometer, there is correlation between optimism about peace and trust in mass media and authorities. Hence, higher expectations of peace in towns and villages may have to do with a different approach to consumption of information. In the provinces compared to the capital city, more information comes from state-controlled broadcast media and businesses have closer links to local authorities.

Table 2. Expectations of developments in the conflict over the next 5 years and trust in the president and media in Armenia (2011), cross-tabulation

	Peaceful settlement is...		Difference (peaceful-forceful)
	Likely	Unlikely	
Full trust in the president	70	17	+53
Full distrust in the president	55	30	+25
Full trust in media	68	18	+50
Full distrust in media	53	33	+20

Source: CRRC⁴

In this logic, the authorities are responsible for achieving peace, and in the event of war,

⁴ Caucasus Barometer 2011, CRRC. <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2011am/codebook/>

for achieving victory. More trust in authorities implies more trust in what the president says about being committed to peace and in the authorities' ability to make it happen. It can be argued that trust in authorities affects perceptions of peace even more strongly given the prevalence of paternalistic attitudes in Armenia. According to the Caucasus Barometer conducted by CRRC in autumn 2015, 72% of the residents of Armenia thought that “people are like children, the government should take care of them like a parent,” while only 21% said that “government is like an employee, the people should be the bosses who control the government”.⁵ The data of the Caucasus Barometer collected between 2008 and 2015 in Armenia show that trust in institutions, including the president and the government, has decreased, but paternalism has not. This can be one of the causes of growing fears of war: as long as people believe everything depends on the government, if they think the government is weak, their hopes for peace (and other positive things) go down.

The following citation illustrates the influence of paternalistic moods on perceptions of the conflict:

The state must prohibit Azerbaijanis from shooting at us. They shoot and as a result, we cannot live here.

Male, 45, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

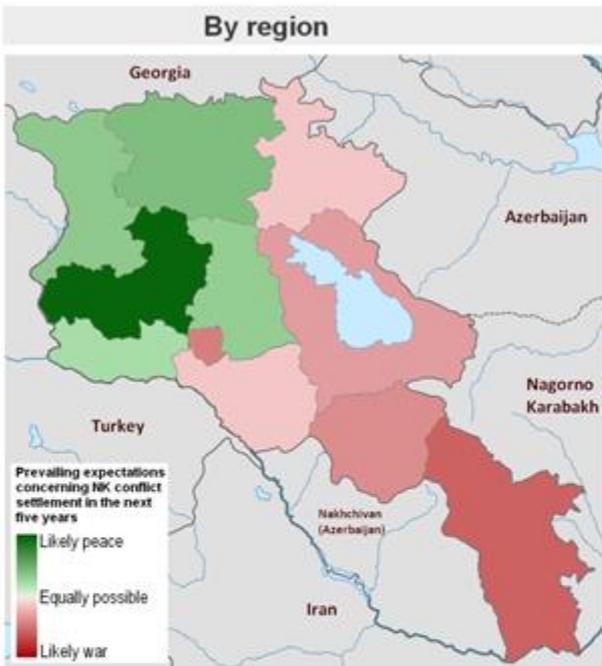
Apparently, the respondent believes the government is capable of preventing shelling but is not trying hard enough. Typically for a paternalistic worldview, the capacities of the state are overestimated.

Expectations of war are higher among people with higher income and those enjoying more social security at the workplace, while the poor and unemployed are prone to believe that the risk of war is lower. Residents of Yerevan and regions directly bordering on Azerbaijan feel more at risk of war. In the rest of the country, people assess the chances for peaceful settlement as high. The distribution of public expectations of peace and war by gender, age, region and type of settlement is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Likelihood of peaceful solution of the Karabakh conflict, by region, gender, region and type of settlement (2017)

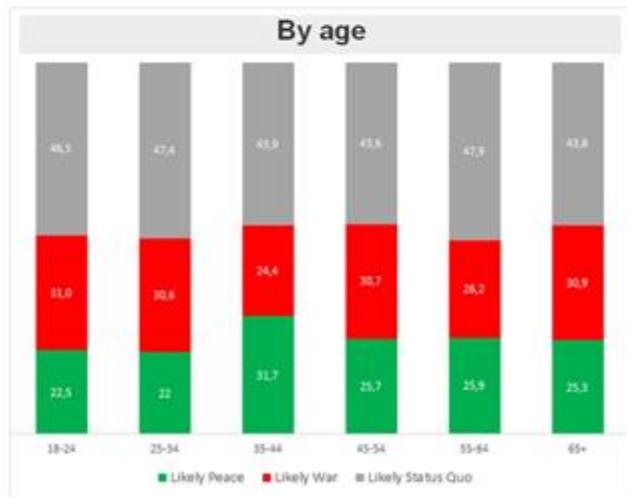
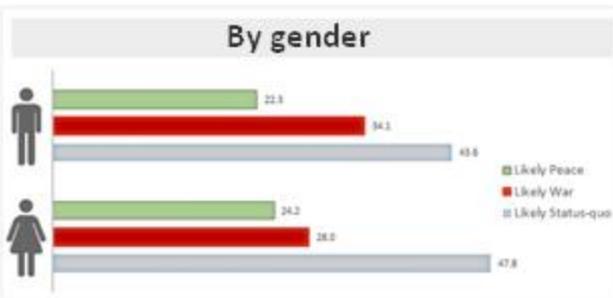
⁵ Caucasus Barometer 2015, CRRC. <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2015am/codebook/>

Likelihood of peaceful solution of the conflict



By type of settlement

	peace	war	status-quo
Yerevan	18.8%	32.6%	48.7%
other urban	24.8%	27.7%	47.5%
rural	32.8%	25.8%	41.4%



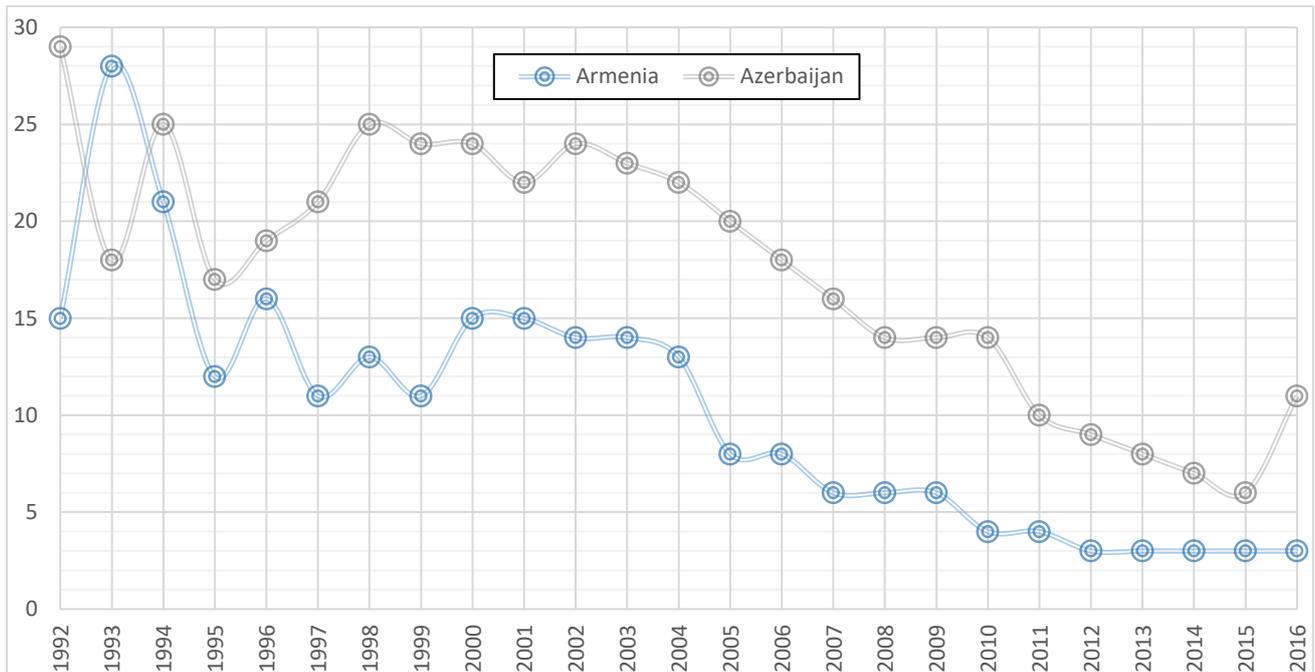
Source: 2017 IPSC/CI poll

Readiness for the war and militarization of society

Since relative stability in the conflict zone is not maintained by external peacemakers but by the parties in conflict themselves, the sides' military potential is crucial. Since the military potential of a country depends on its economic and demographic capacity, Armenia is lagging behind Azerbaijan, and is formally the weaker party of the conflict. Armenia's defence position compensates for the weakness to some extent. According to some scholars, the balance of powers in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is chiefly maintained through resource mobilization.⁶ As a result, Armenia is one of the most militarized countries in the world.

⁶ Deriglazova, Larisa and Sergey Minasyan. Nagorno-Karabakh: The paradoxes of strength and weakness in an asymmetric conflict. Caucasus Institute Research Papers, #3, June 2011, – Yerevan: CI, 2011 – 104 p.

Figure 2. Armenia and Azerbaijan, Global Militarization Index 1992-2016



Source: BICC⁷

Armenia keeps increasing the number of army personnel, the intensity of military recruitment and the share of defence expenditures in its GDP. As a result, Armenia became the 8th most militarized country in the world by 2005, and has ranked 3rd since 2012. In recent years, it has been increasing the number of contract servicemen, especially in border regions where a significant share of the male population serves in the army. Nagorno-Karabakh is arguably even more militarized than Armenia but the data are lacking due to its unrecognized status.

Militarization leads to two extremes: radicalization and war fatigue. Society has started to favour tougher approaches to the conflict, especially after the April escalation 2016:

Since April 2016, radicalization of attitudes has been manifest. People want to give payback to Azerbaijanis if they start a war again. On one hand, we have lost territories, on the other hand, many people want revenge and would like to resolve the issue through war once and for all.

Expert interview, July 2017

One of the experts noticed that similar moods are common for the army of Nagorno-Karabakh:

http://c-i.am/wp-content/uploads/CI-RP3_eng.pdf

⁷ Global Militarization Index (1992-2016). Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC).

http://gmi.bicc.de/index.php?page=ranking-table&year=1992&sort=index_desc

In the Karabakh army, the dominant point of view is that if we go on defending ourselves, we are doomed to failure or, at least, we are in a losing position.

Expert interview, July 2017

Another expert said that Armenia was undecided, and that the approaches of Armenian and Karabakh authorities are in sharp contrast.

It is not clear how to deal with Azerbaijan. It does not react to casualties among its servicemen or civilians; it is invulnerable in this respect. In Karabakh, they think that one can only influence Azerbaijan by conquering its territories, and it is therefore necessary to work in that direction. In Armenia, they want to stick to informal agreements and avoid abrupt actions.

Expert interview, July 2017

Pent-up emotions are manifest in Armenia as well as Nagorno-Karabakh, especially in border zones. Some residents of Tavush province openly favour a military solution that, as they believe, could ultimately bring peace.

The situation will not change, there is no way to establish peace. <...> Let us have a war and be done with it. Maybe I will die, I might be the first victim of that war, but at least there will be a future for my children.

Male, 43, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

Even if they tell us that a peace treaty will be signed tomorrow, we will not believe it! We are fed up with this life. We need to end it once and for all: either we die or they do. Otherwise, it will not end.

Female, 80, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

There is some correlation between preference for military solution and belief in the inevitability of war. However, of those who expect war, about 80% prefer peace.

On the whole, 86% of respondents in Armenia prefer peaceful settlement, 9% favour a military solution, and 5% the status-quo. Support for war is thus moderately common in Armenia. The status-quo is viewed as the most realistic scenario (see Table 1) and the lesser of two evils. Most people would prefer peace even though many do not believe that it is possible:

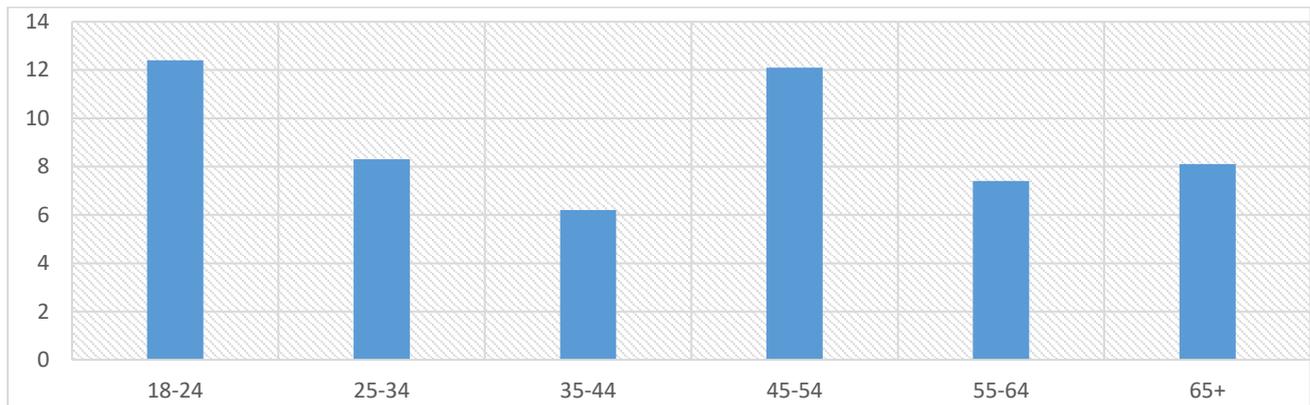
There will be no war, I am sure of it. Nothing will ever change. Even if they declare peace, thirty years later they will shoot at us again, they cannot help themselves. But there won't be a new war <...> I do not know what option I would prefer. It seems that peace is not an option, because we will never be able to live with them peacefully.

Female, 50, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

A military solution is not viewed as the preferable option in any of the regions of

Armenia, though the percentage of its supporters is higher in Yerevan, reaching 11% compared to 7% in villages. Men are more prone than women to choose a military solution: 14% vs. 4.5%. Two age groups stand out in terms of preference for a military solution: youth aged 18-24, which is typical for many societies, and persons aged 45-54, the generation that participated in the Karabakh war in 1991-1994.

Figure 3. The share of supporters of military solution of the conflict, by age



Source: 2017 IPSC/CI poll

In Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, the vast majority of residents of border regions favour peaceful settlement of the conflict. Many respondents said that peace was important and the details were not.

It is very difficult to say how the conflict should be solved, but it goes without saying that it should be solved through peaceful means. I would not like to see the blood of our men being shed again.

Female, 48, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

We would really like the conflict to be resolved, but it is too complicated. Of course, we would like it to be resolved through peaceful means, as the war leads to terrible consequences. We do not want new casualties – there are too few Armenians left. We would not like to concede territories, but unless we do, it will be impossible to solve the conflict peacefully.

Female, 43, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

The war is not a solution; it will only make things worse. You invest your efforts, build a house, set up a business, and then a tank fires and you lose everything.

Male, 45, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

Some of the respondents mentioned **conscription**. Some mentioned sons, family members or relatives serving in the army, and some criticized the conscription, pointing out that the majority would prefer to avoid it. Here are several citations illustrating attitudes to conscription:

Many people [in Nagorno-Karabakh] want to unregister their sons so that they do not participate in the fighting.

Expert interview, July 2017

It is sad that young men serve in the army. Maybe it brings a sense of pride, but hardly happiness.

Female, 33, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

When it was time for my brother to serve in the army, our family left the country.

Female, 22, Yerevan, Armenia

My uncle was killed in 1994, afterwards my brother was named after him and in April 2016 he was serving in the army. We all felt as if the story was going to repeat itself.

Female, 24, Yerevan, Armenia

War and Migration

When speaking about war, many respondents also mentioned migration. Unsurprisingly, migration has been a widely discussed topic in Armenia for two decades following the start of the emigration trend. Migration began in connection with the Karabakh war and reached its peak in 1991-1994.⁸

Emigration has been strongest from the border regions of Armenia, particularly the eastern parts of Tavush and Syunik provinces, and from Nagorno-Karabakh. The village of Movses (Mosesgegh) in Tavush province, to which we conducted one of our study visits during this project, had a population of 1978 in 2001⁹ and 1465 in 2011¹⁰. A quarter of the villagers left over a period of only 10 years. The topic of migration was covered in an interview that the mayor of Movses gave to The Guardian and in our interviews with local residents.¹¹ It is, however, an open question to what extent migration is caused by economic factors, e.g. unemployment, and to what extent it is the result of war and its repercussions, e.g. shelling and skirmishes on the line of contact.

⁸ Hrant Mikaelian. External Migration of Armenia: Trends, Directions, Numbers (in Rus). "Globus" analytical journal, #12, 2012 http://www.noravank.am/rus/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=6837

⁹ De Facto and De Jure Population by Administrative Territorial Distribution and Sex, p. 67. Results of the 2001 Armenian census. <http://docs.armstat.am/census/pdfs/11.pdf>

¹⁰ De Facto and De Jure Population by Administrative Territorial Distribution and Sex, p. 120. Results of the 2011 Armenian census. <http://www.armstat.am/file/doc/99486118.pdf>

¹¹ Amalia Illgner. 'Every house has bullet marks': life in a frozen war zone. The Guardian, 2 August 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/02/living-in-one-of-europes-frozen-conflicts-movses-nagorno-karabakh>

Yerevan is not located on the line of contact and there is less emigration from it. Residents of Yerevan are more likely to view migration as a matter of freedom of movement or a way to improve living conditions:

My opinion on migration is not negative. To be honest, I do not think that the war is the only reason that people are leaving.

Female, 26, Yerevan, Armenia

I can understand it when people living in the villages on the border zone leave their homes. I cannot imagine how courageous one should be to live there in an atmosphere of constant fear and danger.

Male, 25, Yerevan, Armenia

In the regions near the frontline, emigration is frequently perceived as a moral dilemma. Excluding people who are unable to leave for whatever reason (such as economic issues or health problems), the people who stay in a border village usually explain their choice with beliefs or emotions, whereas in their own opinion, migration would be the more rational option. Unlike residents of Yerevan, people in Tavush tend to think that it is the war that causes emigration. Some of them argued that in the event of peace, most emigrants will come back to the village.

We used to have 100 first-graders, and now there are only 7. <...> I could earn money in a cooperative in Yerevan, but I have made my choice. <...> I sometimes regret that I have invested so much into serving my homeland and haven't done enough to help my children stand on their own two feet.

Male, 60, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

Both my daughters are students in Yerevan. One is studying to be a pharmacist and the other is at the Pedagogical Institute. What are they supposed to come back to? They want to come back, they love the village, but there are no jobs here to match their skills. I'm not sure I want them to return. However, the two of us will stay here till the end of our lives. My husband is a war veteran. He says he will not leave even if he is the last man to stay here.

Female, 40, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

I came back after graduating from university in Yerevan because I had a sense of duty, but the majority do not return. <...> If there is a shooting somewhere, no one is able to work during the rest of the day.

Female, 30, Berd town, Tavush province, Armenia

In five years, everything will be the same or even worse, and all of us [participants of the focus group] will probably have left.

Male, 30, Berd town, Tavush province, Armenia

In **Nagorno-Karabakh**, emigration is also a subject of heated debate. Currently emigration is discussed in connection with the April 2016 escalation. A local expert thus assessed the situation around migration in Nagorno-Karabakh,

After April 2016, many people have left [Karabakh]. According to the prime-minister, their number ranges between 1500 and 2000, based on data on utility payments. I think that the number was really larger. Many of those who can afford it have started buying apartments in Yerevan in order to move there in the event of war. Once the level of security increases, these trends will stop.

Expert interview, July 2017

Some respondents in Nagorno-Karabakh mentioned emigration as a bad choice that negatively affects those who stay and weakens the defence of Nagorno-Karabakh. There is a moral dilemma involved. Leaving Nagorno-Karabakh is a chance to improve one's living standards, or, at least, to minimize risks. However, since there are no exemptions from conscription in Nagorno-Karabakh, departure of men is often seen as equivalent to desertion. Regardless of gender, people who emigrate feel that they are letting everyone down.

Many people left after the war but I am against it. We must all defend our motherland together. If each of us leaves this land, the enemy will take it. Our family did not think for a minute of leaving our homeland even during the four-day war. In the years of the war and the Karabakh movement, all the members of our family were here.

Female, 35, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

Many families left, but we did not want to leave our Karabakh. After my father's death, my brother became the head of our family and decided that we must stay. <...> I think some families left in pursuit of a better life, others could not cope with their losses, and the rest emigrated to live in safety.

Female, 43, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

In April, my friend said that she was leaving for Moscow, and I responded: who will stay here?

Female, 32, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

In April, my mother panicked. She called me from Russia and ordered me to pack my things

There were also other opinions. Some people said that they were considering migration or, at least, did not rule out this option.

I used to criticize people who were leaving but now my opinion has changed.

Female, 33, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

The April outbreak called into question possibility of return to a normal life, and desire to leave has become widespread.

Female, 55, Shushi, Nagorno-Karabakh

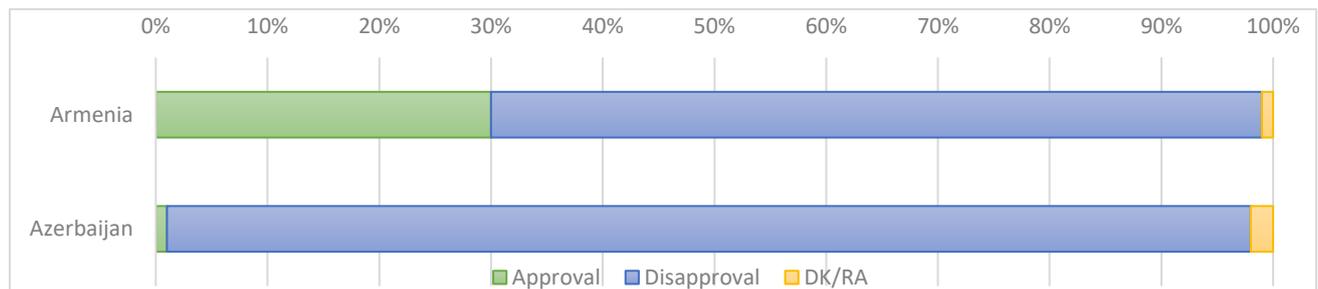
Interethnic Relations: Basis for Long-term Peace?

Quantitative data on Armenian-Azerbaijani interethnic attitudes

In recent years, not only have the interstate relations been worsening and the number of border incidents growing, but interethnic relations have also been deteriorating. Previously, Azerbaijan had been the more affected party, but in the last five years, this trend has been manifest in Armenia as well as Azerbaijan, reflected in the data of the CRRC Caucasus Barometer.

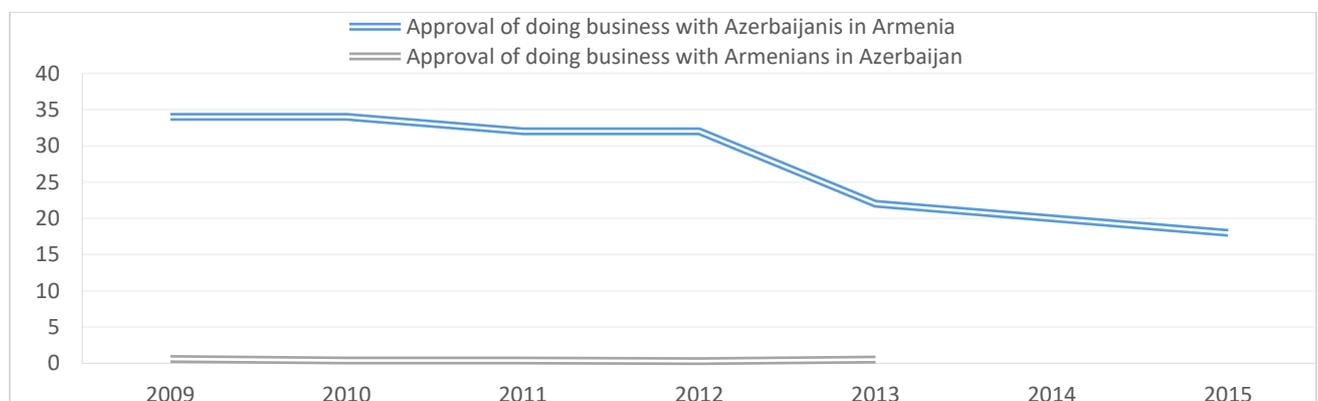
According to the 2009 Barometer, 30% of respondents in Armenia considered friendship with an Azerbaijani as a possibility, where in Azerbaijan only 1% accepted the idea of friendship with an Armenian. This is a huge gap, which, sadly, has been closing in recent years.

Figure 4. Approval of friendship with Azerbaijanis and Armenians (opinion polls in Armenia and Azerbaijan)



Source: CRRC¹²

Figure 5. Change of attitudes toward doing business with each other (opinion polls in Armenia and Azerbaijan, 2009-2015).



¹² Caucasus Barometer 2009 cross-country database. CRRC, 2010.
<http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2009/codebook/>

Source: CRRC¹³

Note: In 2015 the poll was not conducted in Azerbaijan.

Mistrust is a key negative factor affecting Armenian attitudes towards Azerbaijanis

Quantitative data, in particular those from interviews conducted by the CI in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, also point towards a lack of readiness for establishing relations with Azerbaijanis and negative attitude toward them, chiefly in the form of mistrust and fear.

I do not agree that we should establish relations with them. Armenians have a common feature: we are very naive. Anyway, someday they will stick a knife in your back. We must not relate to the current regime in Azerbaijan.

Male, 25, Yerevan, Armenia

Azerbaijanis have proven several times that they are aggressors. I lived abroad and had an Azerbaijani friend. Everything was ok and we never talked about this issue. However, one day he was unable to restrain himself and sent me a link to prove that Azerbaijanis are right. It is impossible to talk to them; they have their own ideology. They hate us. I do not believe that someday we will live in peace with each other.

Female, 22, Yerevan, Armenia

I do not indoctrinate my child against them. But I do not want a Turk to be able to come to Berd and then go back home. The authorities need to prevent that.

Male, 30, Berd town, Tavush province, Armenia

Mistrust was expressed in a desire to live separately. Respondents in border regions of both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh said the borders should remain sealed and guarded by the army.

...It is not up to us. But we are afraid of Azerbaijanis. If necessary, maybe we will be able to live side by side, but I hope this doesn't happen. It is better to have the border guarded, it is safer.

Female, 34, Drmbon village, Nagorno-Karabakh

A long history of mutual mistrust is embodied in Armenian proverbs such as “a Turk remains a Turk”¹⁴ and “make a friendship with a Turk but hold a stick in your hands”

¹³ CRRC Caucasus Barometer 2009, CB 2010, CB 2011, CB 2012, CB 2013, CB 2015 cross-country datasets <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cross-country/>

¹⁴ This approach was found in Armenian media as well during the Caucasus Institute' study conducted in 2009-2010. Hrant Mikaelian. Armenia and Armenians, Turkey and Turks in Armenian Media. CI, 2010. <http://c-i.am/wp-content/uploads/2010-armturkish-monitoring-eng.pdf>

frequently cited by respondents aged 40 and over (while many younger people shared the older generations' mistrust toward Azerbaijanis, they did not cite proverbs to support their arguments).

My grandmother kept telling me that a Turk will remain a Turk. I was a little girl and remember how we went to their villages and the boys threw stones at us. Cruelty is part of their culture.

Female, 50, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

Proverbs about Turks reflect several patterns. Firstly, the proverbs equal Azerbaijanis with Turks. Secondly, they imply that one cannot trust Azerbaijanis because their culture makes them hypocritical and incapable of sincere friendship. Thirdly, they dehumanize Azerbaijanis, picturing them as representatives of an ethnic or religious community and depriving them of individuality.

While rejecting the very possibility to establish good relations with Azerbaijanis, older respondents admitted that relations had been quite normal before the war.

It goes without saying that we will not be able to live side by side with an open border. There should be either a third party, like Russia in the Soviet times, to exert pressure on both parties, or military forces guarding the border. We will not be able to trust each other again. True enough, before the war we had Azerbaijani friends. We called them "dost." Armenians and Azerbaijanis used to visit each other's homes. In our village shop, Azerbaijani women from the neighbouring village were served first because they had a long way to walk. After what they did and what we went through, we cannot be friends again.

Female, 55, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

Like many others, we used to be really close with an Azerbaijani family. They were like godparents to us. Now something like this is no longer possible. No one will want it – neither we nor they. We need to stop the fire and that is all, we do not need any contacts.

Female, 50, Drmbon village, Nagorno-Karabakh

I had many Turkish friends, it is more accurate to call them Azerbaijanis. They spoke our language a bit and we spoke theirs. But after the Sumgait events, hatred was kindled between our two nations. There were fights, we beat them [Azerbaijanis] up. They realized that they could not stay here anymore and left. <...> I do not think that it will now be possible to communicate with them like before. Maybe the Armenians will be able to do that, but they won't.

Female, 48, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

Overall, the project's quantitative data shows that attitudes toward Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh are more negative than in Armenia. This was true for experts as well as the general population. It is ironic that some respondents explained their own prejudice against Azerbaijanis by the fact that the government of Azerbaijan "promotes hatred toward Armenians and plots the nations against each other".

An interesting detail was mentioned by one respondent who told us that before the outbreak in April, negative characters (“bandits”) in children's games were called “Turks” but now the hostility is taken so seriously that the practice went away.

Children used to break up into two groups – “Turks” and “Armenians” – but not anymore.

Female, 32, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

In the opinion of an expert from Nagorno-Karabakh, the 2016 escalation has affected perceptions of the past:

People are now focusing on problems in interethnic relations in the Soviet times. Before April, they would recall good examples of friendship between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Now they say that these relations had been fake and that one cannot trust Azerbaijanis.

Expert interview, August 2017

Diverging attitudes toward Azerbaijanis

Perceptions of peaceful coexistence with Azerbaijanis diverge enough. The majority of the respondents thought that it is very important to express their positions on the topic. Their positions can be divided into several groups by the degree to what they admit possibility of establishing relations with Azerbaijanis and to what they are categorical:

- It is possible to establish relations even today,
- Private ties can already be established, but not at the political level,
- Relations can be restored but only in the long-term perspective,
- Relations cannot be restored anymore.
- Relations with Azerbaijanis a priori cannot be stable.

Thus, despite the general pessimism, some respondents believed in the possibility of peaceful coexistence with Azerbaijanis.

Our two nations have many features in common. We should spread the idea of peace. I had an Azerbaijani friend from Georgia. He always emphasized that there was no problem, and the government was to blame. We should go step by step.

Female, 24, Yerevan, Armenia

If Azerbaijanis come to Shushi, I will not mind. <...> Cannons do not help. Azerbaijanis need to change and we must trust them to. Maybe it will happen in my lifetime. 20 years is long enough to change one's mentality.

Female, 55, Shushi, Nagorno-Karabakh

At an interpersonal level, we can communicate with Azerbaijanis without the help of mediators. When Ofik and Samira sit together, they do not need anyone at all.

Expert interview, August 2017

In Nagorno-Karabakh, some respondents mentioned neighbours of Azerbaijani origin, mostly members of mixed Armenian-Azerbaijani families:

My best neighbour is Azerbaijani; he has stayed here. <...> Generations need to change. Perhaps people who have not seen the war or its consequences will be able to live side by side with Azerbaijanis.

Female, 55, Askeran, Nagorno-Karabakh

Some respondents said that Armenian-Azerbaijani relations could only be restored at interpersonal level, e.g. they were willing to accept the return of a limited number of Karabakh Azerbaijanis or the arrival of some tourists from Azerbaijan, but insisted that coexistence of the two nations would lead to more incidents and growing hostility. Respondents viewed the mending of relations as a long-term process that will take several generations.

Of course, if tourists from Azerbaijan come to Karabakh, no one will attack them. Our society is more tolerant than Azerbaijani society. However, settlement of the conflict and possibility of wider communication will take several decades. If Azerbaijani authorities agree to propagate friendship between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, they will be overthrown.

Expert interview, July 2017

I believe in peace. I think many people want revenge, and it's a shame. We must stop the hatred. It took 25 years to spread the hatred and will take twice that long to eliminate it.

Male, 20, Askeran, Yerevan, Armenia

Public opinion distinguishes Azerbaijanis and Azerbaijan's authorities

Many of the respondents differentiated between the Azerbaijani authorities and ordinary Azerbaijanis; however, some believe that the influence of the state on Azerbaijanis' minds and culture is so big that it prevents interethnic relations from developing in the long-term.

Some experts and residents of border regions said that the current leadership of Azerbaijan was not interested in war and was using the conflict to stay in power. In their opinion, it is almost impossible to influence the leadership of Azerbaijan from outside, including from Armenia, or from within. These respondents believe that the interest of the population and authorities of Azerbaijan do not coincide: Azerbaijanis do not want to fight

but the authorities or circumstances are making them. In contrast to the opinions according to which “one cannot trust Azerbaijanis,” this point of view humanizes them, viewing them as hostages of the conflict along with Armenians who may even have common interests with Armenians.

Here are several citations supporting these arguments:

Azerbaijani villages on the other side of the border live even worse than we do. They also have sons that serve on the border as contract servicemen and also get killed. Just like theirs, our shelling results in casualties on their side. I feel sorry for them, we are all human beings, we have not raised our children so they can die in a war.

Female, 50, the village of Movses, Tavush province, Armenia

Armenians and Azerbaijanis trade and communicate with each other in Russia, do they not? Azerbaijanis also say that they do not want a war. But it is not the same when you are abroad. Here we have a confrontation.

Male, 45, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

Life in the border regions of Azerbaijan is terrible. The mothers of soldiers once came to the military outposts holding hands posters that said “do not make our boys shoot so that they do not get shot at.

Female, 70, the village of Movses, Tavush province, Armenia

Finally, one of the experts in Stepanakert argued that the tough position of the Azerbaijani authorities was not their own but the result of external influence, though he did not clarify who the foreign powers were and what they were trying to achieve:

What Azerbaijan is saying is not its idea. Azerbaijan is a proxy for external actors. <...> We are all forced to accept the existing consensus. All of us, including Azerbaijanis. They do not want a war either.

Expert interview, July 2017

Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Scenarios, Status and Territorial Dispute

The unresolved conflict with its low intensity military resistance and casualties on both sides, especially civilian ones, has caused public attitudes to toughen. Over the years, people began to take the status-quo for granted. As shown above, 42.5% of the adult population of Armenia (almost 46% if we exclude respondents who answered “don’t know” or refused to answer), think that preservation of status-quo is the most realistic scenario in the mid-term perspective, whereas 5% consider it the preferable option.

The Status of Nagorno-Karabakh

The status of Nagorno-Karabakh is barely ever discussed in Armenia, as there is consensus in Armenian society that Nagorno-Karabakh cannot return to the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, opinions vary whether Nagorno-Karabakh should be an independent state or become part of Armenia. This ambiguity arose in the late 1980s-early 1990s, when for political reasons the original goal of the Karabakh movement – unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia (Arm. *Miatsum*) – was replaced by independence for Nagorno-Karabakh. Decades later, many people in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh remain committed to the idea of unification and are not open to alternatives:

The most dangerous thing about these negotiations is propaganda about Artsakh as something separate from Armenia, a separate country and a different nation. But this is not true, we must not allow people believe in it.

Male, 60, Movses village, Tavush province, Armenia

Undoubtedly, we must join Armenia and all Armenians must come back. A house divided against itself cannot stand.

Female, 48, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

Table 3. Transformation of Public Opinion on Future Status of Nagorno-Karabakh, distribution by Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh

<i>Nagorno-Karabakh must...</i>	Armenia		Nagorno-Karabakh	
	2004	2017 ^b	2015	2016
... Become part of Armenia	59.7	53.6	63.7 ^c	50.5 ^d
... Be an independent republic	38.6	46.1	35.1	48.9

... Have autonomy within Azerbaijan	1.1	0.3	0.0	0.0
Other option ^a	0.5	0.1	1.1	0.6

Sources: 2004 ACNIS poll, 2017 IPSC/CI poll, 2013 IPSC/EUFoA

Notes:

^a Including preservation of status-quo, becoming part of Russia, jointly governed territory, etc.

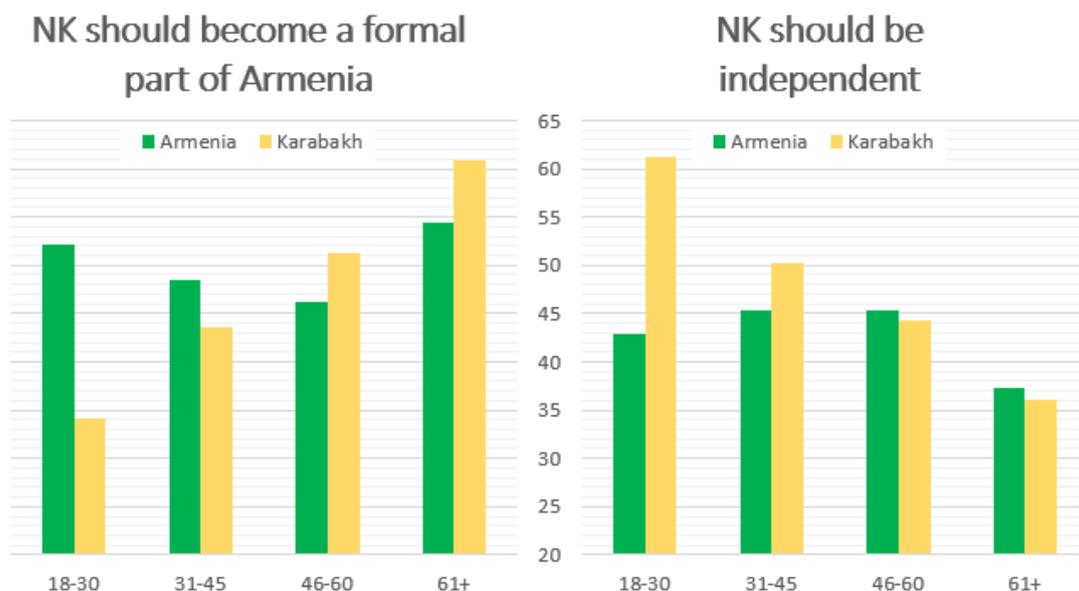
^b Excluding 9.2% of those who did not care, refused to answer, or had no opinion. Otherwise, 48.6% favoured joining Armenia, and 41.8% preferred to see Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent state.

^c Including 7.1% who would prefer Nagorno-Karabakh to be an autonomous region within Armenia.

^d Including 4.3% who would prefer Nagorno-Karabakh to be an autonomous region within Armenia.

We can surmise that people have become accustomed to the status-quo in terms of relations between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia as well as with regard to the conflict, and have internalized the idea of independence for Nagorno-Karabakh. According to statistical data, in Nagorno-Karabakh support for independence is reversely proportional to age – younger people favour independence, older people tend to support unification with Armenia. One can argue that youth are more strongly affected by the ongoing nation-building and emergence of national identity in Nagorno-Karabakh, and therefore more supportive of independence. In Armenia we observe a different trend: support for unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia is highest in the 60+ age group but is also growing in the youngest cohort (18-30).

Figure 6. Nagorno-Karabakh as a part of Armenia vs. Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent state, distribution by age groups, Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia



Sources: 2017 IPSC/CI poll; 2016 IPSC poll

In Armenia, more males than females support unification, 54% and 46%, respectively. This may correlate with readiness to fight a war, which was shown above to be much higher among men. Unification may be viewed as the tougher and riskier option compared to independence. A cross-check shows that 11.3% of those who prefer Nagorno-Karabakh to join Armenia support a military solution, compared to 6.9% among those who support independence for Nagorno-Karabakh.

In this regard, experts' opinions were more diverse. For instance, one of them was not against unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Azerbaijan,

In my opinion, ideally, Karabakh must return to Azerbaijan, but not as an autonomy. It should be able to fully exercise its sovereignty, like an independent state. In other words, Karabakh will gain independence, while formally being part of Azerbaijan.

Expert interview, August 2017

Unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia was one of the least often mentioned options. E.g., one expert said,

The best option for Karabakh would be unification with Armenia. Karabakh will become one of Armenia's provinces but with higher level of autonomy, as it has more democratic traditions developed throughout its history.

Expert interview, July 2017

The majority of experts, particularly Karabakh ones, would prefer Nagorno-Karabakh to gain independence and fight for recognition:

Formalization of the de facto situation is what we need. Even if it's just Uruguay that recognizes Karabakh, the situation will change. Then it will be necessary to appeal to the co-chairs of the Minsk Group. <...> Formal recognition is what our efforts should aim for. In January 1992, the NKR sent an appeal to the UN asking for recognition, but since then, no one even tried.

Expert interview, July 2017

We must take steps towards stabilization, in particular, the recognition of NKR by at least one of the regional powers, for instance, Iran. It will provide non-military means to deter Azerbaijan and strengthen Karabakh's diplomatic potential.

Expert interview, July 2017

The Status of the “territories”

In Armenia, most disputes related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict concern the status of Armenian-controlled territories surrounding the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. There are many ways to denote these territories, including security belt, occupied

territories and liberated territories. The choice of phrase reflects the political position of a speaker. How to call those territories is a subject of intense debate in Armenia, one of the few issues pertaining to the conflict that were publicly discussed ahead of the 2017 parliamentary elections in Armenia.

In the societies of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, there is strong consensus on the need to integrate the territories into Nagorno-Karabakh. At the official level, there is disagreement between Yerevan and Stepanakert with regard to this issue, regularly expressed at the official level. For example, in 1997 the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nagorno-Karabakh severely criticized president Ter-Petrosyan's peace plan introduced in his article "War or peace – time to get serious."¹⁵ In September 2017, Edward Nalbandian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, declared that "*...We are talking about those territories the return of which will not endanger the resolution of the conflict and the security and will not threaten the outcome of the process.*" In response, the presidential spokesperson of Nagorno-Karabakh David Babayan said, "*All the territories around Artsakh are important in terms of ensuring its security; there can be no return to the past in terms of borders and status.*"¹⁶

The 2017 election campaign of the Alliance of the Armenian National Congress and People's Party of Armenia led by Armenia's first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan was built upon a stage-by-stage compromise settlement plan. At the parliamentary elections on April 2, 2017, the alliance failed to pass the threshold to parliament, getting 26,000 votes countrywide or less than just 2% of the poll.¹⁷ This failure, to some extent, can be seen as the measure of public support for compromises in the conflict.

Ambiguity in the relations between the Republic of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh is reflected not only in difference in their approaches to the conflict resolution. Some experts point out that there is

... a large gap between society and authorities in Yerevan in contrast to Stepanakert where it cannot be. Society is dense, population is small, and the frontline is near. <...> Stepanakert suffers from Yerevan's inability to create a format beneficial for Armenian sides.

Expert interview, July 2017

¹⁵ Karabakh Responds to Ter Petrosyan Article. Asbarez.com, 6 November 1997. <http://asbarez.com/34560/karabakh-responds-to-ter-petrosyan-article/>

¹⁶ Stepanakert Responds to Nalbandian's Comments: 'There Can Be No Return to Past Borders'. Armenian Weekly, 20 September 2017. <https://armenianweekly.com/2017/09/20/stepanakert-responds-to-nalbandians-comments-there-can-be-no-return-to-past-borders/>

¹⁷ Parliamentary elections 2 April 2017. OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, p. 27. 10 July 2017. <http://www.osce.org/odihr/328226?download=true>

In 2015, 96.3% of respondents in Nagorno-Karabakh considered territorial concessions of five regions to Azerbaijan unacceptable, while only 2.7% thought that this could bring about peaceful resolution of the conflict. In 2016, after the April escalation, changes in perception fell within the margin of error: 95.3% were against concessions, and 3.3% accepted them (IPSC). In media this attitude is called “not an inch of land,” and during the last 10 years, it has become the most widespread and almost universal attitude, first in Nagorno-Karabakh and then in Armenia.

In the past, public opinion in Armenia on the status of territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh was not consolidated. According to a poll conducted in 2004 by ACNIS, 76% of Armenia’s residents considered that these territories would eventually either be merged with Nagorno-Karabakh or unified with Armenia alongside Nagorno-Karabakh. 13% considered concession of 5 or 6 regions a compromise, 1% approved the concession of all 7 regions, and 9% thought that these territories should become a neutral zone under the supervision of international or CIS peacekeeping forces (2004 ACNIS poll). However, in 2004 two-thirds of the population were ready for concessions under specific circumstances, including a peace deal with Azerbaijan, recognition of NKR by Azerbaijan, concession of Shahumian region by Azerbaijan to Nagorno-Karabakh etc., and only 32.4% excluded any compromise concerning these territories. In an expert poll in 2004, 26% of experts ruled out territorial compromises and insisted that the territories should join Armenia or Nagorno-Karabakh, while 10% were ready to see Nagorno-Karabakh as an autonomy within Azerbaijan (2004 ACNIS expert poll).

The 2017 IPSC/CI poll shows that readiness for compromise has drastically decreased. 86.4% of the population in Armenia oppose territorial concessions, and only 8.2% accept concessions for the sake of conflict settlement.

Table 4. Society's readiness for territorial concessions, Armenia

	% of total	Excl. DK/RA
Not ready for territorial concessions and support recognition of current borders	86.4	91.4
Concession of five regions	6.2	6.5
Concession of seven regions	1.4	1.4
Concession of Nagorno-Karabakh	0.6	0.7
Don't know/ Refuse to answer	5.4	

Source: 2017 IPSC/CI poll

Readiness for concessions varies slightly across genders: 92.6% of women and 90.0% of men oppose territorial concessions, i.e. the readiness of men is a little higher than that of women. There is no relationship between age and readiness for concessions: within all age groups, about 90.7% oppose concessions, except for elderly people (aged 65 and over) among whom 96% oppose concessions.

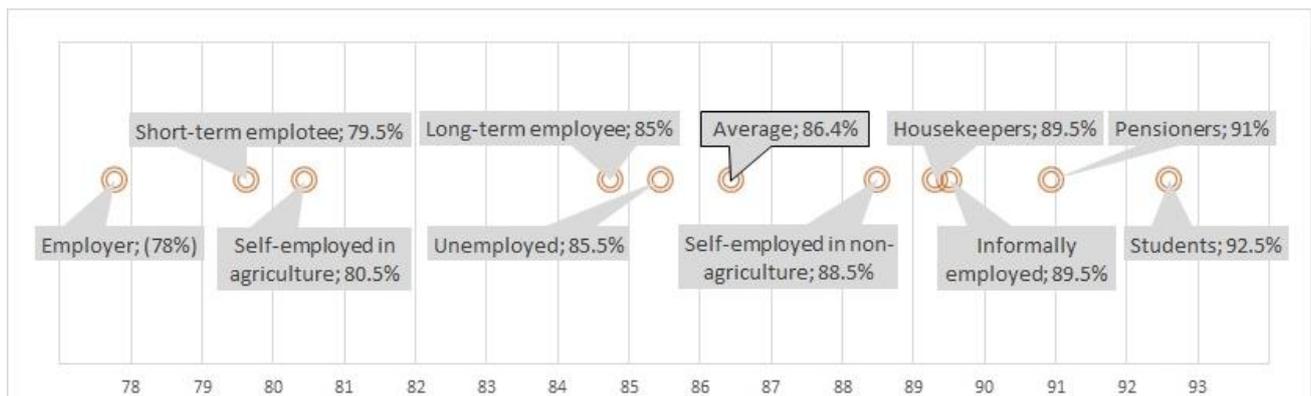
Experts believe that the influence of public opinion on the actions of political elites is significant:

In Armenia, elites are fearful of public opinion, as it is shifting from moderate to militant. Public opinion is against ceding territories, whereas the government still views them as an object of bargaining. But as there is lack of democracy and real free elections, public opinion does not reach the government through democratic procedures.

Expert interview, July 2017

Noteworthy, support for concessions varies by type of employment (Figure 8).

Figure 8. The Level of Readiness for Territorial Concessions in the Conflict Zone, by province



Source: 2017 IPSC/CI poll

Note: the percentage is based on the overall number of people in each group. The fact that 86.4% oppose territorial concessions does not imply that the other 13.6% support them: in fact, 5.4% did not express an opinion and 8.2% chose other options, including return of 7 regions to Azerbaijan and turning Nagorno-Karabakh over to Azerbaijan.

Although within all social groups, the vast majority is opposed to territorial concessions, there is a connection between type of employment and readiness for concessions. Amongst opponents of concessions, there is a larger share of economically less active respondents such as homemakers, retired people and students, and fewer employers and employed. This also explains why the uncompromising position is more common amongst women: there are more women amongst students and retired people.

Most experts in our selection also adhered to the idea of impossibility of territorial concessions, though some of them argued that there is the need for some kind of compromise.

In contrast to Nagorno-Karabakh, in Armenia we observed a strong difference between public opinion and opinion of the expert community. Experts who were against territorial concessions cited security and ineffectiveness of concessions.

Territorial concessions will lead to war. This is the nature of “status quo transformation,” which is frequently being discussed.

Expert interview, July 2017

Theoretically, territorial concessions are possible, but in practice, they are out of the question. These territories were conquered in order to be used as a bargaining chip later on. But since then, the situation has changed. Today's borders are strategically convenient for defence. There are no guarantees that if we cede the territories, a short-term improvement of relations will not be followed by a new war. In this case, our positions will have worsened and it will be difficult for us to defend ourselves.

Expert interview, August 2017

When the war started, the issue of these territories did not even exist. The territories did not cause the war.

Expert interview, July 2017

When people say that they want peace, they mean security. To fully ensure security, the conflict needs to stop. But today it is impossible because there is a balance of powers. The status quo will be preserved for decades. <...> Artillery can now reach more distant targets, that is why existence of the security belt does not provide the same guarantees as before. Anyway, we should hold on to it for the sake of security.

Expert interview, July 2017

The experts who accept concessions pointed out the need to end the military escalation and thought it could be done in the current format of peaceful conflict resolution. They didn't all agree about which of the territories should become the subject of bargaining:

We don't want to have any more casualties in the conflict. This goal alone is worth a compromise. <...> I think that five regions can be conceded in return for a monitoring mechanism, not even a settlement. Monitoring is extremely important. If we succeed in creating mechanisms for monitoring the frontline, it will be possible to conduct fair negotiations.

Expert interview, August 2017

Residents of Nagorno-Karabakh cannot understand how one can make territorial concessions. But giving up the regions is not the same as giving up Nagorno-Karabakh. However, there are few territories that can be ceded without jeopardizing the security of Nagorno-Karabakh. At this moment those are the former Azerbaijani regions: Jabrayil, Fizuli and part of Agdam.

Expert interview, July 2017

Nagorno-Karabakh should join Armenia, and some territories should be turned over to the Azerbaijani side, as is being discussed.

Expert interview, August 2017

Readiness to adopt a compromise plan

Although the majority of respondents have a tough stance on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, one of the most widely discussed topics in connection with the conflict is whether the authorities can or should adopt an unpopular settlement plan. According to one point of view, a settlement based on territorial concessions can cause large-scale destabilization in Armenia that may result in an overthrow of the government or violence against individual politicians. Media quote of the case of assassination of Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin.

To find out how society might express its disagreement with the results of the settlement, the Caucasus Institute included this question in the opinion poll. Over 60% of the respondents said they would take no action; two thirds of these, or almost 40% of the total, said they wouldn't even express their opinion. 32% said they would protest against the implementation of a settlement that they disagree with: 23.4% would take part in peaceful protests and 8.6% in violent ones.

Table 5. Reaction to Unacceptable Peace Deal over Nagorno-Karabakh (%)

	Female	Male	Total
I'll take no action, won't express my opinion	40.0	37.2	38.7
I'll only share my opinion with friends and in social networks	18.9	13.0	16.2
I'll sign a petition	8.5	3.5	6.2
I'll take part in peaceful protests	22.6	24.3	23.4
I'll take part in violent protests	4.5	13.2	8.6
Don't know/refuse to answer	5.5	8.8	7.0
Total	100	100	100

Source: 2017 IPSC/CI poll

Note: The question was formulated in the following way: "What action will you take if Armenian authorities adopt a peace deal that is unacceptable for you?"

In total, about one third of the respondents said they were ready to protest against a settlement plan they disagree with. Unsurprisingly, there are more youth among active protesters: 13.6% among respondents aged 25 and younger. Readiness for protests is almost equal in all age groups, with the difference that youth choose violent protests more often than older people but still prefer peaceful protests.

Interestingly, readiness for protest does not correlate with opposition to territorial

concessions. Some of those who are ready for concessions also say they will participate in violent protests. Correlation with education, income level and employment is not significant either. Therefore, it can be assumed that this indicator reflects a general readiness for protests, including violent ones, not necessarily in connection with the conflict.

However, there is a correlation between readiness for protest and preferred status of Nagorno-Karabakh. Of those who think that Nagorno-Karabakh must join Armenia, 12.5% are ready to participate in violent protests and 27.3%, in peaceful ones, compared to 6.6% and 22.3% respectively amongst all other respondents, including those who support independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. It makes sense, since unification is considered to be the tougher position.

Overall, males, youth, people with high income level and supporters of unification express greater readiness for both peaceful and violent protests. Nonetheless, it is impossible to identify a specific social group that is more prone to violent protest, because such attitudes are present in all groups.

Summary

The survey conducted by the CI in 2017 revealed disturbing trends in the perception of the conflict in Armenian society. Expectations of a peaceful settlement have significantly decreased and now for the first time in the last two decades, the resumption of a full-scale war is considered more likely than a peaceful negotiated settlement.

Given the persisting paternalistic sentiments in society, the lack of conflict resolution, the high degree of militarization of Armenia, the low level of trust in state institutions and the lack of confidence in the Azerbaijani side, there is growing scepticism towards the possibility of conflict resolution in principle. Residents of the border regions and Yerevan, men, youth and the representatives of the older generation consider the likelihood of war to be higher than other groups.

The expectation of war has not yet led to a preference for a military solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Only one in eleven in Armenia supports a military solution to the conflict. Some people are motivated to flee the war and conscription. Some respondents cite the conflict as one of the main reasons for emigration.

The perception of Azerbaijanis has gradually worsened in Armenia over the past few years as the situation on the border and the contact line escalated. The main reason for the worsening of relations is a mistrust deeply rooted in society, especially in connection with the perception of Azerbaijanis and Turks as one nation. Respondents in Armenia still remember a time of peaceful co-existence with Azerbaijanis, but negative experiences are recalled more often as tensions escalate. However, respondents distinguish between Azerbaijani citizens and Azerbaijani authorities, with the latter regarded the main source of hostility and the main reason for escalations.

Armenia's public opinion on the preferred format of the settlement is consolidated: 86% of the population want recognition of de-facto borders and only 7% are ready for territorial concessions. There are differences across age and gender, regional distribution and type of employment, albeit insignificant ones. Contrastingly, there is consensus on the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh: 54% want it to become part of Armenia and 46% want it to be recognized an independent republic.

Finally, one third of the population said they would take part in protest action in the event that an unacceptable peace plan were adopted, including 9% who were ready to take

violent action; men were three times more likely than women to express readiness to take violent action.

When assessing the quantitative results of this study, one should bear in mind that quantitative data collected in a conflict-affected society often reflects more unity than there is on the ground. Uncompromising attitudes may mask plurality of opinion, and mainstream media coverage may influence public attitudes or at least what people are willing to tell researchers. However, in biographical interviews people often expressed their opinion much less categorically and were inclined to discuss various scenarios of a peaceful settlement. In this regard, quantitative and qualitative data on perceptions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in Azerbaijan would be extremely valuable, and it is unfortunate that it is not available.

Appendix. List of experts

Experts in Yerevan:

- Alexan Hakobyan
- David Petrosyan
- Gayane Shagoyan
- Karen Bekaryan
- Mark Grigoryan
- Richard Giragosian
- Tevan Poghosyan
- Vagharshak Harutyunyan

Two public officials who didn't wish to be named

Experts in Stepanakert:

- Artak Beglaryan
- Hayk Khanumyan
- Hrachia Arzumanyan
- Irina Grigoryan
- Masis Mailyan
- Tigran Abrahamyan

Hrant Mikaelian has been Research Fellow at the Caucasus Institute since 2009. He is the author of over 30 academic publications, including three books, articles, working papers and study reports in various fields of social sciences.

The Caucasus Institute is an independent policy think-tank founded in Armenia in 2002. Its main avenues of activity are academic and practical research; training and capacity building for civil society, media and academia; public debates, publications, policy recommendations, advocacy and consulting. The CI conducts conferences, roundtables, workshops, simulation games, training seminars and courses. It has published over 30 books, dozens of research papers and policy briefs. The CI's advocacy potential relies on close ties with the media and decision-makers. It has the reputation of a neutral space for dialogue between stakeholders with sharply contrasting agendas representing the civil society, government, opposition, international organizations and media.

Caucasus Institute
Charents st. 31/4
0025 Yerevan, Armenia
contact@c-i.am
www.c-i.am