

YOUTH STUDY
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS 2023
ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA



Youth Study Comparative analysis 2023: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Tbilisi Office
Nino Ramishvili Dead End 1, Bldg. 1 | 0179 Tbilisi | Georgia
Tel.: +995 32 225 07 28
<https://southcaucasus.fes.de/>

For publishers:

Marcel Röthig (FES), Salome Alania (FES)
georgia@fes.de

Author:

Rati Shubladze

Proofreading:

Suzanne Graham

Cover Graphic:

© Vecteezy.com

This Publication is funded by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Attitudes, opinions and conclusions expressed in this publication - not necessarily express attitudes of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung does not vouch for the accuracy of the data stated in this publication. Commercial use of all media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES.

© Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2024

YOUTH STUDY
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS 2023
ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA

Contents

MAIN FINDINGS	3
INTRODUCTION	5
METHODOLOGY	6
EMPLOYMENT, HOUSEHOLD AND LIVING CONDITIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE	7
DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE	10
FOREIGN POLICY PERSPECTIVES	14
POSITIONS REGARDING CONFLICTS IN THE REGION	17
CONCLUSION	19

MAIN FINDINGS

- According to the study conducted from May – July 2022, most young people aged 14-29 in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia perceive their material condition as comparable to others in their community and country. On a 7-point subjective well-being scale, Armenians (4.7) and Azerbaijanis (4.5) rate their well-being slightly higher than Georgians (4.08).
- Parental support and personal income are the primary sources of income for young people in the South Caucasus. When compared to Georgia (38%), young people in Azerbaijan (51%) and Armenia (49%) seem to have more self-sufficient and autonomous personal income sources. This trend is also observed in the adult population (18 and above). In addition, women are less likely than men to report having personal income.
- Enrolment in educational institutions is highest among young people from Georgia at 43%, compared to 38% in Armenia and 26% in Azerbaijan. Approximately half of Azerbaijani (50%) and Armenian (48%) youth report some form of employment, with only one-third (35%) reporting the same in Georgia.
- Around one-third of young people in Armenia (31%) and Georgia (31%) are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), compared to 25% of young people in Azerbaijan. There is a gender gap in NEET status, with higher proportions of female NEETs in all countries. The proportion of NEETs also increases with age in Armenia and Georgia.
- The youth generally hold positive views of democracy, with 75% support in Georgia, 54% in Azerbaijan, and 51% in Armenia. However, there is some skepticism in Azerbaijan (28%) regarding democracy as the best system of government.
- Young people in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia report low levels of interest in politics, with only 40%, 46%, and 38% expressing interest. Additionally, many believe that young people's interests are poorly represented in politics, with 65% in Armenia, 63% in Georgia, and 30% in Azerbaijan sharing this sentiment. This is compounded by low institutional trust, with trust index scores of 10.7 in Armenia, 11.7 in Georgia, and 16.2 in Azerbaijan on a scale from 0 (no trust) to 30 (highest possible trust). Compared to males, females tend to report slightly higher levels of trust in institutions.
- The majority of Georgians (62%) consider their country to be European, while Armenians (30%) and Azerbaijanis (26%) are less likely to agree. In comparison to their counterparts from Armenia (8%) and Azerbaijan (9%), Georgians (41%) are more inclined to identify themselves as Europeans.
- Among Azerbaijani respondents, 89% consider Turkey their closest ally. Georgians have varied views, with 28% naming Ukraine and 18% naming the USA as their closest friends. Armenians, on

the other hand, tend to favor Russia, with 50% of respondents naming this country as their closest ally (it is important to note that polls were conducted in late spring and early summer of 2022, before the blockade and September 2023 events in Karabakh).

- As of mid-2022, young people in Armenia believed that cooperation with Russia could benefit Armenia's national security (49%) and economic development (34%). In Azerbaijan, an overwhelming majority named Turkey as the country that can support the country's economic growth (86%) and national security (90%). Regarding Georgia, European countries (Country's economic growth (58%) and national security (59%)) and the USA (Country's economic growth (42%) and national security (39%)) held similar positions. (it is important to note that polls were conducted in late spring and early summer of 2022, before the blockade and September 2023 events in Karabakh).
- Georgians view Russia as a major threat to their national values (72%), security (78%), statehood (84%), and economic system (74%). Azerbaijanis view Armenia as the main threat, and Armenians are divided between Azerbaijan and Turkey when naming the country posing the greatest threat to Armenia.
- At the time of conducting the polls in 2022, 82% of Armenian youth feared a resumption of the Karabakh conflict, and the subsequent September 2023 events in Karabakh partially justified these fears. While 29% of Azerbaijani youth did not respond, 26% reported similar fears. Attitudes to the opening of transport links between Armenia and Azerbaijan are very different, with 59% of Armenians against these links, compared to 28% of Azerbaijanis. Young people from both countries believe that cooperation with other nations is necessary, except when it involves Armenia (for Azerbaijani youth) or Azerbaijan and Turkey (for Armenian youth).

INTRODUCTION

Since 2009, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) has conducted youth studies in many countries of the world. These studies focus on young people's perceptions of societal development and their prospects during times of national and global transformation. The studies combine qualitative and quantitative research conducted in close cooperation with regional research teams. The second wave of studies in three South Caucasian countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia - was conducted in 2022 among young people aged 14-29. The purpose of the studies was to provide insights into the attitudes, hopes, beliefs, and future perspectives of young people in the region. Additionally, the studies explored various domains, including education, employment and mobility, family and friends, as well as political attitudes and perceptions.

Located at the crossroads of cultures and continents, the three South Caucasian countries are distinguished by their diverse, multiethnic, and multireligious communities. Though Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have a long and deep-rooted shared past, they have developed differently since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in terms of socio-economic and political development, foreign policy aspirations, and mutual cooperation. As a result, young people in the South Caucasus exhibit both similarities and differences in many of the issues covered in the study.

These studies of young South Caucasians were conducted during an important period for all three countries, associated with dramatic geopolitical changes in the region, the post-COVID-19 recovery, the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the September 2023 conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Those events had a significant impact on young people, shaping their worldview, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and positions on the future. Commonly seen as the drivers of change and innovation, young people are instrumental to the socio-economic and cultural development of their societies. In times of crisis and dramatic change, their views and experiences can significantly shape the future of their respective societies. For this reason, it is particularly important to explore young people's perspectives on a range of issues to better understand how the young people of today might shape the future once they end the long road of socialization and transition from youngsters to full-fledged members of society. Studying young people during these formative years provides valuable insight to governmental agencies, public policymakers, academics, civil society professionals, and other relevant stakeholders to better understand these young and transitioning generations.

Studies in the respective countries have focused on a variety of topics, ranging from descriptions of family socio-economic conditions and employment to views on international politics, identity, values, and attitudes toward climate change, as well as future aspirations and concerns. However, this comparative report only discusses select topics such as employment, household, and living conditions, as well as attitudes toward democracy, governance, foreign policy, and conflicts. The final section of the report outlines the key findings and implications of the study.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological and data collection design was developed by R-Research Limited of the United Kingdom with input from Dr. Félix Krawatzek of the Center for East European and International Studies (ZOiS) in Berlin, at the request of and in consultation with the South Caucasus Regional Office of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). The survey instrument was developed in English in collaboration with FES offices in the South Caucasus and Berlin. Later, it was translated into the local languages and country-specific thematic question blocks were added. This study examines the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of individuals aged 14-29 in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The survey fieldwork lasted from May to July 2022.¹ The surveys were conducted by local survey organizations in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, with 1,200; 1,605; and 1,206 respondents interviewed, respectively. A multistage stratified cluster sampling approach was used for sample selection. Within households, respondents were selected using age and gender quotas.

Data analysis employs elements of exploratory and confirmatory statistical analysis. Unless otherwise noted, reported differences are statistically significant and are estimated using appropriate regression models while controlling for basic demographics. For convenience, group differences are reported using crosstabulations. In some cases, proportions may not equal 100 or may differ from actual and reported data by 1% due to rounding errors.

In addition to the quantitative study, researchers also collected qualitative data through focus group discussions with young people from the capital cities of the South Caucasian countries. The discussions covered various themes, including young people's personal experiences, perspectives on politics, democracy, and contemporary challenges facing societies around the world, as well as views on the collapse of the Soviet Union, belonging to Europe, and emigration. The focus group participants also submitted responses to a short online survey, providing additional context for the qualitative data analysis. The findings from the qualitative study are presented thematically in this report in parallel with the findings from the quantitative component of the study.

¹ Fieldwork dates: 30 May 2022 - 16 June 2022 in Armenia and Georgia; 8 June 2022 - 21 July 2022 in Azerbaijan.

EMPLOYMENT, HOUSEHOLD AND LIVING CONDITIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The socio-economic well-being and conditions of young people play a crucial role in their access to education, the labor market, personal development opportunities, and overall success later in life. It is important to note that access and exposure to different educational or employment opportunities can contribute to the development of various aspects of value orientation, assessment of public institutions, and even foreign policy perspectives. Hence, the comparison of South Caucasian youth begins by examining their financial and household circumstances, followed by a description of their involvement in the education and labor markets.

Using the measure of subjective well-being,² most young people across the South Caucasus assessed their status as slightly above average on a 7-point scale. Armenians (4.7) and Azerbaijanis (4.5) reported relatively higher scores than Georgians (4.08). Young people were also asked to compare their households' material situation with that of the people living in their community and country. The majority of respondents perceived their material condition as comparable to others in all surveyed countries. A total of 64% of Armenian youth reported similar material conditions to others in their community, and 59% believed the same when compared to other Armenians.³ In Azerbaijan, nearly the same tendency is observed, with 59% reporting similar conditions both in their community and the country. In Georgia, 70% of youth perceived their material condition as equivalent to that of others in their community, and 61% held the same view when compared to other Georgians.

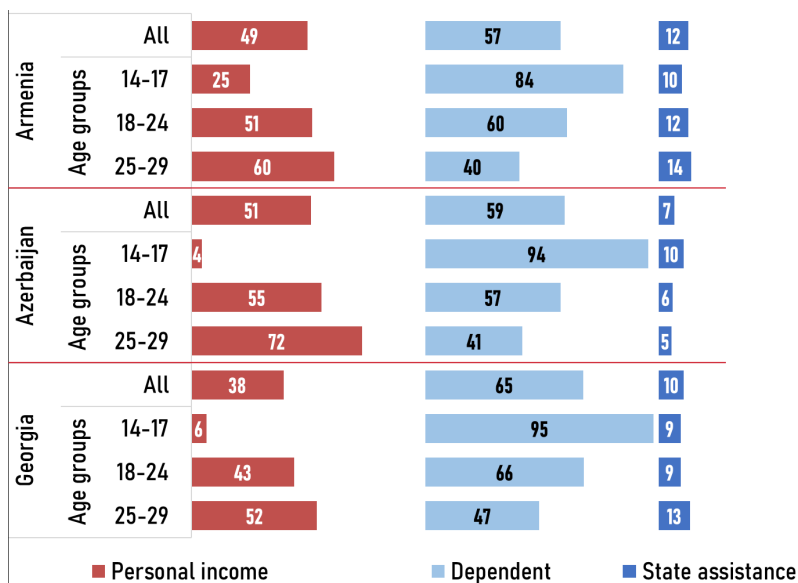
Questions on sources of income provide more specific information regarding young people's economic independence. In the South Caucasus, individuals aged 14-29 rely on two principal sources of income: parental support and personal income. To gain a more accurate insight into the level of income (in)dependence of young people, three different variables were computed to measure whether they are self-supporting, dependent on someone else, or receive state assistance.⁴ As expected, the share of parental support and dependence decreases with the increase with age, and conversely, the share of personal income increases with age. Compared to Georgia (38%), young people in Azerbaijan (51%) and Armenia (49%) appear to be more self-sufficient and autonomous. The trend is similar when comparing only adults (18 years and over). Within the 24-29 age group, personal income figures are higher in Azerbaijan (72%) and Armenia (60%) than in Georgia (52%) (Figure 1). Furthermore, there are gender differences in all three countries. Males (62% in Armenia, 64% in Azerbaijan, and 49% in Georgia) report having personal income more frequently than females (37% in Armenia, 36% in Azerbaijan, and 28% in Georgia).

² This is a theoretical construct that assesses self-perceptions of material well-being beyond monetary measures. To facilitate the interpretation of the findings, the variable was transformed into a seven-point scale. On this scale, a score of 1 corresponds to the response 'Money is not enough for food', while a score of 7 corresponds to the highest socioeconomic status and the response 'We experience no material difficulties'.

³ In the original report for Armenia, these figures were calculated without "Refused to answer", "Don't know" or "Difficult to answer" options. For comparability reason, in this report they are counted using the approach used in Azerbaijani and Georgian reports – i.e. not omitting these answer options. Here and thereafter in similar cases: this did not change the overall trend and the logic of findings from Armenian data.

⁴ The proportions do not add up to 100 because individuals may have multiple sources of income.

Figure 1. SOURCES OF INCOME BY COUNTRIES AND AGE GROUPS (% , only statistically significant differences are shown, full sample)⁵

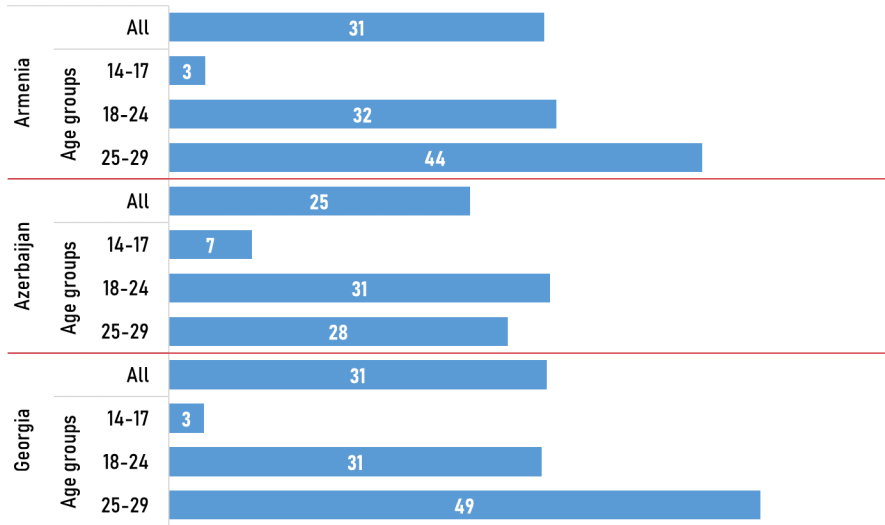


Conditions related to financial independence are linked to engagement in educational or employment activities, and these figures vary by country. The highest number of young people aged 14-29 enrolled in some form of educational institution is in Georgia (43%), followed by Armenia (38%), with the lowest number in Azerbaijan (26%). In terms of self-reported employment, approximately half of the youth in Azerbaijan (50%) and Armenia (48%) report having some form of employment, while only one-third (35%) report the same in Georgia. It is important to note that educational attainment and employment data are significantly dependent on age groups, as those aged 14-17 are usually in secondary education institutions, and many in the 18-24 group are enrolled in university studies and hence not present in the job market.

Therefore, a more accurate assessment of youth occupancy is provided by the share of individuals who are not in education, employment, or training (NEETs). Around one-third of all young people in Armenia (31%) and Georgia (31%) fall into this category, while the same is true for one-quarter (25%) of young Azerbaijanis. The proportion of NEETs increases with age in Armenia and Georgia (Figure 2). This can be partially explained by the fact that after the age of 24, many in Armenia and Georgia complete their university studies and find it difficult to enter the labor market. In contrast, the proportion of Azerbaijani youth aged 18-24 enrolled in educational institutions is lower, and a significant portion of them could be already active in the labor market, however, this claim needs to be verified by further research. It is worth noting that there is a gender gap in NEET status across all three countries, with a higher percentage of females (Armenia 42%, Azerbaijan 39%, Georgia 37%) not working or studying compared to males (Armenia 19%, Azerbaijan 12%, Georgia 26%).

⁵ Differently calculated in Armenian report (excluding don't know & refuse to answer) options. Recalculated according to the approach used for Azerbaijani and Georgian reports.

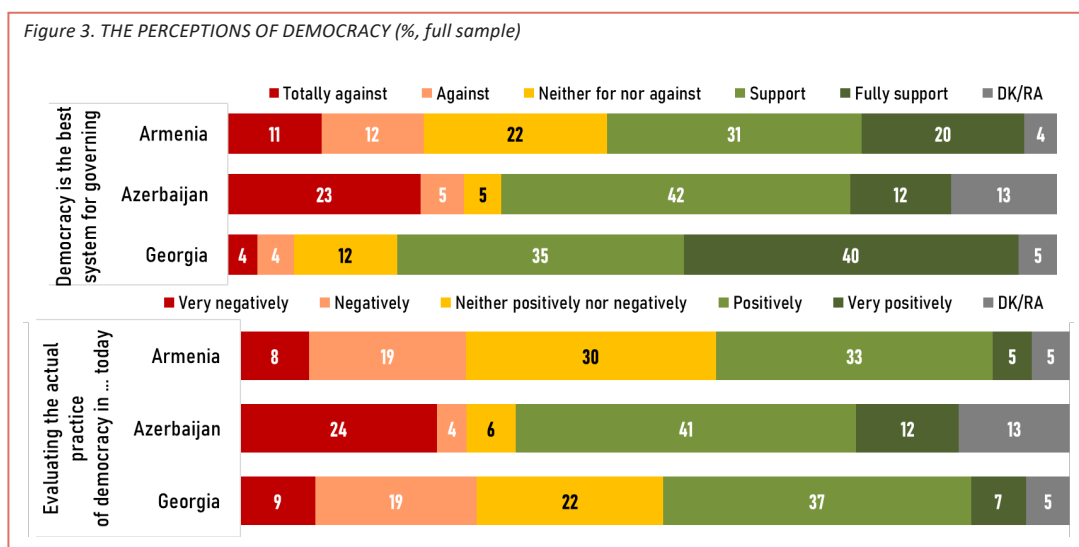
Figure 2. PROPORTION OF NEETS (NOT IN EDUCATION, NOT IN EMPLOYMENT) BY COUNTRIES AND AGE GROUPS (%)



To summarise the socio-economic characteristics of young people in the South Caucasus, the majority of respondents across all reviewed countries rated their status as slightly above average and perceived their material condition as comparable to others. Despite having personal income, young individuals still significantly rely on parental support to varying degrees. Young people in Azerbaijan and Armenia report relatively higher degrees of financial independence than young people in Georgia. To a certain extent, this may be because Georgian youth are more involved in post-secondary education than their neighbors and therefore are less active in the labor market, however, this claim needs to be supported by further research focused on the labor market and education. Between one-quarter and one-third of young people in the South Caucasus neither work nor study and this figure usually increases as they mature. Simultaneously, there is a gender gap across all three countries, with young females being more likely to claim NEET status compared to young males. Females also less frequently report having personal income than males.

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Most young people view democracy positively and support it in principle, but with varying degrees. In Georgia, 75% of respondents partially or fully support democratic governance, compared to 51% in Armenia and 54% in Azerbaijan. Most young people in Azerbaijan (53%) and a plurality in Armenia (38%) and Georgia (44%) view the actual practice of democracy positively. It is important to note that, in contrast to Armenia and Georgia, just over a quarter of Azerbaijanis (28%) have strong negative feelings about the idea that democracy is the best system of government and about the practice of democracy today.



The qualitative data analysis reveals that in all three countries, democracy is associated with concepts such as equality, unity, respect, and the exercise of fundamental human freedoms and rights. In Georgia, it was also mentioned that democracy entails a high quality of life and rule by the people. In Armenian focus group discussions, obedience to the law and a high level of education were also mentioned. In Azerbaijan, democracy was associated with equal rights between men and women, an independent lifestyle, and freedom of religion. The concept of democracy among young people from the South Caucasus is often viewed through a Western lens, with countries such as the USA, Germany, Canada, Switzerland, and other European nations being commonly cited as examples of democratic nations.

Although there is general support for democracy, young people in all three countries exhibit passivity when it comes to political participation. Only a minority of young people in Armenia (40%), Azerbaijan (46%), and Georgia (38%) show at least some interest in politics. Interestingly, while the differences were not statistically significant in Armenia and Georgia, more men (52%) than women (40%) in Azerbaijan reported being at least somewhat interested in politics. The levels of young people's civic and political involvement are even lower. The survey asked respondents if they had participated in eight different activities.⁶ Based on these questions, an 8-point index was created to count the number of political activities in which a respondent has participated. A score of 0 represents no participation in any activity, while a score of 8 represents participation in all activities. The average values for all countries were very low, with the lowest in Armenia (0.54) and Azerbaijan (0.59), while relatively higher in Georgia (0.82). This index did not reach 1 point on the scale, and a median score of 0 for all countries suggests general passivity and detachment from different dimensions of political participation. During the focus groups, young people stated that political participation, including voting in elections, is an important aspect of democratic governance, however, some individuals still exhibit restraint regarding political activity. Armenian and Georgian participants highlighted the significance of fair and peaceful political actions, protests, and demonstrations for democracy and government accountability. According to these respondents, protests can be effective tools to push the government to take certain actions. In some cases, however, a sense of disillusionment was reported, with some feeling that participating in protests could be an ineffective way to bring about tangible change.

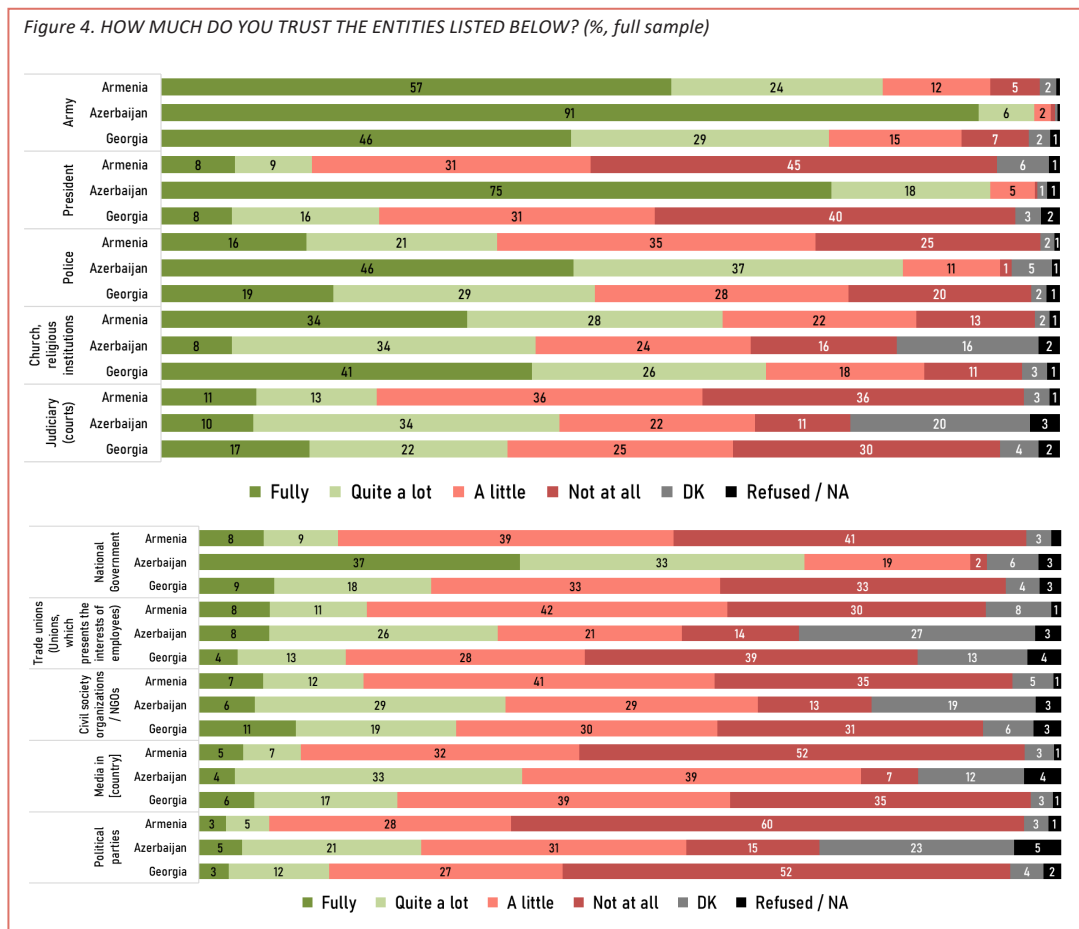
Disengagement from politics is also confirmed by quantitative research results. In Armenia (65%) and Georgia (63%) a majority of respondents believe that young people's interests are either not represented or poorly represented in national politics. While the figures for the same questions are lower in Azerbaijan, 30% still believe that young people's interests are not represented or poorly represented, with a further 30% refusing or finding it difficult to answer this question. A certain disconnect and indifference to politics is reflected in the fact that among those who say they are at least somewhat interested in politics, the vast majority never or rarely discuss politics with their friends and peers - 77% in Armenia (23% never and 54% rarely), 76% in Georgia (25% never and 51% rarely), and 70% in Azerbaijan (6% never and 64% rarely). Moreover, few young people plan to actively engage in politics. When asked if they plan to take on a political function, less than one-fifth (18% in Armenia and Azerbaijan and 17% in Georgia) stated that they would be willing to take on a political function.

As with political participation and interest in politics, young people from the South Caucasus also report a low level of trust in institutions. Out of the ten institutions and entities assessed, only the Army showed high levels of support among youth across all countries. Notably, support for other political and public actors such as political parties, media, civil society organizations, and trade unions is weak (Figure 4). In Armenia (17%) and Georgia (27%) a minority of respondents show high levels of support for the national government, while in Azerbaijan around 70% report some form of support. Similarly, regarding the president, Azerbaijani youth showed undisputed (93%) support, compared

⁶ Participated in the solution of a settlement's/ neighbors' problem(s); Participated in volunteer or civil society organisation activities; Donation to a social or political organisation*; Signed a list with political requests / Supported an online petition*; Stopped buying things for political or environmental reasons; Expressed an opinion in an online public space / entered debate; Worked in a political party or political group*; Participated in a demonstration*. Items denoted with asterisks were asked respondents older than 16.

to a lower figure in Armenia (17%) and Georgia (24%).⁷ In terms of religious institutions and the church, young people in Armenia (62%) and Georgia (67%) reported high levels of trust, while in Azerbaijan, support is moderate (42%). The study also found that Azerbaijani youth were often hesitant to report their views on trust in political parties, civil society institutions, trade unions, and the judiciary, with many responding ‘do not know’ or ‘refuse to answer’ (Figure 4).

Figure 4. HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST THE ENTITIES LISTED BELOW? (% , full sample)



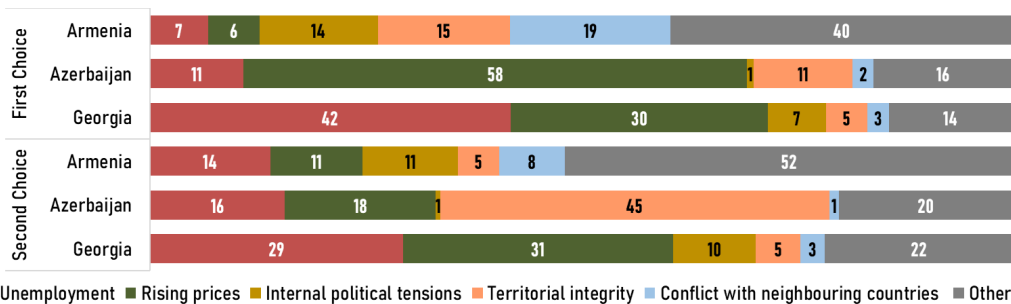
The institutional trust index provides a more precise and comprehensive explanation of the situation regarding institutional trust among young people. It was calculated using the survey questions discussed above. The interpretation of this cumulative index is simple: a value of zero indicates that the respondent either distrusted or did not report any position on the discussed institutions, while a value of 30 represents complete trust in all institutions. Thus, a higher index corresponds to a greater level of overall institutional trust. Azerbaijan had the highest average index score of 16.2, slightly

⁷ In contrast to Azerbaijan, which is a Presidential Republic, Armenia and Georgia are Parliamentary Republics, with Presidents not holding executive power.

above the midpoint of the index. Georgia’s average index was 11.7, lower than the median theoretical value of the index. Armenia had the lowest mean value of the index at 10.7. Interestingly, across all countries, females (Armenia 11.0; Azerbaijan 16.4; Georgia 12.3) had higher trust in institutions than males (Armenia 10.4; Azerbaijan 15.9; Georgia 11.1).

Although youth across the South Caucasus share low levels of political engagement and trust in institutions, the problems they identify in their respective countries vary. Azerbaijan and Georgia are primarily concerned with socio-economic issues, whereas Armenia is more focused on security and territorial integrity (Figure 5). It is important to note that the surveys were conducted in the spring-summer of 2022. Therefore, it is reasonable that for Armenia, conflict with neighboring countries (19%) and territorial integrity (15%) were the most important issues, while in Azerbaijan territorial integrity was mentioned in the first place by 11% of respondents and in the second place by 45% of respondents. The qualitative phase of the study confirms that during the focus group discussions in Armenia and Azerbaijan, the “Nagorno-Karabakh war” resonated strongly. As for Georgia, unemployment was the most cited concern (42% as the first choice and 29% as the second choice) followed by rising prices (30% as the first choice and 29% as the second choice). Rising prices (58%) were the most important problem for Azerbaijani youth, too. Furthermore, the survey revealed that 9% of respondents in Georgia chose education as their first concern, and 12% as their second. The focus group discussions highlighted the interconnection between economic development and the educational system, both of which are current struggles in Georgia according to young people.

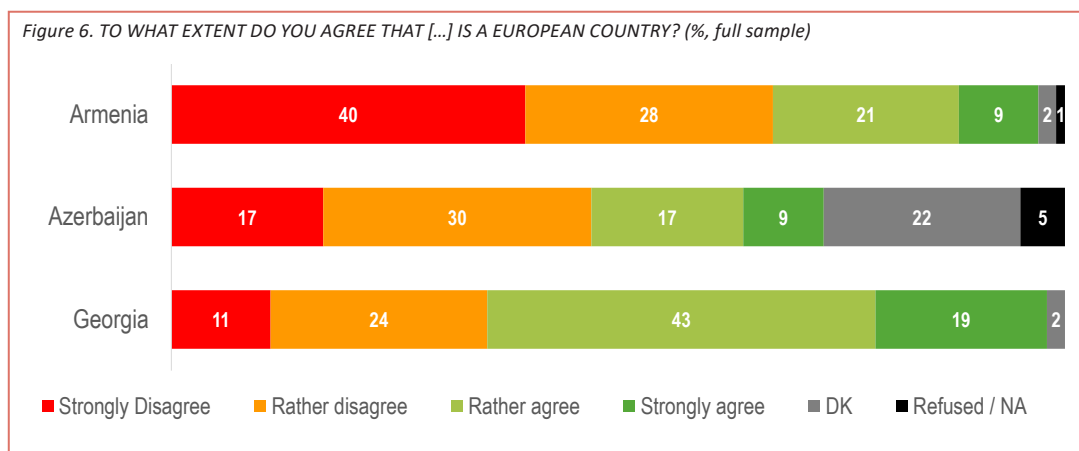
Figure 5. WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT / SECOND MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM FOR OUR COUNTRY RIGHT NOW? (% , full sample)



In summary, most young people have a positive view of democracy. They associate it with concepts such as equality and fundamental human freedoms. Nevertheless, alongside support for democracy, there is a notable lack of political participation and trust in institutions among youth. The study found widespread disengagement, distance, and apathy towards politics. A significant number of young people were skeptical of the extent to which young people’s interests are represented in national politics. In Azerbaijan and Georgia, socio-economic concerns are seen as the country’s main challenge, while in Armenia, security and territorial integrity are the main concerns, corresponding to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

FOREIGN POLICY PERSPECTIVES

During the period of geopolitical turbulence in which the study was conducted, the investigation of the foreign policy attitudes and geopolitical identities among South Caucasian youth was one of the most intriguing aspects. The study examined the attitudes of youth towards Europe and neighboring countries, as well as their perceptions of the role that foreign powers could play in the development of their societies.

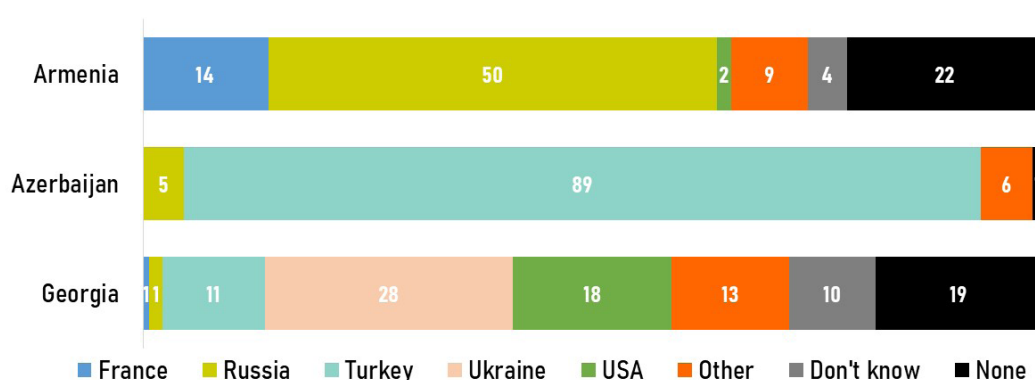


All three countries are currently members of the European Union’s Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative, but the intensity and level of integration vary considerably, which may be reflected in the survey responses. Almost two-thirds (62%) of Georgian youth agreed that Georgia is a European country, while this figure for Armenia (30%) and Azerbaijan (26%) is almost twice as low (Figure 6). More importantly, almost one-quarter (27%) in Azerbaijan found it difficult or refused to answer this question. Going further, when asked whether they see themselves as Europeans, only 8% of young people in Armenia and 9% of young people in Azerbaijan said they completely or very much agreed with this statement, while in Georgia the corresponding share was 41%.

During the focus group discussions, participants from Armenia and Azerbaijan frequently cited cultural and value differences that distinguish them from Europeans. Despite these differences, Armenian youngsters feel that there are similarities between modern Armenian and European cultures and lifestyles. In the case of Azerbaijan, cultural differences between Azerbaijan and Europe are commonly highlighted, but many feel that there could be benefits in developing links with Europe in areas such as healthcare, education, and the economy. In Georgia, despite certain differences, the prevailing discourse suggests that Georgia is culturally aligned with Europe and should ultimately become an integral part of it.

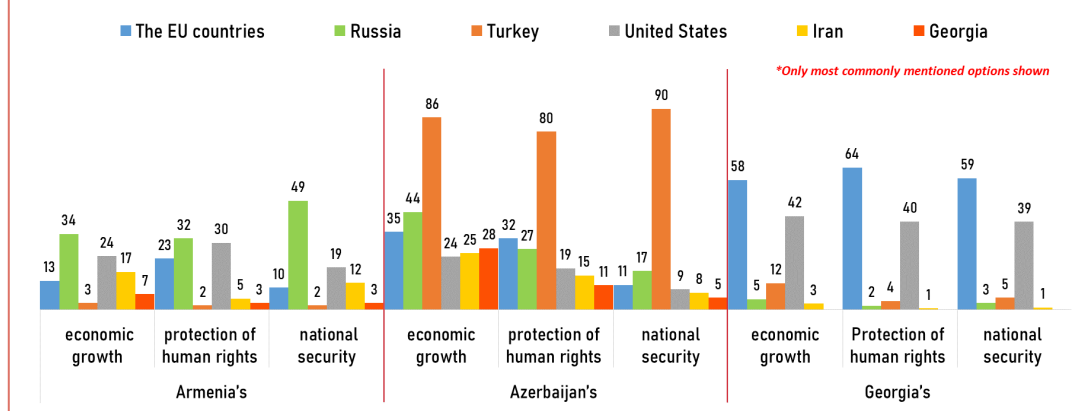
Foreign policy preferences among young people from the South Caucasus are diverse. Azerbaijani youth consider Turkey to be their country's closest friend (89%), while Armenian youth believe that Russia is the closest country (50%), followed by France (14%). It should be noted that the fieldwork for this study was conducted prior to the September 2023 events in Karabakh. As a result, foreign policy sentiment may have shifted since then. In contrast, Georgians have varied views on their country's closest friend, with the plurality naming Ukraine (28%), followed by the USA (18%) and Turkey (11%). Many in Georgia and Armenia share the belief that their countries have no friends, with around one in five holding this view. This is true for 19% of Georgian and 22% of Armenian young people (Figure 7).

Figure 7. FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE, WHICH COUNTRY IS [...] CLOSEST FRIEND? (% , single choice, full sample)



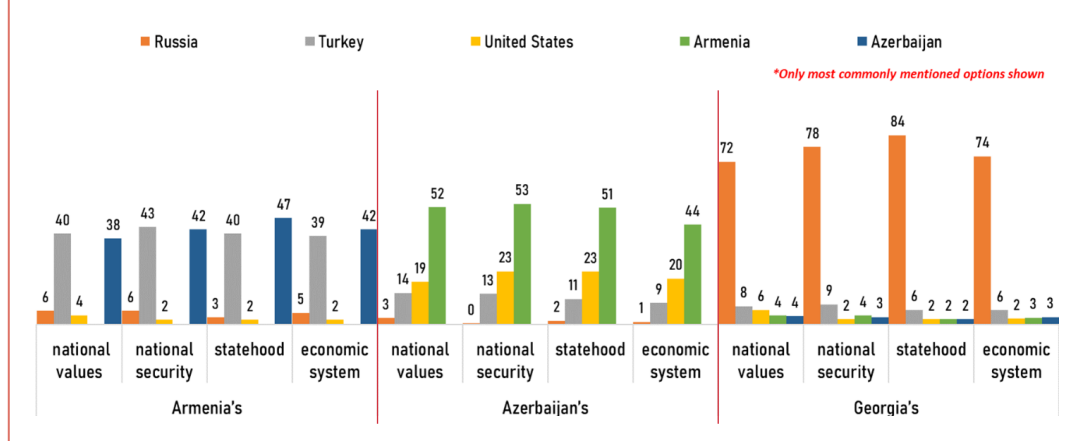
Young people's perception of foreign policy preferences is also reflected in their views on cooperation with other countries in various fields. According to a plurality of Armenian youth, Russia is the best option for ensuring national security (49%), economic growth (34%), and the protection of human rights in the country (32%). However, considering the September 2023 developments in Karabakh, these positions may have changed. The United States was the second most common choice for supporting economic growth (24%) and the protection of human rights (30%) in Armenia. In Azerbaijan, Turkey is considered the leader in facilitating economic growth (86%), protecting human rights (80%), and ensuring national security (90%). As for Georgia, EU countries and the United States are believed to contribute to Georgia's development in all areas. Importantly, a sizeable portion of young people in Armenia (7%) and Azerbaijan (28%) see Georgia as a country that contributes to their country's economic growth.

Figure 8. COOPERATION WITH WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES WILL CONTRIBUTE TO ... (% , multiple choice, full sample)



Youth in all countries have straightforward views on potential threats: for Georgians, Russia is the greatest threat to national values (72%), security (78%), statehood (84%), and economic system (74%). Azerbaijani young people view Armenia as the most important threat, while Armenian young people’s views on threats are almost equally divided between Azerbaijan and Turkey (Figure 9).

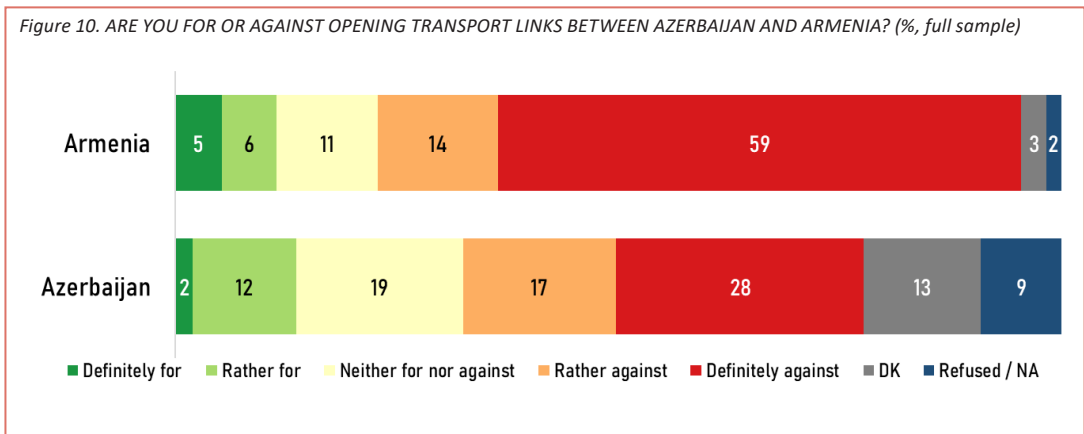
Figure 9. COOPERATION WITH WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES WILL THREATEN... (% , multiple choice, full sample)



The attitudes of young people towards foreign policy topics vary significantly across all countries of the South Caucasus. While young people from Georgia are predominantly oriented toward the West, with the stated goal of integrating Georgia into the EU and clearly identifying Russia as the most significant threat to their country’s development, the foreign policy choices and preferences of Armenians and Azerbaijanis are related to the existing tensions between these two countries. Azerbaijani youth tend to be oriented toward Turkey and view Armenia as a major threat. Conversely, a plurality of Armenian youth rely on Russia and hold equally worrying views of both Azerbaijan and Turkey. These findings should be interpreted cautiously, however, since they reflect positions prior to the September 2023 military action in Karabakh. The opinions of young people may have since changed.

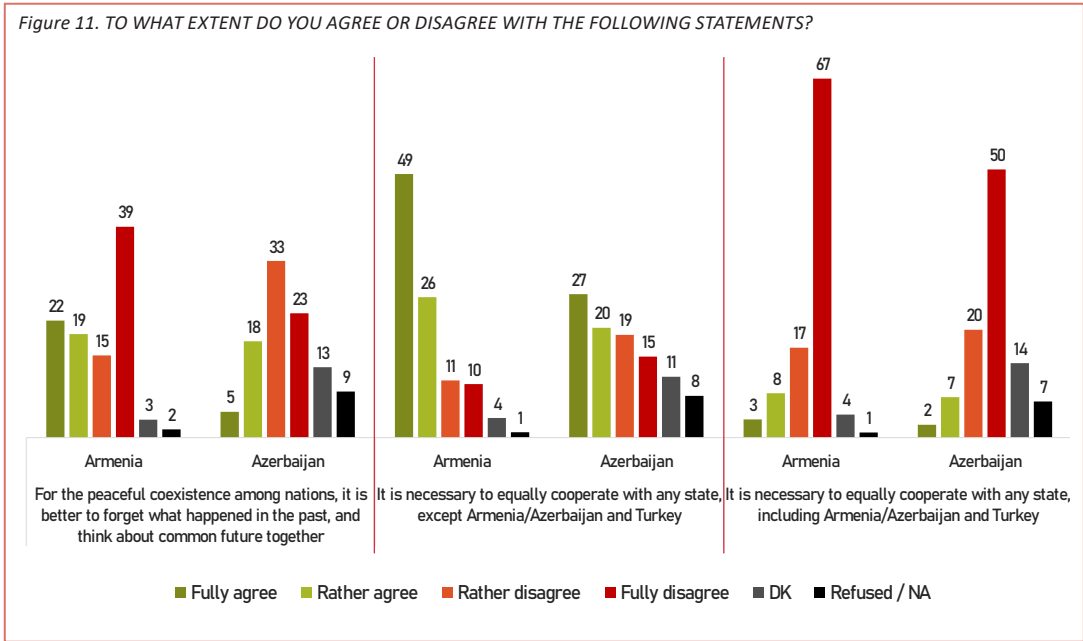
POSITIONS REGARDING CONFLICTS IN THE REGION

At the time the study was conducted (late spring - early summer 2022), the status quo of the November 2020 ceasefire in Karabakh was still intact. A significant majority of Armenian youth (40% definitely; 42% somewhat) expected the possibility of a resumption of conflict over the next five years, which proved to be the case with the September 2023 military developments. The results for the same questions were somewhat different among Azerbaijani youth. A plurality of respondents either did not know how to answer the questions (29%) or refused (7%) to provide any response. Only 26% felt that there was some likelihood of a resumption of armed conflict. When asked about opening transportation links between the two countries, most young people in both Armenia and Azerbaijan were reluctant. In Armenia, opposition to the idea (59% definitely against) was stronger than in Azerbaijan (28% definitely against). Additionally, around one-fifth (22%) of Azerbaijani youth did not express any opinion on this topic (Figure 10).



During the survey, Armenian and Azerbaijani youth were asked whether or not they agreed with the following statement: “For the peaceful coexistence among nations, it is better to forget what happened in the past and think about a common future together”. Armenians showed a higher degree of agreement (41%) with this statement than their Azerbaijani peers (23%). However, in both cases, more than half of the respondents were against the idea, with 54% in Armenia and 56% in Azerbaijan reporting disagreement with this claim. Cooperation with other countries is generally welcomed, with 75% of Armenian and 47% of Azerbaijani young people supporting the idea. However, it should be noted that support is limited to countries other than Azerbaijan or Turkey in the case of Armenia, and other than Armenia in the case of Azerbaijan. It should be noted that when Armenia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan are included among other countries, willingness to cooperate shrinks significantly. Only 11% of Armenian youth support the idea of cooperation with other countries including Azerbaijan and Turkey, and only 9% of Azerbaijani youth feel the same when Armenia is included.

Figure 11. TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?



At the time the fieldwork for the study was carried out, the painful experiences and wounds of the 2020 war were still fresh in both societies, and the findings should be interpreted through this lens. Armenian youth expressed fear of a resumption of hostilities, and feelings of reconciliation were either moderate or in many cases non-existent. The focus group discussions and results of the quantitative survey revealed that Armenian youth consider the Karabakh issue to be the most pressing problem facing Armenia. The focus group discussions with Azerbaijani youth showed that the war also had a significant impact on their consciousness, although in contrast to their Armenian counterparts, the conflict chapter was closed and they were more focused on the reconstruction and integration of Karabakh into Azerbaijan. However, like their Armenian counterparts, reconciliatory and cooperative sentiments were not prevalent.

CONCLUSION

The comparative study highlights the differences and similarities among young people in the South Caucasus. The survey shows that while young people tend to be optimistic about their well-being, a significant proportion still depend on parental support. Although they are becoming more financially independent as they mature, unemployment rates among those over 18 remain significant. Between one-quarter and one-third of young people aged 14-29 in the South Caucasus are NEETs, posing a significant long-term challenge for the countries in this region. These figures are even higher for young women, who are more likely to report being NEETs, and less likely than young men to report having personal income in all three countries.

At the declared level, support for democracy is strong, highest in Georgia, followed by Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, participation and interest in politics are weak among young people. Political passivity and low levels of engagement are accompanied by low levels of trust in institutions. Most young people in all countries believe that their interests and those of their peers are not well represented in national politics, leading to high levels of political disengagement. While trust in institutions is low in all three countries, females tend to have slightly more trust in institutions than males. The foreign policy preferences of young people appear to be largely aligned with the stated foreign policy goals, experiences, and commitments of their countries, at least as of the study implementation period from May-July 2022. In Georgia, which is the most integrated into European institutions and has declared its goal of becoming an EU member state in the near future, young people have clearly defined pro-European and pro-Western foreign policy preferences and view Russia as a major threat to their country. In contrast, it is the tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan that determine the foreign policy attitudes of the young people of those countries. Young people from Azerbaijan and Armenia perceive each other's countries as a major threat to their national security, statehood, and national values. In this context, Azerbaijani youth are clearly Turkey-oriented, while the plurality of Armenian youth still count on Russia, according to the survey conducted in May-July 2022. In Armenia, a significant portion of respondents also considered the importance of cooperation with the United States and European countries.

The existing conflict and tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan have influenced the opinions and expectations of young people. In Armenia, there was a strong fear of conflict renewal in Karabakh, while in Azerbaijan young people were less concerned about a potential resumption of hostilities. As of 2022, young people in Armenia and Azerbaijan were still skeptical about building partnerships and cooperation between the two countries.

About the Author

Dr Rati Shubladze is a researcher with more than ten years of experience carrying out quantitative and qualitative research in Georgia and the South Caucasus. He holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from Tbilisi State University. Since 2015 he has been teaching at several Georgian universities and is currently affiliated with the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA), serving as the head of the Sociology Programme. Rati has experience of working in the public opinion polling organisations, as well as being part of the international monitoring and evaluation research projects. Furthermore, he was part of the academic research projects focusing on youth, history and culture. His academic interests include elections, post-soviet transformation, youth culture and youth studies.

