

2023

YOUTH STUDY YOUTH VOICES OF AZERBAIJAN – ATTITUDES, VALUES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Half of all young people (51%) in Azerbaijan report that their households can afford more than just food and clothing, while 28% say there is enough money for clothing and shoes, but not enough to buy a large household appliance. Fourteen percent are at the bottom of the financial ladder, with 10% only affording food and 4% basic necessities.
- Residents of Baku report being better off than those living in rural areas. In addition, ethnic Azerbaijanis and young people with higher education claim a higher subjective level of well-being compared to youth that indicated their ethnicity as other than Azerbaijani¹ and those with primary education.
- The majority of young people (59%) in Azerbaijan believe that materially they are in the same condition as other fellow citizens. Men, Baku residents, respondents in the oldest age cohort, employed persons and holders of higher education are more likely to evaluate the material situation of their household as worse than the majority in their geographic area.

- More than half of the young Azerbaijanis² have personal income, including salaries and other types of income, while 59% are financially dependent on parents, relatives or partners.³ Only 7% report receiving state support, including a family pension.
- The majority of youth in Baku (61%) possess some form of personal income, while more youth outside Baku depend on family members. Young women, those between the ages of 14 and 17 and those who indicated their ethnicity as other than Azerbaijani are more likely to be dependents than young men, older age cohorts and ethnic Azerbaijani youth.
- About a quarter of young people in Azerbaijan (26%) are enrolled in an educational institution, including secondary and tertiary educational establishments. More youth residing in Baku are in educational institutions (32%) compared to 25% of those in other urban areas and 24% of rural youth.
- More than half of Azerbaijani youth (56%) are dissatisfied with the quality of education they are receiving or have received at schools. Respondents in or with higher education were most likely to be dissatisfied with the quality of education that their institutions are giving or have given in the past.
- Many do not feel that schools prepare them for the labour market. About 72% of those who are still in educational institutions said that they are either not confident at all (27%) or mostly not confident (45%) that schools prepare them for the labour market, with only 10% being mostly or fully confident in this regard.
- Young people in focus group discussions were critical of the country's education system. Respondents noted that schools offer outdated curricula, instructors are not on top of the modern approaches to education and the quality of education itself fails to respond to the demands of the labour market.
- Half of the young people in Azerbaijan report being employed, either in full-time jobs (27%), part-time jobs (4%), occasional jobs (5%) or are self-employed (14%).
- Youth from Baku (59%), young men (62%), those between the ages of 25 and 29 (71%) and those with higher education (76%) are more likely to have a job compared to youth from outside the capital, young women (36%), younger age cohorts and those with a lower level of education.
- The proportion of NEETs⁴ among Azerbaijan's 14- to 29-year-olds is about 25%. Three times more young women (39%) neither have jobs nor are in education or training compared to only 12% of young men. Similarly, youth outside Baku are more likely to be NEETs than those residing in the capital.
- Young Azerbaijanis believe that level of education (81%), friends and relatives (65%), family wealth (64%) and previous experience (62%) are the most important factors in obtaining a job they want. This indicates that meritocratic, as well as non-meritocratic factors play an important role in employment in Azerbaijan.

- Only about one in ten Azerbaijani youth (9%) has volunteered in the last twelve months. While few young Azerbaijanis have done volunteer work, groups such as youth outside the capital, ethnic minority youth, employed respondents and those older than 24 were more likely to have volunteered in the last year.
- More than half (54%) of young Azerbaijanis support the idea that democracy is the best way to govern Azerbaijan, with 28% being against this idea. Youngsters in Baku are least enthusiastic about democracy, with the plurality being either totally or somewhat against it (42%).
- The practice of democracy in Azerbaijan is seen either positively or fully positively (53%). Negative views on the practice of democracy in Azerbaijan prevail among young people living in the capital, with the plurality (42%) thinking so.
- Few young Azerbaijanis say that they are interested in politics. A plurality (43%) is not interested in politics at all, with about one-quarter of respondents (26%) saying they are not very interested in politics and one in five (20%) being somewhat or very interested in politics.
- Young men and 25- to 29-year-olds are more likely to have at least some level of interest in politics. Additionally, one in five respondents in the capital finds it hard to answer this question.
- Only 23% of those who had at least some degree of interest in politics⁵ discuss the subject with their peers frequently, with 64% doing it rarely and 6% never talking about politics with friends. Even fewer talk about politics with parents, with only 18% doing so frequently, 59% discussing politics rarely and 11% never talking about politics with their parents.
- Few young Azerbaijanis engage with political news, with only one-quarter accessing political information at least once a week. Over one-third (35%) of respondents report hardly ever consuming political news, while 7% do so infrequently, just once a month.
- A plurality of young Azerbaijanis (40%) believe that their interests are well-represented in national politics, while many are unsure⁶ or believe that their interests are poorly or not at all represented (30% each).
- Few young Azerbaijanis would take on a political function. Only about 18% of respondents said that they either gladly or maybe would take on a political function. Young men and respondents with higher education are slightly more likely to be willing to take on a political function.
- Overall, close to three-quarters of young Azerbaijanis (74%) have not participated in any social or political activities. Those outside Baku, younger respondents and those with lower educational attainment are less likely to be politically engaged.

- The economy is the most important grievance for young Azerbaijanis, with 58% of respondents naming rising prices as the most important problem facing the country. Importantly, the issue of territorial integrity is considered a major problem by 11% of the Azerbaijani youth and was named most frequently as the second most important problem (45%).
- Few young Azerbaijanis claim association with left-leaning or right-leaning political ideologies. A plurality (36%) places themselves in the centre,⁷ with 32% unsure about ideological self-placement.
- Most respondents are unable to clearly identify left-wing or right-wing policies, highlighting that the results on ideological self-placement should be taken with a grain of salt.
- Only a minority (26%) of young people in Azerbaijan believe that Azerbaijan is a European country, with about an equal proportion (27%) unable to answer this question.
- The perspectives of youth towards Europe are complex. A plurality believes that Europe is a place of democracy and rule of law (45%), as well as cultural and scientific achievements (40%). Over one-third perceive Europe as the wealthiest and most prosperous region (35%). Still, negative sentiments are widespread – close to one-third associate it with an unfamiliar world with its own rules (36%) and approx. one-quarter of youth feel Europe is home to unwelcoming and cold people (22%), as well as moral decline and a loss of traditional values (24%).
- The majority (89%) state that Turkey is Azerbaijan’s closest friend. Turkey is also perceived as the most important foreign actor that can contribute to the development of the Azerbaijani economy (86%), protection of human rights (80%) and national security (90%).
- A positive image of Turkey supporting the development of the economy, human rights and national security is elevated across all socio-demographic groups. A positive impact of the EU on the Azerbaijani economy is relatively more endorsed by youth from Baku and those with higher education.
- More than half of the young respondents believe that cooperating with Armenia can threaten the country’s national values (52%), national security (53%) and statehood (51%). A plurality also claims that cooperation with Armenia could threaten Azerbaijan’s economic system (44%). One-fifth is also afraid that cooperation with the United States can do the same.
- Perceptions about international organisations among young people are divided. While a plurality thinks that the EU (49%), international financial institutions (48%), NATO (46%) or other international organisations (44%) play a rather positive or clearly positive role, the rest of the young respondents either fail to provide any evaluation or think that those organisations impact the country negatively.

- When young people are given the choice of the “West” vs “Russia”, a plurality (48%) lean toward the “West”, however, intermediate positions such as “no polarisation is preferable” (16%) are also widespread. The rejection of polarisation is more widespread among young people in the capital and those with higher education.
- A plurality of young people in Azerbaijan either are not able to evaluate the impact of the end of the USSR [30% report that they do not know the answer or refuse to provide any answer (8%)]. Nearly equal proportions report neutral (24%) or positive (26%) responses, while only 12% believe that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a negative event.
- More than half of young people aged 14-17 and those with primary education do not have any position (“don’t know” or “refuse to answer”) regarding the dissolution of the Soviet Union, while those with higher education (38%) and those aged 25-29 (34%) more positively evaluate this event compared to their peers.
- Nearly half (48%) of young respondents are undecided regarding the consequences of the 1990s for Azerbaijan. The rest are divided on whether the first decade of independence brought more good (24%) or bad (27%).
- A positive evaluation of the end of the USSR is correlated with a positive assessment of the 1990s. Among those who believe that end of the Soviet Union was a good thing, 58% also think that the 90s eventually brought Azerbaijan good rather than bad things.
- Certain improvements since the 90s were mentioned in the context of earning money (25%) and getting qualified medical care (17%).
- A plurality (43%) of respondents report satisfaction with the outcome of the Karabakh conflict, while slightly more than one-quarter (28%) report neutral positions. Young people living in other urban (44%) or rural (47%) areas were slightly more satisfied with the outcome of the conflict when compared to those living in the capital (30%).
- Twenty-eight percent of young people reported that at least one person from their family participated in the 44-day Karabakh war as a soldier, military servant or volunteer. These figures were a little higher among other urban (28%) and rural (31%) settlements compared to the capital (22%).
- A plurality (45%) of respondents is against opening transport links between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This idea is less rejected in the capital (19%), while it faces more opposition among young people living in other urban (59%) and rural (48%) areas.

- A significant share of young people either do not know (29%) or refuse (7%) to respond to questions about the prospects of restarting the war in Karabakh over the next 5 years. While 38% think that there are no risks of resuming hostilities, 26% report a certain degree of possibility.
- Considering the context of the Karabakh war and Azerbaijan's relationship with its neighbours, the majority (60%) is inclined to believe that citizens must be ready to make different kinds of sacrifices for the sake of strengthening Azerbaijan's statehood. They believe that the only chance for Azerbaijan to progress is through deeper integration with Turkey (89%) rather than with Russia (55%).
- The majority (56%) disagrees with the statement that to achieve peaceful co-existence it is "better to forget what happened in the past". An echo of this position is seen when comparing two statements about cooperation with states – nearly half of the young people (47%) acknowledge that it is important to cooperate with all countries except Armenia. Only 9% agree to cooperate with all countries including Armenia.
- Being a citizen of Azerbaijan (90%) is the most widespread self-identification among young people. This is followed by local-regional (68%) and belonging to the Caucasus (66%) self-conceptions. Conversely, more cosmopolitan identities, like being a citizen of the world (36%) or European (9%), are shared by significantly smaller portions of young people. Only one-quarter (25%) of young people see themselves as belonging to a specific ethnic group, while one-third (33%) of respondents reject this idea.
- While the majority (72%) of respondents disagree that religious institutions have a special role in Azerbaijani society, nearly the same share (67%) of young people oppose the idea that freedom of speech entails possible criticism of all religions. Those living in Baku (54%) are more supportive of the idea that free speech involves criticism of religion compared to those living in other urban (30%) or rural (24%) areas. At the same time, young people from the capital (50%) report the special role of religious institutions more frequently than rural (24%) or other urban (19%) youth.
- Young people are inclined to support the universality of the dominant culture: 58% think that immigrants should adapt to Azerbaijani cultural traditions and 50% claim that it would be best for the country if everyone follows the same customs and traditions. Furthermore, 64% also reject the idea that the fusion of different religions and cultures can be beneficial for Azerbaijan. Support for religious and cultural heterogeneity is more widespread among young people living in the capital (55%) compared to those from other urban (23%) and rural (36%) areas.
- Despite traditional-preservation stances on the culture and society, the majority (63%) of respondents report that minority children should have the opportunity to be taught their native language in addition to their ordinary classes in Azerbaijani.

- The position that individuals should take more responsibility and rely less on the government is accepted by 40% and rejected by 60% of respondents. Young people from the capital (52%) are more supportive of such individualistic values compared to respondents from other urban (36%) or rural (37%) areas. The prevalence of personal responsibility is greater among young people with higher education (50%) than youth with secondary (39%) or primary (35%) schooling.
- Family values and merits associated with personal success or physical appearance are universally accepted by Azerbaijani youth, while civic participation activities are less endorsed. For instance, marriage (82%), having children (77%), being faithful to a partner (86%), taking responsibility (86%), being independent (86%), healthy eating (87%) and looking good (82%) are important for a substantial majority of youth.
- Being active in politics (29%) or participating in civic actions or initiatives (32%) is a shared value for only one-third of the youth in Azerbaijan. Engagement in political and civic actions is relatively higher in the capital – for 44% being active in politics, and for 49% participation in civic actions, is important.
- Personal dignity (35%), social prestige (19%) and material wealth (14%) are among the most important values for young people in Azerbaijan. From among compassion-related values, altruism (14%) was also frequently mentioned, while values like tolerance (3%) and solidarity (1%) were relatively neglected.
- Young people in Azerbaijan have a great deal of trust⁸ in law enforcement and executive government institutions: the army (97%), president (93%), police (83%) and national government (70%) are among the most trusted institutions.
- Among the least trusted institutions in Azerbaijan are the media (46% distrust⁹), political parties (46% distrust) and civil society organisations (42% distrust). These institutions are more trusted among young people living in Baku compared to those living outside the capital city. In addition, those with higher education tend to report relatively elevated levels of trust in the above-mentioned institutions.
- People from Armenia (57%), queer people¹⁰ (37%) and drug addicts (23%) are the most rejected groups, with respondents noting they should even be refused entry into Azerbaijan. As for the most welcomed categories, young people would accept a refugee (14%) and internally displaced people (10%) as members of their families.
- A majority of young people live with their parents in nuclear or extended families. In general, young people report getting along well with their parents (87%) and only a small minority report having a very conflicted relationship (2%). Only 5% report living with a friend or other relative and less than 1% say they live alone. The number of those living with their partner/spouse and children is higher among rural youth than urban and capital residents.

- Young people in Azerbaijan are not worried about climate change – less than 1% spontaneously mentioned it among the most important challenges Azerbaijan currently faces.
- When explicitly asked, 45% agree that climate change is a global emergency, but 28% find it hard to give a specific answer and 5% refuse to respond to the question.
- A majority (63%) believe that the causes of climate change are either entirely natural (31%) or primarily triggered by natural (32%) reasons. Only 33% consider that the roots of climate change in one way or another are related to human activity. Support for natural reasons is the highest among youth living in Baku (85%), while the same claim is shared by only 64% in other urban areas and 54% in rural areas.
- Despite the differences in causes, the majority (61%) of respondents back the introduction of preventive and restrictive measures to combat climate change. Young people living in the capital, those with higher education and those with high levels of living conditions are more enthusiastically supporting such measures compared to their peers with different socio-demographic characteristics.
- Overall, young people are optimistic about the future as 72% report experiencing hope and 63% feel confident when they hear about the efforts to mitigate global warming. A considerable number of respondents, however, report being indifferent (51%) to those actions.
- Only a small portion of young people (13%) have travelled abroad. Those aged 25-29 and those with higher education have visited foreign countries more frequently than their younger cohorts and those without higher education.
- Even fewer (3% of all young people and 26% of those with experience travel abroad) respondents have stayed abroad for longer than 6 months. Only 2% report visiting foreign countries for study or work reasons (18% of those who have ever been abroad).
- Moreover, the majority (80%) of young people do not wish to go abroad for study or work purposes. The desire to remain in Azerbaijan is highest in the capital, among females, married respondents, those aged 18-29 and young people with higher education.
- Among those who either have been abroad or would like to go abroad for employment or educational purposes, the majority name higher salaries (51%) and better educational prospects (44%) as the main reasons they would move to another country. The most desired destinations for relocation are Turkey (39%), Germany (16%) and Russia (12%).
- Young people in Azerbaijan are optimistic about the improvement of their family's (48%) and country's (55%) standard of living in the next 5 years, however, many are ambivalent.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Young people who indicated their ethnicity other than Azerbaijani will be referenced as “ethnic minorities” for the rest of the report.
- 2 Throughout the report, young people in Azerbaijan are also referred to as “young Azerbaijanis”, or “Azerbaijani youth”. These terms are used to describe the same group of young people that includes ethnic Azerbaijanis as well as young people who indicated their ethnicity other than Azerbaijani.
- 3 Note that proportions do not total 100 as respondents were allowed to choose more than one source of income. A respondent might have had personal income and also being partially supported by parents.
- 4 Not in Education, Employment or Training.
- 5 Excluding those who are not at all interested.
- 6 Report “don’t know” or “refuse to answer”.
- 7 Sum of 5 and 6 on a 10-point scale.
- 8 Sum of “fully” and “quite a lot”.
- 9 Sum of “not at all” and “a little”
- 10 The questionnaire made use of the word “homosexual” as there is no Azerbaijani equivalent of “queer”. Authors are aware of contextual differences between the English and Azerbaijani usage of this word.

CONTACT

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung South Caucasus (FES)
Nino Ramishvili Dead End I, Bldg. 1, App. 7
0179 Tbilisi, Georgia
Email: georgia@fes.de
<https://southcaucasus.fes.de/>