VALENTINA GEVORGYAN, YULIA ANTONYAN (EDS.)

# ARMENIA AFTER 2018

## SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

PETER LANG

This book focuses on social and political developments in Armenia during a turbulent post-2018 period. Between 2018 and 2020, the country experienced three significant waves of upheaval: a revolution, a pandemic, and a war. These events had far-reaching implications for Armenia's social, cultural, security, and political foundations. The book provides both factual insights and theoretical underpinnings that help readers understand the country's transformation and the resulting challenges. In its immediate neighbourhood, Armenia is one of the few countries with a clear commitment to democratic governance. However, the country, with its democratic potential in Europe's eastern neighbourhood, is currently undergoing complex dynamics in security and social spheres. The main goal of this volume is to shed light on Armenia's complicated reality, bring it into the research spotlight, and foster discussions about the country's core challenges.

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# ARMENIA AFTER 2018

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**PETER LANG**
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# Preface

The goal of this volume is to launch a discussion about Armenia and its various challenging realities today. This book addresses Armenia's social, cultural and political environment after the shocks that the country witnessed in the period of three years from 2018 to 2020. The seven chapters assess developments and transformations in Armenian society, politics and culture. The idea for this project came from the sense of an urgent need to shed more light on Armenia's intricate realities for the benefit of the international community, scholars and policy experts. The chapters focus on changes and transformations in Armenian society, providing an understanding of the processes of democratic resilience, social protests and the effects on society of the Artsakh 44-Day War or Second Karabakh War (2020). Despite the huge losses in the war and various shocks, Armenian society has opted for peace through democratic methods. Armenians have chosen the road to peace, not confrontation; negotiation, not violence. Today, Armenia, a country with democratic potential in Europe's eastern neighbourhood, is navigating very challenging dynamics on the security and social fronts.

Previously, literature has concentrated on comparative perspectives, looking at Armenia and its regional counterparts in a similar social and political context. Considering that circumstances and regional dynamics have positioned Armenia uniquely for analysis today (for reasons discussed in the introductory chapter), the value of this volume lies in its concentration on a single country. Presently, Armenia necessitates careful and considerate approaches to be able to withstand its many challenges, most importantly the challenges to its independence and statehood. Armenia today comes to the fore as a unique case study, as it has experienced a trifecta of social, political and security shocks over a period of three consecutive years, a circumstance that makes it imperative to analyse these developments and seek to understand the transformations that shocks entail.

Importantly, this volume puts a spotlight on Armenia as one of the few countries with potential for democratisation in an immediate neighbourhood of aggressive authoritarian regimes. Thematically the chapters cover the transformations in relation to the country's democratisation and life post-war. The book brings together established

but also new scholars, with fresh data and analysis conducted over the past years. The authors position themselves within different theoretical paradigms, but at the same time they are eager to examine the next realistic steps for Armenia's democratic institutional progress. The book will be of interest to academic communities, political and diplomatic circles, local, regional and international civil society organisations and other actors involved in development and peacebuilding. We were glad to accept the diverse points of view, which also offer stimuli for further thinking and research. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the University of Fribourg (Switzerland), Prof. Dr. Nicolas Hayoz and Peter Lang Publishing for understanding the value of and supporting generously this publication.

## About This Book

This book is a collection of seven chapters, which fall generally into two main sections: an analysis of life in Armenia since the revolution (2018) and life after the Second Karabakh War (2020). The first chapter by the editors sets the stage by inviting the reader to explore further the different realities (including the worst, but also the hopes for progress) of Armenian citizens. The introductory chapter explains the reasons for and the imperative behind developing this book. It discusses the political, social and security shocks that Armenia, a member of the EU's Eastern Partnership, has experienced over a period of three years. It offers a discussion of basic concepts, followed by some necessary background for understanding Armenia's context in the present. This chapter presents the trifecta of challenges that the country is facing today, which might be considered a combination of reasons for placing Armenia on the research and attention radar of the international community of scholars and policy experts. Firstly, the three chapters discuss Armenia's Velvet Revolution and democratisation efforts, secondly the three chapters that follow offer analyses of the post-war realities in Armenia.

Nerses Kopalyan's contribution addresses Armenia's transition and democratisation processes, by providing a multi-tiered understanding of how the country consolidated the democratisation process after the democratic breakthrough in 2018. Kopalyan examines a rigid security

and democracy dichotomy in the country, relevant to developments in Armenia especially in the post-war period or after the security shock, as the editors frame it in the introduction. Kopalyan also reflects on the uniqueness of Armenia's experience of a security crisis during the democratic transition, reflecting on the relationship between war, security and democratic consolidation. An important subject of inquiry for post-war Armenia has been the "democracy-versus-security" discourse, a dichotomous framework that has eroded democracy in countries where a cultural understanding of democracy has been highly instrumentalised. Kopalyan's chapter fills a gap in the literature on the relationship between democracy and security, demonstrating that authoritarian reversals, based on promises of security, fail in the face of extensive empirical evidence. More so, democratising societies such as Armenia value democracy equally with security, and further qualify the enhancement of their security environment with the enhancement of their democratic safeguards.

As a different point of view, the next contribution is by Khatchik Der Ghougassian, who proposes a critical assessment of Armenia's Velvet Revolution by taking sides in the debate about the 'Velvet' phenomenon from a leftist critical perspective. Der Ghougassian's essay is a somewhat general inquiry into whether Armenia's Velvet Revolution has contributed to democratisation or otherwise; according to his analysis, it revealed a somewhat ideological cast of neoliberalism, that has limited the democratisation pretensions that are raised as a legitimisation flag by the revolutionary regime. Der Ghougassian places Armenia's Velvet Revolution in the wider context of the popular mobilisations in the aftermath of the post-Cold War transition at the end of the 1990s, taking a critical path that questions the assumption of democratisation per se, and focuses on the ideological drive that lies behind it. The author makes assumptions, including that democratisation is closely linked to economic inclusion, that populist uprisings are not ideologically impartial, and that extreme wealth concentration disables any structural reforms aimed at deepening democracy. The author's main argument is that whereas social protest at the beginning of the twenty-first century in Latin America targeted neoliberalism and aimed at the deepening of democracy through a fairer redistribution of wealth, Armenia's Velvet phenomenon followed closely the script of the "democratic revolutions" in its abstention from any criticism of the dominant assumption of free market economics with respect to the question of wealth redistribution.

The chapter by Hrayr Manukyan attaches importance to viewing the country's performance solely on the basis of international indicators, which makes it a clear and practical contribution to approaching Armenia's democratisation. Manukyan argues that Armenia has substantially democratised since the revolution, and that this democratisation is partially due to the Velvet phenomenon itself, viewed in his analysis as a case of civil disobedience. The author also responds to some vocal opinions that downgrade or reject the significance of Armenia's democratic transition after 2018. This contribution demonstrates that Armenia was a semi-authoritarian country before 2018, and became a democracy (though not a consolidated one) after 2018, despite the challenges from other shocks (discussed in the introduction), the pressure from outside authoritarian regimes and internal authoritarian tendencies. Manukyan's chapter indirectly acknowledges the value of the empirical potential of research methodologies and measurements of democracy. By concentrating on the case of Armenia, the author's contribution highlights the importance of international standards and indicators offered by institutions tracking the performance of countries worldwide.

The next three chapters concentrate on realities in Armenia following the Artsakh 44-Day War or the Second Karabakh War (2020). The first chapter in this section offers an analysis by Alen Shadunts, who reflects on the moment of identity dislocation or crisis for Armenians. The author argues that the war has challenged some of the most sedimented narratives regarding self-identification in Armenian society, articulated around the notions of revival and victory. Shadunts discusses the polarising environment in Armenia, the limited thinking and the lack of self-reflective practices on the part of oppositional forces, as well as the different mechanisms used for coping with this situation so as to navigate a self-certainty through different articulations of subjectivity. By reflecting on the existing fierce political competition to define what the war was and how it should fit into the broader discursive structures of national identity, Shadunts proposes a thinking about the shaping of the national "*self*", the use and popularity of narratives, and their influence as means of ontological security. Methodologically, the author offers a discourse analysis of contrasting narratives, discussing their attempts to provide answers and to mitigate the disorienting effects of the war.

The next chapter by Aghasi Tadevosyan raises an extremely important issue, which seems to have attracted less attention than it deserves in

the post-war period, due to a multiplicity of everyday societal problems. Tadevosyan's contribution reflects on social transformation, in particular the issue of the different traumas experienced by the forcibly displaced population as a result of the war. This chapter points to indifference as the biggest societal problem, also building on the imperative for policymaking that would prioritise the issues that have clearly impacted the forcibly displaced population. This chapter focuses on the need to "rehabilitate lives" amid the new security and other challenges in the country. By uncovering the losses and traumas suffered by the displaced population, Tadevosyan raises priorities that demand the attention of the policymaking community, namely, to focus on issues related to the displaced population: their integration into society, rebuilding lives anew, and providing material and other assistance on their way to becoming full members of Armenian society.

The last chapter focuses on public perceptions of the future. Arpy Manusyan, Mariam Khalatyan and Nvard Margaryan offer an analysis of the ways that the different crises in Armenia have impacted public perceptions regarding the social and political future of the country. Methodologically, the trajectory towards potential peaceful coexistence with Armenia's aggressive neighbour is the focal point for the conversations conducted for the purpose of this chapter. The authors' analysis focuses on the social changes that have affected the public, the characteristics of the peace narratives before and after the war, and how the expert community in Armenia imagines the future of the country and peaceful coexistence with Azerbaijan within the broader perspective of regional transformations. By discussing social and political theories regarding the future, agency and the liquidity of modern times, the authors offer an analysis of how the ambiguity of the future affects peace narratives. The chapter also analyses what role political agency experts have in terms of developing regional relations and influencing the country's future. The authors frame local perceptions within the definition of agency as temporal-relational contexts of social and political action that can both reproduce and transform structures in changing historical situations.

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **BTI** | Bartelsmann Transformation Index |
| **CSO** | Civil Society Organisation |
| **ECHR** | European Court of Human Rights |
| **EIU** | Economist Intelligence Unit |
| **IDEA** | International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance |
| **IDI** | In-depth Interviews |
| **IMF** | International Monetary Fund |
| **IR** | International Relations |
| **IRI** | International Republican Institute |
| **LDI** | Liberal Democracy Index |
| **NK** | Nagorno-Karabakh |
| **NKAO** | Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast |
| **NGO** | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| **OSCE** | Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe |
| **PM** | Prime Minister |
| **RA** | Republic of Armenia |
| **RWB** | Reporters Without Borders International Non-Profit Organisation |
| **US** | United States |
| **V-Dem** | Varieties of Democracy Institute |
| **WB** | World Bank |

Valentina Gevorgyan / Yulia Antonyan

# 1. Armenia after 2018. Social and Political Transformations

**Abstract:** This introductory chapter explains the reasons for developing this book. It offers reflections on the ideas and concepts used in this book, based on the case of Armenia. This chapter also provides some necessary background for understanding Armenia's social and political context. It then presents a discussion of three shocks that the country experienced, followed by the trifecta of challenges ensuing from these.

**Keywords:** Armenia, revolution, democracy, war, political shock, social shock, transformation, transition

From both academic and policy perspectives, Armenia comes to the fore as a unique case with respect to three events over the period of the past several years that have shaken the country to its core: the 2018 revolution, the Covid-19 pandemic and Azerbaijan's war imposed on Armenians in 2020. From 2018 to 2020, these three events shook its social, cultural, security and political foundations. Inevitably, such shocks have consequences. These consequences and the possible transformations of Armenian society constitute the main focus of this book. We intend to provide an understanding of loss, death, trauma and other categories that dispose societies to change. At the same time, we admit that our intention to reflect on transformations in a society after such a short period of time may well be considered ambitious. But we attempt this in view of Armenia's egregious problems due to its positioning in a hellhole of neighbours, and the treacherous road ahead filled with challenges that make analytical contributions urgent. The idea for this book came out of the need to provide an understanding of the situation today, after this trilogy of shocks. These shocks, as evidenced, do not seem to be going away. Instead, they snowball into a chorus of challenges, with the potential of blotting out the rationale for moving forward. Presently, Armenia finds itself in a villainous alliance,

as a state entity, forced into the position of a victim in a continual web of internal problems, external complications, betrayal and despair, trauma and anger, and other characteristics discussed in this book.

Our intention to provide an understanding of the country's various transformations, or otherwise, calls immediately for an assessment of conditions. This book addresses the social, cultural and political transformations of a country that is enduring amid old and new challenges. A post-war environment is a challenge to democracy per se. At this time, there are too many latent and manifest difficulties preventing Armenia from establishing an environment in which a democratic transformation might be possible. We hold on to the idea that Armenia requires a thoughtful strategy to maintain its statehood, sovereignty and security, by inviting interdisciplinary thinking and research.

We should like to place the larger idea for this book within the contours of the centre and periphery model, which serves to provide an understanding of the meanings of former peripheries based on the case of Armenia (Filippov, Hayoz, and Herlth, 2020). As a priority *conceptual umbrella*, we have also chosen an approach that allows us to view countries mainly through their regime type classifications (as opposed to, for example, rivalries among states or economic advantages), which places Armenia (categorised as a transitional government or a hybrid regime) in a better position than its neighbouring consolidated authoritarian regimes, including Azerbaijan and Russia (Freedom House, 2023). We believe that this shall remain an overarching frame of reference, if we are to expect a democratic transformation in former peripheries trying to break the chain of post-Sovietism.

Armenia resides on a crossroads of shifting geopolitical alliances and strategies, as well as the aspirations of autocrats taking advantage of and impeding peacemaking efforts on the part of former peripheries. Former centres aim to reinstate their power, regardless of the costs, either human, territorial or financial. This is no surprise. We might consider Russia's war in Ukraine having an undeniable resemblance to Azerbaijani aggression in Nagorno Karabakh just previously. Since 2020, Armenia's neighbourhood has become a region of war, drama and loss due to the warmongering of bloody dictators nurtured by an "all you can eat" policy of their own making and arbitrary approval. Such is the result of a region being abandoned by civilised and democratic powers to the appetite of oil-rich autocracies seeking solely to reinstate their illegitimate power and reap the benefits

for as long as they can, by reimposing an Orwellian disorder on the post-Soviet space.

The types and means of transformation appear across disciplines and theories, with the aim of understanding cultural, political, social, economic and other changes in societies throughout the world. We admit that it might be too soon to address academically the various transformations in Armenia over such a short period. However, the task we set forth is inevitable, judging the scale of the challenges that exist in Armenia. We started to prepare this book in 2021, and it is being published in 2023. We put this timeline into the title to give an idea to the reader, who might be seeking to learn what happened, of how Armenia is coping amid the wide array of problems today. We are interested in the transformations that result in the aftermath of cultural, security and other shocks, in the context of a country which moved towards democratisation, but ended up in a web of thorns meticulously prepared by small and big autocrats in its hostile neighbourhood. Hence, considering Armenia as a separate case even after such a short period is a task worth following. The discussions we offer in this book, within its larger intention, are conceptual contributions in terms of providing an understanding of shocking processes or events having impacts on society.

## An Explanation of Concepts

Generally, when describing revolutionary changes in a society, two main concepts are used: *transformation* and *transition*. *Transformation* is an abstract concept, and can mean many things. Inquiries regarding the transformation of societies have varied and been viewed in the context of critical theory (Delanty, 2020; Habermas, 1989), cultural changes (Marwick, 2011) or economic perspectives (Polanyi, 1957). Transformation has also been viewed in the context of particular research areas, for example as a development of society towards democracy and the vibrancy of critical public forces (Almond and Verba, 1989; Tocqueville, 2002), or in historical legacy and memory policy (Walkowitz and Knauer, 2004). The notions of *transformation* and *transition* have also been approached in different contexts to describe social change (for example, Adloff and Neckel, 2019;

Castles, 2001; Hölscher, Wittmayer, and Loorbach, 2018). In this book, we are concerned with the ways in which major shocks have impact. Shocks transform societies. The chapters in this book attempt to address what such transformations might look like, and in what ways they can be framed in a post-shock environment.

The other term, *transition*, has a more complicated history of use. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the period of the 1990s and early 2000s has often been addressed as a "transitional" one, from totalitarian, socialist regimes to democracy and market economy systems (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999; Herrschel, 2007). The editors of the volume *Uncertain Transitions*, Michel Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, address the concept of transition anthropologically and sociologically (1999: 4). According to them, the transitional period is a process connecting the past to the future. In political terms, the process of transition has been perceived as a revolutionary transformation of totalitarian societies until another order of things (neoliberal, capitalist, democratic) is established. However, while political science operates with a general term of *transition*, anthropologists and sociologists prefer to speak more of *transitions*, that is, different ethnographic realities, which make the process multidimensional, heterogenic and socially/culturally determined (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999, Herrschel, 2007). As such, and in different contexts, the term has been applied to the Armenian situation as well (Ishkanian, 2003; Tadevosyan, 2016). Variations of political mechanisms (shock therapies, restoration of socialist legacies, post-colonial developments, revolutions, etc.), local forms of market realities and social structures, wars and national ideologies all make the process of transition rather uncertain and vague as a concept. And this seems to be the reason why social scientists prefer either totally to reject *transition* in favour of rather neutral concepts (e.g. *transformation*), or to reduce its meaning to a revolutionary process of social and political rupture and the subsequent re-establishment of relative institutional and social order. In this sense, revolutionary ruptures are viewed as a "radical form of discontinuity" (Holbraad, Kapferer and Sauma, 2019: 2), which, taken anthropologically, cannot be judged positively or negatively, or conceptualised as successes or failures; they may be only multiplied ethnographically to discover different ways of conceiving and experiencing them (Holbraad, Kapferer and Sauma, 2019: 9). The Bartelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) views countries according to their political, economic and governance variables, offering

sub-indicators for each. According to its political transformation[1] Armenia scores 6.75 (on a scale of 10; the higher the figure, the closer to *democracy in consolidation*) (BTI, 2022).

A few words are warranted here about Armenia's revolution in 2018 and the reasons why this book treats this event as a starting point for the analytical and empirical enquiries collected here. A number of valuable texts on both successful and unsuccessful cases of revolutions in the post-socialist space contain interdisciplinary insights into the patterns and mechanics of these revolutions, their main actors and beneficiaries, their strategies and post-revolutionary developments. One of the earlier insights defines these "colour revolutions" as "a number of non-violent protests that succeeded in overthrowing authoritarian regimes" (Beacháin and Polese, 2010: 1), offering five variables for the analysis of such a phenomenon: (1) the character of the state and elites on the eve of the protests; (2) the character of the opposition; (3) external influences; (4) civil society; and (5) people (Beacháin and Polese, 2010: 7–9). With these variables, the authors try to understand why in some cases (Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan) revolutions have been successful, while in others (Armenia in 2008, Russia, Belarus) they failed. In Gerlach's study, the risk of regime cycles, meaning the cyclic comebacks of nepotism, corruption and coercion under revolutionary governments, is discussed, without a deep analysis of the reasons for this (Gerlach, 2014: 48). In these and other studies attempts were made to understand the internal social/cultural/religious factors influencing the character of these revolutions and their general geopolitical and historical contexts.

The Armenian experience of both failed (2003–2004, 2008)[2] and successful (2018) revolutions demonstrates the importance of conjunctures. It also shows how even minor oscillations in such contextual factors as post-colonial relationships with a previous coloniser, dormant

1    An aggregate concept based on the following sub-indicators: stateness, political participation, rule of law, stability of institutions, and political and social integration (each offering detailed conceptualisation) (BTI, 2022); <https://bti-project.org/en/repo rts/country-report/ARM#pos3>.

2    Public protests and political movements in 2003–2004 and 2008 used to be interpreted as attempted but failed revolutions (Gerlach, 2014; Zolyan, 2010). The events of 2008 were led by, among others, Nikol Pashinyan, who would later lead the successful Velvet Revolution of 2018.

ethnic and territorial conflicts, the presence/absence of natural resources, natural friends and natural enemies, or global religious and civilisational identities can crucially affect revolutionary and post-revolutionary processes, affecting their successful development or failure. The Armenian situation is also a good example of how local specificities of informal and moral economies, the formation of elites, socialist legacies and traditions of civic movements may define revolutionary changes and developments. The fusion of different disciplinary approaches might become a basis for a new situational analysis opening new horizons towards understanding the colour revolutions and the tectonic shifts in global geopolitics produced by them.

However, was Armenia's April 2018 uprising a revolution, or was it a simple shift of power? Was it aimed at democratisation or for the sake of a change of power? These questions remain a subject of discussion in Armenian public discourse to date, and warrant attention. We hereby respond with certainty that Armenia's Velvet Revolution of 2018 was a revolution, as it retained some vital functions, attributes and realities of such an event, following similar developments in the post-Soviet space. The literature on colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space is wealthy (for example, Beacháin and Polese, 2010; Mitchell, 2012; Polese, 2010). Even the revolution's immediate aftermath points to consequences that display similarities with other events and processes in the region, for example former civic actors moving into the government, and the lack of public policy experience and expertise (Gevorgyan, 2021). In short, the effort to portray Armenia's nationwide uprising in 2018 as a non-revolution but simply a seizure of power seems to be merely an attempt to discredit the government, which might fairly be blamed for malpractices and lack of expertise, but not for failing to bring about a revolution according to its selected factual manifestations. It was undeniably a revolution because it also had one of the most important revolutionary indicators, a conflict of elites (Lachmann, 1997), that of old oligarchic and nationalistic ruling groups with new liberal intellectuals, which resulted in the complete transformation of the elite structures. Did Armenia's Velvet Revolution intend to produce democratisation? It surely did. Did the revolution meet its initial expectations? We might not want to be equally confident here, and some of the discussion in the chapters that follow addresses this issue.

Revolutions do not simply end with the change of a political regime. Sometimes they slide into civil wars, and severe economic and value

crises, which result in another autocracy. From this perspective, Armenia's 'Velvet' resembled technically an ideal revolutionary event, worthy of examination in textbooks and potentially surprising to experts, who call it an "Armenian anomaly" (see, for example, Derluguian and Hovhannisyan, 2018; Iskandaryan, 2018). It was a non-violent, ideologically and technically well-organised process, strongly supported by the masses, a true political upheaval which was long dreamed of by civil society (Abrahamyan and Shagoyan, 2018; Ishkanian, 2019); and a manifestation of the developing ecosystem of Armenian civil society (Paturyan and Gevorgyan, 2020).

At the same time, it became a source of external and internal threats that were not long in coming. Armenia was not an exception in terms of the geopolitical turbulence and wars that follow revolutions; a similar condition of fatal developments was shared by Georgia and Ukraine as well. Wars following revolutions (both civil and external ones) might be seen as part of post-revolutionary transition. Such appears to be the case, as they usually involve a number of (risky and dangerous, exposed to potential failure, but sometimes necessary) existential passages from (re)-colonisation to decolonisation, from economic dependency and monopolies to free and (relatively) competitive markets, from colonial and patriarchal elites to self-sustained and self-made rulers, from obsolete status-based hierarchical structures to a modernised, meritocratic and technological society. Armenia of 2020 and 2022 and, to a greater extent, Ukraine of 2022 are vivid examples of such post-revolutionary wars, with promising global consequences similar to those following the French (1789) or the Bolshevik (1917) revolutions.

Although we do not include chapters on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Armenian society in this volume, it should still be stressed as a shocking event, supporting the regime of political uncertainty and ultimately becoming a convenient cover-up for the Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War of 2020. Generally considered and interpreted in the context of major shifts of the geopolitical world-system, the discussed cluster of events have generated large-scale changes in both the internal and external politics of Armenia. The pandemic and the war in aggregate constituted a serious challenge for the nascent revolutionary government in Armenia.

Naturally, for a time it seemed that the government was doomed to fail, and that the previous oligarchic elites were close to registering a comeback. In an article published in 2022 (though obviously written earlier), two scholars foresaw the potential for political death for the ruling party and

Nikol Pashinyan, whose reputation was severely damaged by the military defeat of 2020 (see Derluguian and Hovhannisyan, 2022: 919). However, not even a year after the devastating war that involved critical losses for Armenia and Artsakh, the Armenian citizens surprisingly elected the same, revolutionary government in the June 2021 parliamentary elections. The government was given a second chance, a vote of confidence, which came also as a response to consistent damage brought by the anti-revolutionary opposition, calling on society to revert to its former rulers and using any means to achieve this. The Armenian citizens, notwithstanding the loss, trauma, disappointment and other post-war realities discussed in this book, rejected any desire to return to the past decades of mismanagement, as well as an even higher reliance on its former centre Russia. This development appears unusual, and such an unexpected turn requires interpretation in different fields. This might range from external political influences to internal political culture, which has more resources for democratic development than many might think due to the fully fledged civil society, the educated and politically literate middle class, and the local tradition of protest shaped since the late Soviet times (see the chapter by Kopalyan in this volume; see also Andreasyan and Derluguian, 2015).

Supported from the inside, democracy in Armenia is still being challenged from the outside, primarily by the political alliance of previous Soviet republics, headed by Russia. Considering Russia's behaviour since the 1990s in general, and the regional dynamics post-2014 (Ukraine) in particular, much less post-2019 (Armenia), the region seems to have witnessed continual efforts to keep former peripheries under control; the effort being most destructive and desperate in Ukraine. Such behaviour makes it urgent for former peripheries to get away from, to use Medvedev's framing, "the crazy cocktail of monarchism, Stalinism and 'Orthodox civilisation'" (Medvedev, 2019).[3] This seems to increase the urgency for the small states in the post-Soviet space to find new partners and solutions among the civilised, democratic powers, aimed at a successful escape from the "post-Soviet camp". Presently, the geopolitical map of former centres and peripheries seems to be making rapid shifts, and Armenia (still positioning itself as a periphery) might consider steering towards

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3    The author refers to the separatists of eastern Ukraine.

new and powerful centres in an attempt to escape the complete loss of its sovereignty.

Three decades ago, a de facto independent Armenia embarked on a new course. Armenia is located in a bad neighbourhood, or rather a very bad neighbourhood, surrounded by aggressor countries with regimes that prioritise strong authoritarian beliefs and the abrogation of human rights. The years preceding Armenia's independence were characterised by the Soviet system and post-Soviet values. Embarking on a new path towards independence has naturally been marked by extreme challenges, including economic hardship and political problems. The Karabakh movement, a movement for democracy and human rights led to the eventual disintegration of nationalities from a process that students of the Eastern European Road to freedom know well. During the period 1991–2018 Armenia experienced three consecutive regimes in power, bedevilled by informality, partisanship and corruption, and consistent with distinctive qualities of weak civil societies throughout the post-Soviet region of Eurasia (Ishkanian, 2008; Stefes, 2006; Stefes and Weingartner, 2015). For decades now, the post-Soviet societies in the Eurasian space have been searching for ways to shift their policymaking cultures, which have been continuously damaged from within; weak civil society and policies of informality emerged as a continuation of the Soviet legacy (Hayoz, Jesień and Koleva, 2011; Hayoz, 2015; Stefes, 2006; Stefes and Weingartner, 2015).

After the Soviet structure's disintegration, the region witnessed a wave of so-called colour revolutions, and the gradual return of the strength of civil society's involvement in the policymaking culture. Previous research has addressed how this might be possible with the help of local agency, based on the case of Armenia (Gevorgyan, 2021, 2023). The revolution of 2018 was Armenia's bid for societal conditions that resisted injustice and the old, ambitiously ignorant and informal methods of decision making, and that encouraged accountable governance. Such became the main points of a checklist for the nationwide uprising. This was a public quest entirely for the reform and rehabilitation of state institutions (Abrahamian and Shagoyan, 2018; Lanskoy and Suthers, 2019). Revolutions are events, not processes (Chartier, 1991), and massive mobilisations do not emerge from a vacuum. In Armenia's case, issue-centred civic advocacy and the gradually developing ecosystem of civil society prepared the terrain for the revolution (Paturyan and Gevorgyan, 2020).

## Armenia: The Three Shocks of 2018–2020

In sociology and anthropology, the concept of cultural shock is a psychological phenomenon. It refers to the condition when an individual feels anxiety due to a loss of previously familiar cultural signs, identities, symbols, modes of communication and patterns of lifestyle as a result of rapid or abrupt life-affecting changes, such as emigration or escaping from wars or disasters (Ward, Bochner and Furham, 2001). But we might equally use this concept when thinking about societal shocks due to the loss or transformation of cultural and social values and meanings that follow diverse social and military cataclysms, political overthrows and economic crises. Does this concept seem useful in analysing the local situation, and how have the social and cultural shocks in Armenia manifested themselves? Shocks to societies and governing systems can be diverse, ranging from economic and cultural to political, from minor to major, from internal to external, and so on. The literature has treated *wars* and *revolutions* as political shocks, as well as exogenous shocks to political systems, economies and institutional stability (Hay and Wincott, 1998; Price and Sanders, 1993; Rhodes, Binder, and Rockman, 2008; Sanders, Ward, and Marsh, 1991). Political shocks and their influences have also been approached as a separate category, for example, with regard to social movements (Zarrugh, 2016).

Was Armenia's Velvet Revolution a societal shock? It undeniably was, in many aspects. The revolutionary events were quick and unexpected, and the processes of its aftermath limited the time or possibility to adapt. On the one hand, it was a positive shock, as it reanimated hopes for significant improvements such as democratic elections, the elimination of economic monopolies, and reforms in the spheres of education, justice and the army. However, the changes that the revolution generated would not prove necessarily positive on a micro or individual level. People hardly expected that they might be personally affected by losing their jobs, income and positions in state institutions because of the change of power elites, the damage to the businesses of state-supported oligarchs, or anti-corruption campaigns affecting many officials. No one predicted the catastrophic defeat in the 44-Day War and the loss of most of the territories of the Artsakh republic, a loss that shook the national ideology and symbolism,

identity and general feeling of national security that Armenians had held since the First Karabakh War. The war and the subsequent geopolitical shifts have crucially contributed to the shift of the security architecture and stability in the region. Armenia suddenly found itself surrounded by incommensurably powerful enemies, vulnerable and defenceless. The unprecedented deficit of security seemed to turn into the ostensible perverseness of what might be thought to be a natural choice between freedom and slavery, development and stagnation, respect/interest and indifference/apathy towards the political processes of building sovereignty. The political opposition, personified by the Armenian-Russian businessman Ruben Vardanyan and the former president Robert Kocharyan, reflected the idea that losing sovereignty and economic independence might be a better prospect than the traumatic loss of historical territories ("Armenian lands") in Karabakh and, possibly, Syunik,[4] with Armenian cultural heritage destroyed and the Armenian ethnic presence in the last piece of historical Armenia endangered. Similar ideas could be heard in the public texts of the former Soviet intelligentsia and professionals who are keen to conceive national history exclusively in the context of military victories and defeats, not being ready to replace these with the routine, long-term and not necessarily productive construction of national subjectivity.

Such discourses seemed dangerous, and especially so in the situation of the permanent military threat from Azerbaijan, so that in October 2022 the Armenian government introduced a new law criminalising any appeals and actions against state sovereignty. However, the phenomenon is worthy of discussion in social research. It might be suggested that the theoretical underdevelopment and public blindness towards, if not suppression of, the problems of colonialism and post-coloniality, specifically in the post-colonies of socialism (Oushakine, 2021), might be one of the reasons for the post-war emergence of such public discourses. The colonial past has never been studied and evaluated in terms of its long-term political and public consequences. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenian society had (and still has) to go through all the main stages of the construction of a new political subjectivity. This is not simply a matter of a sustainable economy or formal political independency. It is also a matter of a new

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4    The southern province of Armenia, contested by the aggressive military plans of Azerbaijan's leader Ilham Aliyev.

collective identity, different national priorities, narratives and political ideologies. Armenia failed to construct a new political ideology that would have led to a complete decolonisation of the country for different objective and subjective reasons. A set of political narratives were created instead. However, after the Second Karabakh War (2020), the narratives of the liberated motherland, military victories and an effective army[5] have been devalued and no longer seem to be effective, requiring new, more realistic and stronger narratives. It seems that the lack of new strong narratives might partly explain the weakness of the current political discourse in the country.

Finally, in discussing the shocks that Armenia has been (and continues to be) exposed to in a short period, it warrants outlining what we here define as a shock in Armenia's case, in particular by proposing the idea that Armenian society has experienced a trilogy of shocks. Those are *a values shock*, *a security shock* and *a shock to the country's sovereignty or statehood*. The cultural or values shock is represented by the new values associated with the Velvet Revolution, and its aftermath of purposeful damage to concepts related to democracy, human rights and civil society. The second is *a security shock*, as a result of Azerbaijan's war imposed on Armenians, the Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War of 2020. The third shock emerged in the most dangerous form, targeting the country's very sovereignty, its powers and control, due to the joint and continued effort of the surrounding regimes to adjust the political infrastructure to their advantage. A long-lasting honeymoon between Russia, Azerbaijan and Turkey is closely carving out scenarios that are dangerous to Armenia, which has limited resources to guarantee security and protect its people, much less find a way back to democratisation. These three shocks and their dangerous influences are discussed next.

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5    In addition to the narrative of "a country image of secure poverty under the wings of a powerful ally" still exploited by the opposition.

# A Trifecta of Challenges

## *A Values Shock*

The shrinking of civil society space (Carothers, 2014; Puddington, 2017; Mendelson, 2015) remains a global problem that has not lost its relevance, and especially so in places struggling socially and economically to rise from the ruins of legacies of authoritarianism, limited freedoms and state control. In Armenia, the post-revolutionary environment has generated many challenges. The atmosphere in the republic after the 44-Day War has multiplied these.

The first challenge we define as *a values shock*. We suggest this framing for the processes of reconfiguring public attitudes to state-making and social economy that the country experienced after the revolution. Why do we classify this process as a shock, instead of a transformation or simply a change? We classify it as a shock because, first, it was conceived as establishing completely different foundations for the government, economy and culture/education management institutions; and, secondly, it was intended to be completed within the shortest time period possible.

The principle of transparency of government, which reached sometimes an exaggerated scale at the beginning, was such a shock. Thus, newly appointed ministers and members of Parliament went live on social networks almost every day, and made regular video-reports of their activities. This demonstration of new approaches to the state government lessened strongly sometime after, with the establishing of bureaucratic routines. Although limited and controlled now, the practice of communicating directly with the people remains one of the ways of being (or seeming to be) transparent in Armenia. Even now, group protests or personal appeals to ministers or other government officials can have almost immediate effect in a form of a written answer, a personal meeting or a public media event.

Another shocking transformation was the abrupt disappearance of oligarchic control over private businesses. In a very short time, all informal monopolies, political protections, state-supported racketeering and various pressures as well as shadow taxation were mostly eliminated. For some businesses this level of freedom has been favourable, for others

it resulted in a complete collapse of their corrupt networks (Antonyan, 2023). New realities sometimes leave people in complete uncertainty about how to act: the old corrupt practices of protection and promotion seem not to be efficient any more, while the new ones are still to be procedurally settled, formalised and culturally accepted.

In the aftermath of the revolution, Armenian civil society organisations (CSO) became the targets of pseudo-civic groups and forces associated with those who were formerly in power.[6] These forces aimed to delegitimise critical CSOs and experts, which played an essential role in defending human rights and supporting the implementation of legal, judicial and other vital reforms for a long period. The delegitimisation was orchestrated by declamatory labelling, propaganda and manipulative attacks intended to influence the image of independent and outspoken members of civil society. In the immediate aftermath of the war, concepts commensurate with civilised countries and developed democracies, such as democratic values, freedom and individualism, became the next targets. The environment after the war created an ideological vacuum, allowing the spread of harmful nationalistic, extremist, illogical and reality-refusing discourses.

Thus, after the different and major transformations that the country experienced, emancipatory values and open public aspirations to democracy became the main targets of the groups with links to Armenia's former regimes and Russia. The purpose was to break public aspirations for democratisation, so as to revert back to the foundations for an authoritarian state. These processes were organised to spread disinformation and undermine the work of critical voices, mainly to target the thinking of youth and citizens courageous enough to demand democratisation. The main manipulation-messaging suggested that democratic forces and processes brought harm. Positioning democratic values against survival and security guarantees became the main purpose. Such a dynamics, based on the case of Armenia, emerges as a new area of enquiry for the social sciences and research into political culture, namely, the effort of groups with authoritarian beliefs to disempower people and

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6    See, for example, "Armenian civil society's critical potential on target", 15 November 2019, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2019/11/15/armenian-civil-societys-critical-potential-on-target/>.

target public perceptions, for example by playing on issues from survival to self-expression values (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010). Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel stress the importance of democratic regimes being able to sustain such aspirations, if they are to satisfy the (democratic) demands of the population at large. Looking at whether regimes have been able to move towards democratisation or not, the authors base their claim on empirical evidence from countries that could maintain the mass aspiration and demand for democracy (Welzel and Inglehart, 2008).

Armenia's Velvet Revolution manifested public aspirations for good governance and justice, as stated earlier. It was a showcase of support for democracy. Data on public perceptions in Armenia show 59 % of respondents mentioning the largest failure of the government from 2018 to 2021 as being defeat in the Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War.[7] In the June 2021 parliamentary elections, even after this major security shock, the Pashinyan administration's re-election, among other things, might suggest the public's democratic aspirations in choosing again the previously elected legitimate government, regardless of the problems that the swearing-in of the new government administration has entailed.

The conspiratorial values problem that seems to remain in the post-Soviet space is the intention of nationalistic groups (whether in power or not) to portray everything as dangerous to their societies. Everything, that is, except for what they hold true and represent, such as values sustaining a power grab while continually draining state resources for individual and group needs. Authors have characterised the years after the post-Soviet departure as displaying no ideology (for example, Kobrin, 2016), which has served as the reason for the many failures of governance in the post-Soviet space. When democratic values do not drive political decision making, or worse, when wrong values take the lead, societies encounter serious problems. Armenia is a case in point. How are the government, civil society and the public at large to reverse this delinquency? This might mean starting a discussion about how to circumvent the snowball of problems, that is only becoming bigger as it slides down the gorge where Armenian citizens find themselves these days.

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[7] The question asked was: "In your opinion what was the largest failure of the government from 2018-present (Nikol Pashinyan)?" (n = 1494) (CRRC, Caucasus Barometer Data, 2021).

The war, initiated, supported and agreed to by Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia, correspondingly, was aimed, among other obvious intentions, at crushing the possibility of Armenia becoming an open and liberal society. The war was intended to produce a step-change in the country's social and political route, which the Armenian people showcased in 2018. A war, as an event and a process, was shocking per se as an act of collective violence, destroying countries and lives, killing generations, and eliminating hopes for the future. In addition to this, the war also severely crushed the Armenian national image – as the winner in the First Karabakh War (1991–1994) – cherished for several decades by successive governments of Armenia. The emotions of being a winner, apart from its political and social consequences, had a therapeutic effect for a nation that had experienced genocide and the loss of the most part of its historical homeland. After the Second Karabakh War this constructed image seemed to dissolve. An example illustrates the post-war collapse of the national spirit and the disillusion of nationalistic values: the bitterness and desperation Armenians experienced and demonstrated in public discourses on 9 May 2021. This day used to be officially claimed as a national "triple-Victory" day,[8] but it had always been celebrated pompously primarily as a day marking the liberation of Shushi.[9] As a result of the war in 2020, Shushi was lost to Azerbaijan, and this extremely important holiday suddenly lost its meaning.

Politically and economically, the war had the aim of transforming society through a humanitarian crisis by producing poverty, a number of internally displaced persons and other realities generating an environment of fear and loss. This brings us to taking a note of the next type of shock, *the security shock*.

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8    So called because three victories are celebrated on one day: the victory over Nazi Germany in 1945, the liberation of Shushi in 1994 and the foundation of the National Army of Karabakh.

9    Shushi is a city in Karabakh, second to Stepanakert, the capital, in size. It used to be a big Armenian cultural and economic centre in imperial times, then in 1920 it was captured and devastated by the Azerbaijanis, with its Armenian population being massacred or fleeing. In late Soviet times, the Soviet authorities made sure to repopulate it predominantly with Azerbaijanis as a political counterbalance to Stepanakert, which was almost 100 % Armenian.

## A Security Shock

This book is not about security or conflict. However, the post-Soviet space continues to exercise active and frozen conflicts to keep former peripheries in check. Understanding the meaning of the peripheries is a task that is still relevant and unaccomplished (Filippov, Hayoz, and Herlth, 2020). It may be important to look at the Artsakh (or NK) conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan from the perspective of Russia's continued involvement. Even in cases where the conflict had an opportunity for resolution over the course of the past three decades, this effort was meticulously opposed by leaders "mediating" the conflict. In fact, Russian involvement as a mediator has served as a constant factor of instability and lack of tangible resolution; not to mention that Armenia's security alliance with Russia has actually contributed to the failure to meet the country's minimal security objectives (Kopalyan, 2023).

In September 2020 Armenia experienced what we refer to as a security shock, which lasted 44 days, and left Armenia, Artsakh and Armenians around the world devastated as a result of the grave losses. Deception and terror became defining characteristics of this dirty war,[10] in which civilians and vital infrastructure and cultural objects were destroyed, including general healthcare facilities and maternity hospitals, schools, theatres, churches, fauna and the natural habitat. Azerbaijan committed all possible violations during the 44-Day War (Open Society Foundations-Armenia et al., 2022).

We can assume that the war imposed by Azerbaijan on Armenia was not prepared in isolation. It was agreed to, let alone planned, in advance by Armenia's "strategically friendly" neighbours and, it seems, also agreed to by world leaders, assuming that major shifts as a result of countries' arbitrary aggression are not executed in isolation. The war produced a multiplicity of social, political, humanitarian and security challenges, discussed in the chapters that follow. We allow the assumption that the intention of this war, among others, was to bring Armenia back to a point where physiological needs and the need for survival would make the country, a former periphery, more dependent on the situation imposed

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10    To borrow the term used by Anna Politkovskaya for her book about Russia's war in Chechnya (Politkovskaya, 2001).

by regional autocrats. We assume that Armenia's democratic intentions were not desirable, and NK was used to encourage the game change. Considering public perceptions, the data has consistently confirmed that in conflict zones and developing countries, securitisation and need-to-survive narratives tend to win over considerations of reform, self-expression, freedom and civility (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010). This leads to the discussion of the next shock and the main challenge that the country is facing today: to keep its sovereignty and statehood. Will Armenia be able to reverse course and save its independence by taking the path towards development?

## A Shock to Sovereignty and Statehood

We do not intend to discuss here the multilevel and complicated security architecture of the region and Armenia's situation as a result of this, since that is not the aim of this book. However, mentioning the general trajectory of the power play and its dirty dynamics seems an obvious prerequisite. Developments in the country and the shocks discussed earlier have created the conditions for the gravest challenge to Armenian society. The country and its political leadership seem to be under pressure to give up power and control, the main ingredients of sovereignty. The pressures come in different forms: security and political, from Russia and its Azeri counterparts. Armenia's security trajectory and the safety of the Armenians of NK are subject to a continual interplay of the interests of bigger regional actors and their outliers. The lack of solution to the ongoing conflict in NK and Azerbaijan's expanding appetite seem to be linked to autocrats' intentions to keep Armenian society under constant threat and fear. Developments after the Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War mainly involved renewed Azeri aggression. In September 2022, two years after the war, Azeri forces launched a military offensive across the whole eastern and south-eastern border with Armenia,[11] an offensive that ended in the occupation of Armenian territories. Up to 2023 Azerbaijan has maintained

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11 Call for Urgent Action by Armenian Civil Society, in Response to Azerbaijani Aggression against Armenia (13 September 2022), <https://hcav.am/en/english-call-for-urgent-action-in-response-to-the-azerbaijani-aggression-against-armenia/>.

control of Armenian territories, followed by the international community condemning Azerbaijan's attacks and continued aggression, considering the significant evidence of Azerbaijani shelling in Armenia and significant damage to Armenian infrastructure (see, for example, US Department of State, 2022; Freedom House, 2022; Reuters, 2022). Azerbaijan's regime has stepped up its military aggression towards Armenia, which has suffered repeated attacks on its sovereign territory by Azerbaijan, despite a Russian security guarantee (Freedom House, 2023); the situation now seems bleak as never before. In fact, it calls for serious reconsideration if Armenia is to keep its security and sovereignty, much less the pace of democratisation. Since 12 December 2022 Azerbaijan's autocrat Ilham Aliyev has kept the Armenians of Artsakh under a blockade with the closed Lachin corridor, which was harming the interests of everybody in the region (Poghosyan, 2023), and had the potential for a so-called *soft* ethnic cleansing, considering that it is the only road connecting NK with Armenia (Boy, 2023).

Since 2020 the infamous autocrats Aliyev and Putin resembled madmen leading their societies (or otherwise, the blind) to a long-term underdevelopment of the social fabric by employing indoctrination and propaganda to justify aggression towards other societies and sovereigns, Armenia and Ukraine, respectively. The importance of the case of Armenia, apart from international indicators demonstrating the country's prospects for democratisation,[12] is the fact of its being surrounded by neighbours that necessitate a thorough decriminalisation of the region, which will hopefully arrive via the defeat of the aggressors.

The situation is rather uncertain and still developing, making it difficult to offer any definite conclusions. However, it is plain to see that Armenia has started the process of reconfiguring its political, economic and military liaisons, loyalties and dependencies. In this complicated process, not only Azerbaijan or Turkey (as obvious and traditional threats to Armenian sovereignty) should be taken into account. Russia as the formerly established (and still formally acting) "partner and ally" may

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12   Armenia and Georgia are the only countries in the region classified as "Partly Free", surrounded by Azerbaijan, Iran, Russia and Turkey, which are classified as "Not Free" (Freedom House, 2023). In fact, Georgia is another "victim" country in the region, with Russia regularly undermining the country's efforts to obtain EU membership (Sauer, 2023).

and often does come forward as a threat to Armenian sovereignty and territorial integrity by allowing and even triggering Azerbaijani acts of aggression against Armenia and Karabakh, using this as a punishment for "disloyalty" and political stubbornness. The idea that Russia, an eternal "big brother" and historical "natural ally" of Armenia, does not perform this, at times real, at times imagined, function any longer (having not performed it for a long period already) also seems shocking to the majority of citizens in Armenia, Karabakh and the Armenian Diaspora, which in aggregate still need time to get used to the new reality, with its serious risks and existential threats (especially to those in border communities). Two politically and culturally determined camps, pro-Russian and anti-Russian, accuse Pashinyan's revolutionary government respectively of breaking the alliance or delaying the full political rupture with Russia, which means that the current political power is somewhere in between these two polarised strategies. However, the post-revolutionary extremes of fully fledged democracy and counter-revolutionary totalitarianism are not occurring in Armenia, according to some scholars, because of the lack of considerable resources and infrastructural power (Derluguian and Hovhannisyan, 2022: 916).

## What Next?

Major crises give rise to new beginnings. The three shocks and the challenges they represent lead to a need to prioritise Armenia's sovereignty and statehood as the main ideology around which the policy of the state can be built anew. We should like to borrow a line from Stephan Feuchtwang: "It is normal to find an event of great loss at the foundation of a nation" (Feuchtwang, 2006). This may be relevant for Armenia, after many losses following the Artsakh War (along with the danger of new ones), in reconceptualising the "nation" into "statehood" in the country's current context and circumstance. Challenges and problems do not disappear; however, they also do not entirely darken the future. Rather, the lack of useful values and ideologies does. As per the consequences of the shock to values, society needs to reject discourses that put forward narrow, isolationist, ethnic-mindedness and unrealistic patriotism. Armenian

society needs to look forward to changes, which might well happen naturally, regardless of the peripheries' positioning and initiative. It might come about unintentionally that Armenia finds new partners and solutions by distancing itself from the powers set to control their former peripheries. Armenia might choose to contribute to an environment in which the possibility of a new war is minimised. The regional dynamics are changing. The Russian–Ukrainian war since 2022 has aggravated the situation in the South Caucasus in general, and in Armenia and Karabakh in particular.[13] And the countries may need to adjust to this change, in terms of resilience, opportunity and innovative solutions. One such solution might be the change of peripherality (Gevorgyan, 2021; 2023) towards forming a new and actual Eastern European periphery.

For Armenians, among local and international institutions, the European Union seems to be the entity that enjoys the greatest trust among the population (53 %).[14] The EU–Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), with its broad reform agenda and increased financial support to Armenia, offers another opportunity for the country to engage in intensive cooperation, using its advantages. Caught in the thorns of old and new challenges, the country needs an outlook that can facilitate integration into the community of civilised nations. To be able to withstand the trifecta of shocks, Armenia needs a values-based closer and honest cooperation with new allies, whose societies function based on the rule of law and respect for human dignity and rights. In fact, Western involvement and international guarantees might be the only means of achieving a lasting peace in the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict (Grigoryan, 2023). Achieving an agreement with the EU to deploy civilian monitoring missions in 2022 and 2023 to monitor the border with Azerbaijan (Council of the EU, 2023) is an important step towards that aim. Consolidated authoritarian regimes, including Azerbaijan and Russia, are full of contempt for legitimate governments, which might reject

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13    We do not intend to address the developments triggered by the Russian–Ukrainian war in this volume.

14    The question asked was: "Please tell me how much you trust or distrust the European Union?" (53 %: *rather trust* and *fully trust* categories combined). CRRC Caucasus Barometer data (Caucasus Research Resource Center (Armenia 2021), <https://www.caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2021am/TRUSTEU/>.

the post-Soviet sense of well-being by replacing it with something new for the actual good of their citizens.

Armenia's important task is to seek an understanding of how it can contribute to creating peace (in conditions where other players reject it), and maintain statehood and a democratic outlook at the same time. Armenian society has an obligation to envision an end point to the decades of conflict over NK, as most certainly the Azeri counterpart does. Both countries need to attempt to shift this problematic situation towards stability to achieve development in the region. Without peace there can be no development, rather a helpful condition for authoritarian guarantees. Among other things, development will entail the need for an open discussion with the citizens, revolving around public understanding of ways to achieve peace. This is why Armenia should choose to aim for a system with a healthy public sphere, and above all a clear understanding of and actions towards prioritising the fundamental conditions of sovereignty and independence.

PS. (As this book goes to publishing): after nine months of blockade and humanitarian crisis, Azerbaijan resorted to ethnic cleansing in NK by military escalation, to facilitate a forced deportation and displacement of more than 100,000 Armenian population fleeing their homeland. Neither international civilised community, nor Russian so-called peacekeepers intervened, encouraging a tragic resolution of a decades-old conflict. Whether the shocking circumsance would emerge as the final resolution or otherwise, will remain to be seen. It is, however, certain that in 2023, Armenia and the Armenians witnessed another shock, on a new and most tragic level. Armenia's unique positioning along with emerging challenges, makes it an imperative for keeping the country on an international academic and research radars.

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Nerses Kopalyan

## 2. Democratic Resilience amid Instability: Transition and Consolidation in Post-war Armenia

**Abstract:** Scholarly research on Armenia's transition and democratisation process remains limited, as post-Velvet Revolution Armenia proceeds to consolidate the democratisation process after the democratic breakthrough of 2018 (Ohanyan and Kopalyan, 2022). Exogenous factors interacting with the consolidation process, however, have complicated configurations, with factors such as the Karabagh (Artsakh) 44-Day War 2020, foreign invasion and a security dilemma imposing the need for new explanatory variables. In this context, while Armenia's transition took place under structural and social arrangements that were conducive to a democratic breakthrough, the consolidation process has faced daunting obstacles, ranging from geopolitical factors to interstate military disputes. These exogenous factors, however, have, to an important extent, been mitigated as impediments to the consolidation process by important inroads that Armenia has made in enhancing its democratic safeguards.

**Keywords:** Armenia, democratisation, security dilemma, democratic culture, institutions

## Framing Armenia's Democratisation within the Broader Scholarly Literature

Substantive treatments of democratic consolidation in the literature evaluate developments based on such metrics as "robust political competition, vibrant civil society, and widespread acceptance of key democratic tenets among the public and elites" (Svolik, 2015; Bernhard and Karakoc, 2007). Perspective assessments primarily associate consolidation with the durability of democracy, where "consolidating democracy means reducing the probability of its breakdown to the point where we can feel reasonably confident that democracy persists" (Schedler, 1998: 95). This framework is supported by Acemoglu and Robinson (2005: 30): "a

democracy is consolidated if the set of institutions that characterize it endure through time". The collective findings of this chapter indicate broad commensurability with the evaluative criteria in the literature, indicating a strong link between Armenia's post-Velvet transition and post-war consolidation.

The consolidation process, generally speaking, presupposes robust institutionalisation (Diamond and Linz, 1989; Diamond, 1999; Mainwaring et al., 1992; O'Donnell, 1996; Schneider, 1995) and in this context, it supplements and reinforces important progress in human rights indices, alleviation of systemic corruption, dismantling of monopolies and the creation of a more law-and-order society. This chapter concentrates on the state of progress of Armenia's democratic consolidation via institutionalisation (Dodsworth and Ramshaw, 2021), institutional reforms, burgeoning democratic culture (Inglehart, 1990; Granato et al., 1996, Jackman and Miller, 1996) and electoral cycles (Kostelka, 2017), while accounting for the country's security dilemma as an impediment (Kopalyan, 2022) to the consolidation process. Relying on the transitology literature, with the latest research on consolidation, this chapter will qualify Armenia's democratisation process as having a "latent quality" that is to be measured by "large, durable, and statistically significant decline" (Svolik, 2015) in the risk of democratic backsliding (Cianetti and Hanley, 2021). The findings do not attest to any significant decline, but rather support the scholarly consensus in the consolidation literature that reaffirms the democratisation process. In this chapter, the tracing of these causal and explanatory variables is operationalised by utilising recent survey data on Armenia's post-war political climate, the progress in institutional reforms, the role of the anti-democratic forces or "authoritarian vestiges" (Loxton, 2021), the growth of democratic culture (Welzel, 2021) and the state of political developments after the 2021 snap parliamentary elections. The findings demonstrate a general positive trajectory for Armenia's continued democratisation, and while exogenous factors, such as interstate military disputes, and endogenous obstacles, such as structural and institutional complexities, have at times slowed down the transition process, the overarching picture still points to incremental developments in the consolidation process. The general outlook supports a society with a thriving democratic culture and a vibrant civil society, while at the same time noting shortcomings in institutional reforms and insufficient pluralism in the electoral field.

The post-war crisis in Armenia's domestic political theatre after the 9 November 2020 trilateral ceasefire produced a wide range of conceptual concerns about the viability of the democratic gains obtained after the Velvet Revolution, the continuing consolidation of these gains after the war, and a broader narrative seeking to qualify the discourse into a rigid dichotomy: security-and-stability versus democracy-and-state-failure. This chapter demonstrates that, based on extant data and empirical observations, the attempt to construct such a dichotomy fundamentally failed, with the consolidation process proceeding, albeit at a fluctuating pace.

Overarchingly, two broad indicators find robust empirical support in the extant literature with respect to transition and consolidation: first, there is a strong causal relationship between economic growth, democratic survival and democratic deepening; and second, countries with a higher initial level of democracy are more likely to survive (Mainwaring and Bizzarro, 2019). These broad indicators are further supported by other statistically significant findings: there is a robust relationship between large and durable decline in the risk of authoritarian reversal and democratic consolidation, and the resilience of consolidation is supplemented by the persistence of economic development (Svolik, 2015: 717). That is to say, high levels of economic development reduce the risk of authoritarian reversal in transitional democracies. While economic considerations remain outside the purview of this chapter, there is broad consensus, supported by data from the World Bank, the IMF and a multitude of other international organisations, that Armenia possesses one of the fastest-growing economies in the post-Soviet space. This exponential economic growth reifies the findings in the extant literature and demonstrates consistency with the empirical output. In aligning the economic indicators with democratic resilience, the scholarly literature supports the findings of this chapter on the positive trajectory of Armenia's consolidation process.

Armenia's transitional democracy, in this context, is consistently placed within the broader scholarship on consolidation and democratic deepening. The results of the 2021 snap parliamentary elections, the growth of Armenia's democratic culture and the increase in citizen trust towards Armenia's institutions serve as causal and explanatory variables in accounting for the endurance, consolidation and resilience of Armenia's nascent democracy during the post-war period and the continuous security crisis that the country faces.

These developments, however, have given birth to a set of questions that have perplexed many observers with respect to the relationship between war (the Karabagh (Artsakh) 44-Day War 2020), security crisis and democratic consolidation:

1 How did the pro-democracy incumbent, whose government lost a war and thus committed a cardinal sin of Armenian politics, that of losing land, manage such an electoral success in the 2021 parliamentary elections?
2 How did the pro-democracy party, even with the domestic political crisis that ensued after the 9 November 2020 trilateral agreement which ended the war, and facing a formidable and well-financed anti-democratic opposition, deliver a landslide victory?
3 Collectively, how can we understand the dynamics of Armenian society that overwhelmingly voted for a party that not only suffered a military defeat, but continues to struggle in resolving Armenia's security crisis?

Six explanatory variables offer answers to these questions: consolidation and institutionalisation, resistance to democratic backsliding, a burgeoning democratic culture, increased citizen trust in political and state institutions, the legacy of the Velvet Revolution and democratic elections, and an electorally weak anti-democracy opposition.

## Transitology and Consolidation

The literature on transitology presupposes a vigorous debate: does economic development lead to democratisation (Diamond et al., 1989; Huntington, 1991; Lipset, 1959; O'Donnell, 1996; Przeworski et al., 2000; Przeworksi and Limongi, 1997); how vital is political culture to the process (Almond and Verba, 1965; Eckstein, 1988; Inglehart, 1988; Pye and Verba, 1965); and do the modes of transition offer predictive insight into democratic consolidation or erosion (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2005; Collier and Levitsky, 1997; Diamond, 1996, 1999; Huntington, 1991; Mainwaring et al., 1992; O'Donnell, 1996; Pridham and Lewis, 1996; Schneider, 1995; Schmitter, 1996)? Collectively, the theoretical underpinnings of transitology note that democratic transitions are consequentialist inquiries

into democratic consolidation, a specific reference to the degree of stability and institutionalisation that the democratic regime attains. This degree is the continuum that post-Velvet Armenia finds itself in.

The consolidation process is affected by such variables as political institutions, economic well-being of the populace (Przeworski et al., 2000) and the course that the transition takes from authoritarianism to democratisation. Consolidation, in general, is measured by such variables as the stability of the nascent democratic regime, the development of complex institutions, the inaugural conditions after elections and the degree and scope of pluralism.

There are, furthermore, two main structural dimensions when gauging democratisation. The first is the norms and beliefs of the actors involved; in the case of Armenia, these include dichotomies such as Velvet values versus non-democratic values, democratic progress versus anti-democratic regression, and the balance between security and democracy versus the strong state taking precedence over democracy. Second, when observing the democratisation process, the literature points to three levels of elites: decision-makers or political leaders; organisations and movements (political parties, civil society, social movements); and the informal leaders of mass uprisings. In the case of Armenia, impediments to democratic consolidation primarily come from the non-democratic political elite, since organisations and the masses remain primarily aligned with democratic consolidation. Democratic breakthroughs, based on these criteria, are qualified as having been consolidated when a compromise on all levels is attained with respect to political institutionalisation: bureaucracies, parties, civil society, governance and civil–military relations become institutionalised and function strictly within constitutional parameters. Noting this criterion, the evidence suggests that Armenia's consolidation is a work in progress.

Electoral cycles are another important indicator of democratic consolidation. In general, the literature requires a two-turnover electoral cycle as a prerequisite for consolidation (Huntington, 1991). Thus, there needs to be two fully democratic election cycles consecutively: in the case of Armenia, the 2018 parliamentary elections and the 2021 June parliamentary elections reinforce the positive trajectory of the consolidation process. Within this context, a continuation or transition of power, via democratic elections, must take place: either the incumbent party wins and continues, or if it loses, it must accept a peaceful transfer of power.

The rationale is to observe a continuation of the consolidation process without the losing incumbent seeking a return to authoritarianism, or the losing forces seeking to attain power outside of constitutional and legal parameters. The 2021 June elections remained consistent with the broad scholarly consensus on electoral consolidation: continuation of power, via democratic elections, was attained in Armenia.

In gauging Armenia's transition-consolidation period, an important set of questions also need to be addressed: has Armenia overcome the problem of abuse of executive power; has Armenia alleviated systemic political patronage; and has Armenia managed to escape the trap of plebiscitary interpretations of democracy? The post-Velvet government produced an ambitious and wide-ranging reform programme that envisioned crucial institutional reforms, thus seeking to address such concerns. When considering the main points of the government's 2019–2023 Action Plan for institutional reforms, for example, the following policies stand out:

- Implementing a transitional justice agenda
- Undertaking constitutional reforms
- Reforming the electoral system and electoral legislation
- Continuing judicial reforms
- Transparency in legal and judicial proceedings
- Alleviation of systemic corruption and patronage
- Reforming the law-enforcement system
- Reforming criminal laws and procedures
- Forming a Commission for the Prevention of Corruption
- Establishment of an Independent Anti-Corruption Committee to undertake investigations
- Specific Anti-Corruption Task Force in General Prosecutor's Office
- Oversight and integrity-inspection protocols for judges, prosecutors and law-enforcement officials
- Civil service reforms, with the implementation of a meritocratic system.

While the reform policies on transparency, electoral systems, law-enforcement reforms and anti-corruption endeavours have made progress,[1] other important reform policies have not been sufficiently implemented. It

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1    Armenia's Corruption Perception Index has noted an exponential increase, as have the free and fair elections since December of 2018, as well as the establishment of a police patrol service (with US support and funding) and the anti-corruption courts.

is within this specific context that Armenia has made important progress in institutional reforms, but its consolidation remains partial due to partial institutionalisation.

The main shortcomings that have limited the consolidation process are specific to only three main spheres: failure to implement a comprehensive transitional justice agenda; failure in implementing robust judicial reforms; and incomplete or ad hoc constitutional reforms. These selective limitations create a rather nuanced and intricate puzzle with regard to Armenia's democratic consolidation, as important reforms have been instituted, while other crucial reforms remain unfulfilled. Thus, while partial institutionalisation and consolidation has taken place in Armenia, the process remains incomplete. What explains these shortcomings, how do these impact Armenia's political climate after the Karabagh (Artsakh) 44-Day War 2020, and how did these shortcomings affect the 2021 June parliamentary elections?

There are three broad causal explanations of why Armenia's institutionalisation and consolidation have been partial: Armenia's civil service laws, institutional insulation and the authoritarian reserves. Armenia's civil service laws, by virtue of their design, produce over-bloated bureaucracies that suffer from structural deficiencies. Drawn up by the previous non-democratic governments, and a partial continuation of the Soviet legacy, these laws are not conducive to reforms or institutional alterations. Thus, the bureaucracies are non-functionally swollen, structurally and operationally problematic, and they require complete restructuring. Given that Armenia, due to restraints from the Venice Commission as well as obligations to the ECHR, cannot simply engage in lustration, bureaucratic reforms remain surgical, ad hoc, tedious and extremely time-consuming. Collectively, the legal infrastructure that informs Armenia's state and bureaucratic system is an inherent obstacle to institutional reforms, and it remains an intrinsic institutional deficiency that either stagnates or at times slows institutional change.

The concept of institutional insulation contends that previously non-democratic regimes design constitutions, laws and state structures that allow for pockets of insulation within institutions for the preservation of authoritarian interests. Thus, even after revolutions or democratic breakthroughs, the new government faces complex obstacles, legal barriers and pockets of "insulated" resistance that make reforms exceedingly difficult. The example of Armenia's Constitutional Court, as a case in

point, demonstrates this, where the Constitution was drawn up by Hrayr Tovmasyan, who also installed himself as head of the court and included sets of legal barriers to his removal or the removal of other justices who were "grandfathered in" (Kopalyan and Sargsyan, 2020). In this context, the process of implementing even limited reforms within the Constitutional Court required amendments to the Constitution itself, thus bringing about a tedious, time-consuming and counter-productive process. Such cases of institutional insulation are designed to protect the authoritarian interests of the previous regime and serve as severe impediments to institutional reforms and democratic consolidation.

The remnants of the pre-Velvet regimes, which remain embedded in diverse sectors of Armenia's state system, are qualified as authoritarian vestiges that have played a crucial role in utilising their vast resources in an attempt to slow down Armenia's democratisation process. They have attempted to do this by virtue of having maintained dominant positions within the economy and media. Cases of institutional insulation, especially within the judiciary, have been vital in impeding processes and developments conducive to institutional reforms. This has been supplemented by "authoritarian successor parties," such as the Republican Party, Prosperous Armenia, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and the Hayastan Alliance, with each attempting or having attempted to serve as a political bulwark against democratic consolidation. Similarly, dominance in the economic sector has allowed such authoritarian vestiges' oversized influence in relation to their numerical minority. And just as importantly, their relative dominance of the media has allowed them to magnify their voices in attempting to shape anti-democratic narratives. Collectively, the operational objectives of the highly resourceful authoritarian reserves have been defined by obstructing the consolidation process and attempting to roll back the relative success of the Velvet Revolution.

## Overcoming the Democratic Backsliding Paradigm

A conceptual treatment of democratic backsliding entails a general process of democratic erosion, where the gradual "stripping of constitutional

safeguards and piecemeal dismantling of democratic institutions" produce illiberal outcomes (Cianettiy and Hanley, 2021: 67). This process, however, is not linear: in the same fashion that democratisation and consolidation are multilayered, intricate processes (Carothers, 2022), so too is the reverse process of backsliding. Armenia's trajectory in the post-war period remains consistent with the multilayered, intricate process of consolidation, and while empirical evidence discounts any systemic considerations of democratic backsliding, the extant literature does suggest syndromes of "democratic careening", a democratisation process that is not unidirectional, but is rather a fluctuating consolidation process (Slater, 2013). The counter-mobilisation efforts of Armenia's anti-democratic opposition, for example, have tested the democratic threshold of the government, as authoritarian vestiges have instrumentalised such traditional liberal democratic activities as street protests, civil disobedience and attempted paralysis of the political system to achieve non-democratic outcomes: regime change without elections (Kopalyan, 2022). While such endeavours have failed, the government's response to such activities, and its ability to maintain democratic values and standards against non-democratic political forces, demonstrates the non-linear process of Armenia's democratic consolidation.

Further, the fusion of polarisation and civic protests, for example, which are born out of the country's security dilemma, may suggest impediments to a linear democratisation process, for consolidated democracies generally do not face non-democratic forces as the primary political opposition in the electoral field. In this context, while institutional strengthening and democratic safeguards are being established to enhance the consolidation process, the presence of authoritarian vestiges as the only political alternative within the electoral field points to democratic careening as the prevailing consolidation process. To this end, whether qualifying developments through a linear, non-linear or a careening framework, the overarching trajectory points to a continuous, albeit slow, consolidation of democracy in post-war Armenia. Concomitantly, the democratic backsliding paradigm, lacking empirical support for "large, durable, and statistically significant decline" (Svolik, 2015), suggests a careening process where democratic growth indicators fluctuate, but refrain from regressing or producing backsliding effects.

## Burgeoning Democratic Culture

The extant literature on political culture demonstrates that "emancipative values", such as human freedom, individual choice and equality before the law, are "replacing authoritarian values that stress deference and conformity" (Welzel, 2021: 132–33). The entrenchment of a stronger commitment to democratic principles is part of an observable pattern within the political culture of post-Velvet Armenia, even when controlling for war, crisis and political instability. The persistence of Armenia's burgeoning democratic culture can be attributed to its "latent democratic culture".[2] That is to say, the generational ascension of emancipative values has gradually produced in Armenia a structural contradiction between an authoritarian system of government and aspirations for individual freedom, autonomy and opportunity. This "regime-versus-culture mismatch" ruptured in 2018 with the Velvet Revolution, as the previous "regime's structure" proved "too undemocratic relative to society's values", thus transitioning Armenia's latent democratic culture into a burgeoning one.

An important subject of inquiry for post-war Armenia has been the "democracy versus security" discourse, a dichotomous framework that research shows has eroded democracy in countries where cultural understandings of democracy have been highly instrumentalised (Kirsch and Welzel, 2019). In the case of Armenia, such instrumentalisation has not materialised, with trends suggesting the opposite. Survey data presented in this chapter demonstrates the collapse of the dichotomy and society's support for democracy even amid a security crisis. The strong presence of emancipative values in Armenia's political culture is also a robust indicator

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2    Armenia's latent democratic culture, which incrementally developed over a decade, consists of the system of beliefs, symbolic expressions and shared values that contextually defined political action, and shared clusters of attitudes on political norms and values. Considering the non-democratic nature of Armenia's political system prior to the Velvet Revolution, these attributes were either suppressed or not vigorously displayed. Hence the "latent" qualifier. Its incremental expression, however, ranging from the Electric Yerevan protests in 2015 to the Velvet Revolution in 2018, displays the transition from a latent to a burgeoning democratic cultural syndrome. Collectively, these latent attributes slowly produced enduring cultural syndromes that offered the ideational structure for a democratic breakthrough.

of its burgeoning democratic culture, for research shows that prevalence of emancipative values is a much stronger predictor of a country's actual level of democracy than the percentage of people who simply express support for democracy (Claassen, 2020). The fusion of emancipative values and democracy promotion, at the same time, remains the strongest predictor of genuine democratic support (Kruse et al., 2019), which is a better description of Armenia's developing democratic culture.

The patterns of development in political culture in non-democratic societies is contingent on a broad range of factors, the most crucial of which remains the level and magnitude of authoritarianism. In the post-Soviet space, political systems have fluctuated from full authoritarianism (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Belarus, etc.) to rigid hybrid regimes (Russia) to loose hybrid regimes (pre-revolution Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia). The formation of enduring cultural syndromes that promote conduciveness to a democratising political culture are found in loose hybrid regimes (Ohanyan and Kopalyan, 2022). This remains impossible in authoritarian regimes, and exceedingly difficult in rigid hybrid regimes. Thus, it is within loose hybrid regimes that nascent civic culture, democratic values and citizen activism reinforce the growth of civil society and demands for systemic change. The outcome, as observed in Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia, is democratic breakthroughs, where popular movements, having been birthed in a growing, yet latent democratic culture, succeed in dismantling the loose hybrid regime. Armenia's political culture, prior to the Velvet Revolution, remains consistent with such developments, in which there were developing cultural syndromes that normalised corruption, nepotism and conformity to abuse of power. Thus, whereas Armenia's post-Velvet political culture may be defined as a *burgeoning democratic culture*, the pre-Velvet political culture may be defined as a *latent democratic culture* (Kopalyan, 2021). Consequently, the Velvet Revolution did not happen in a vacuum: a latent democratic culture, incrementally developed over a decade (Gevorgyan and Paturyan, 2021), slowly produced enduring cultural syndromes and emancipative values that offered the ideational structure for a democratic breakthrough.

Empirical findings confirm these observations, as they demonstrate robust support for the democratisation of Armenia's political culture during the post-Velvet and post-war stages. Culling data from the 2020 Caucasus Barometer, as well as the 2021 IRI survey, thus providing for a two-year post-war trend, findings demonstrate that the post-Velvet

burgeoning democratic culture has not simply been temporary or euphoric but is part of an enduring cultural syndrome. Data from the Caucasus Barometer shows that 85 % of post-Velvet society affirmed that Armenia is a democratic country, with this affirmation tempered by a set of pragmatic observations: 37 % conceded that while Armenia is a democracy, it does have "major problems", 30 % held that it is a democracy with "minor" problems, and only 18 % believed that Armenia is a "full democracy" (Caucasus Barometer, 2021).[3] Post-Velvet society's healthy and diverse perceptions of its democracy, and its shared cluster of attitudes, enhances the burgeoning democratic culture thesis.

This was further reaffirmed in the 2021 IRI survey released in May.[4] When asked whether democracy is the best form of government, 48 % responded in the positive, with 18 % suggesting an alternative. At the same time, respondents displayed concern with the way Armenia's democracy was proceeding: only 30 % remained satisfied, while 63 % displayed dissatisfaction. However, this dissatisfaction did not translate to votes for the non-democratic parties, hence suggesting the endurance of democratic cultural syndromes. This became evident in the pre-election survey that was conducted by the Armenian Election Study, as it addressed the security-versus-democracy dilemma, where 54 % of respondents prioritised democracy and security equally (Oganesyan and Kopalyan, 2021). Contextually, even in the midst of Armenia's security crisis, a healthy majority of citizens did not prioritise security over democracy, but said that Armenia should prioritise both. This seems to suggest the entrenched emancipative values within Armenia's growing democratic culture, as well as the endurance of democratic cultural syndromes that demonstrate resilience.

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3    The question asked was: "How much of a democracy is the country today?" (n = 1491) (CRRC, Caucasus Barometer Data, 2021).

4    Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia, International Republican Institute (IRI) survey, May 2021.

## Increased Citizen Trust in Political and State Institutions

Since political culture consists of a system of beliefs, symbolic expressions and shared values that contextually define political action, shared clusters of attitudes on political norms and values remain fundamental. Perhaps the most important cultural syndrome for a burgeoning democratic political culture is the growth of institutional trust among citizens. For Armenia, institutional trust was almost non-existent in its pre-Velvet political culture, but shared clusters of democratic attitudes on political norms and values were in the process of being crystallised. However, during the post-Velvet stage, extensive data demonstrates an exponential increase in institutional trust, while shared clusters of democratic attitudes and norms became embedded in Armenia's burgeoning democratic culture.

In the democratisation literature, one of the most important indicators that distinguishes democratised societies from democratising or non-democratic societies is the magnitude of institutional trust. The higher the interpersonal trust citizens have in their political institutions, the more democratic the given society remains. The lower the interpersonal trust that citizens have in their political institutions, the less democratic or non-democratic those given societies remain. Furthermore, in societies where institutional trust is high, concerns regarding democratic backsliding, institutional instability and, in general, authoritarian reversals become marginalised. As the extant survey data demonstrates (shown below), Armenia's democratic political culture is strongly on the rise, displaying a robust positive trajectory. Similarly, the data unequivocally demonstrates enhanced trust by citizens towards Armenia's political institutions.

Why are interpersonal and institutional trust such important indicators of democratic progress and institutionalisation? The broad scholarly literature on institutional trust holds that democratic sustainability is not possible without high levels of institutional trust among citizens. Thus, high levels of institutional trust are correlated with high levels of trust in the political system itself. There is a verifiable relationship between the growth of civic culture, the fostering of democratic performance, the reproduction of democratic outcomes, and institutional trust (Inglehart,

1990). Just as importantly, enhanced interpersonal and institutional trust creates platforms within society that are conducive to pluralism and consensus-based problem solving. Collectively, institutional trust, as a crucial component of a democratising political culture, gives legitimacy to the political system and promotes political participation. This is qualified as being part of an enduring cultural syndrome that becomes embedded in a society's political culture, thus nurturing the viability of democratic politics (Putnam, 1993).

To understand the relationship between growing institutional trust and how Armenia's pro-democracy incumbent was able to absorb the political shock of defeat in the Karabagh (Artsakh) 44-Day War 2020, this section comparatively observes the high levels of institutional and interpersonal trust prior to the 2021 parliamentary elections (2021 IRI, May & February):

- 75 % displayed a favourable rating of the armed forces (May 2021);
- 62 % displayed a favourable rating of the police (May 2021);
- 52 % displayed a favourable rating of the Human Rights Defender's Office (May 2021);
- 47 % displayed a favourable rating of local government (May 2021);
- 54 % displayed a favourable rating of the Office of the Prime Minister (February 2021);
- 38 % displayed a favourable rating for Office of Prime Minister (May 2021);
- PM Pashinyan's personal favourability stood at 45 % (May 2021);
- 62 % trusted the pro-democracy incumbent to oversee snap elections, while the opposition's demand for a transitional government only received 21 % support (February 2021).

The data reflects continuous and robust institutional trust from a large majority of Armenian society, with this trust strongly correlating with democratic governance. Similarly, while favourability ratings for the government fluctuate in comparative terms, this fluctuation is not reflected in levels of institutional trust. This enduring democratic syndrome, reinforced by Armenian society's embracing of emancipative values, aligns with the broader empirical findings in the literature, thus supporting the positive trajectory of the consolidation process after the military defeat in the Karabagh (Artsakh) 44-Day War 2020.

## Legacy of the Velvet Revolution and Democratic Elections

The legacy of the Velvet Revolution resolved one of the biggest problems that Armenian society had faced since the mid-1990s: the governing elite's crisis of legitimacy. The democratic elections of 2018 produced the first government in Armenia that did not suffer a crisis of legitimacy since 1991, when Levon Ter-Petrosyan was elected president after the fall of the Soviet Union. The subsequent free and fair elections of 2021 reaffirmed the institutional and governing legitimacy of the pro-democracy incumbent, while also satisfying the two-cycle electoral threshold implicit in the consolidation literature (Huntington, 1991).

Three factors, with respect to the legacy of the Velvet Revolution, explain the resilience and electoral success of the pro-democracy incumbent. First, consistent findings from survey data have shown a very large disparity between public support for the pro-democracy incumbent and support for the opposition. The disparity has held constant for both types of opposition, whether it is the authoritarian vestiges, or the more constructive, yet small, democratic opposition. Second, citizen trust in the pro-democracy incumbent and institutional support for his government translates into citizen distrust towards the opposition. In this context, the credibility of the opposition forces increases when it aligns with the government's policies, and decreases when it opposes the government. As such, regardless of the opposition's ideological leanings, public support is heavily tied to support of the Velvet government, confirming the findings on emancipative values and enduring democratic cultural syndromes. Third, these developments, to a very large extent, are directly tied to the legacy of the Velvet Revolution. The fight against corruption, abuse of power, human rights violations and the systemic repression that Armenian society suffered over the previous thirty years are equated with the Velvet Revolution as being the remedy. As such, the formation of Armenia's democratic culture is also directly tied to the Velvet Revolution. And since the pro-democracy Pashinyan government represents the culmination, or the realisation, of the Velvet Revolution, the legacy has remained persistent in limiting the capacity of the non-democratic opposition to diminish the pro-democracy incumbent's political capital.

## Electorally Weak Authoritarian Opposition and Democratic Consolidation

Empirical treatments of a democracy's trajectory after transition concentrate on the dynamics and covariates of democratic consolidation and breakdown. Three general postulates are hypothesised: first, all democracies as born transitional face a high risk of an authoritarian reversal; second, a transitional democracy may survive and consolidate, thus facing a low risk of authoritarian reversal; and third, a transitional democracy may survive but not consolidate, thus facing a high risk of authoritarian reversal (Svolik, 2015: 717). The determinant outcome in qualifying the scope of consolidation is the risk of breakdown faced by transitional democracies and the risk of authoritarian reversal. There is a statistically significant and robust relationship between large and durable decline in the risk of authoritarian reversal and democratic consolidation. This relationship, and the resilience of consolidation, is supplemented by the persistence of economic development: high levels of economic development reduce the risk of authoritarian reversal in transitional democracies, while also controlling for authoritarian neighbours.

These empirical referents serve as important causal factors in qualifying the consolidation process of Armenia's transitional democracy. First, as two cycles of fair and free elections demonstrate, along with expansive survey data, the risk of authoritarian reversal has been exponentially diminished, even amid a security crisis. Second, Armenia's economic indicators remain one of the strongest in the post-Soviet space, positively correlating with the empirical relationship between levels of economic development and reduction in risks of authoritarian reversal. These indicators, of course, do not presuppose absolute outcomes. De-consolidation, for example, still remains a possibility based on economic recession, incumbent backsliding and increased risk of authoritarian reversal. Third, perhaps the most important explanatory factor in accounting for the continuity of the pro-democracy government, and thus the resilience of Armenia's democratisation process, is the electoral weakness of the anti-democratic opposition. Collectively, these three factors are supported by the statistically significant findings in the scholarly literature regarding the relationship between democratic consolidation and risks of authoritarian reversal

(Svolik, 2015). Further, consistent survey data results from Armenia align with the findings in the extant research on the relationship between diminishing risks of authoritarian reversal and democratic consolidation.

Three important sets of factors define how the power configurations in Armenia's domestic politics consistently favour the pro-democracy incumbent. First, Armenia's domestic political theatre remains remarkably stable, *ceteris paribus*, in the light of the country's loss in a recent war as well as the continuing security crisis. The marginal size of an opposition composed of authoritarian vestiges, the latent support for the pro-democracy incumbent and society's overt rejection of the non-democratic opposition have mitigated any serious concerns about instability. In this context, post-war Armenia has not so much faced societal political instability, but rather instability among the political elite, which has not trickled down to the rest of society.

Second, the non-democratic opposition, in the eyes of the Armenian electorate, lacks both trust and credibility, and this has resulted in the failure of this faction to construct a tenable movement. In an effort to bury society's emancipative values under the soil of nationalism and promises of security, the anti-democratic opposition composed a narrative defined by national density and geopolitical aspirations, with the objective of breeding a "culture of allegiance" (Welzel, 2021: 138). This objective collapsed in the face of the emancipative effects entrenched within Armenia's democratic culture, as demonstrated by the pro-democracy incumbent's landslide victory in the 2021 parliamentary elections.

Third, both pre and post-2021 election survey data tell the same story: exceedingly low approval and trust in the opposition, and much higher approval and trust in the pro-democracy incumbent. In the pre-election Armenian Election Study (Oganesyan and Kopalyan, 2021), PM Pashinyan remained the most popular candidate, with an approval rating of 35 %. Head of the anti-democracy coalition and former president Robert Kocharyan's approval stood at 18 %. These results remained consistent with the various IRI surveys published between the end of the Karabagh (Artsakh) 44-Day War 2020 and the parliamentary elections. However, what was more telling in the Armenian Election Study's survey was Kocharyan's disapproval rating: it stood at 62 %. Just as interestingly, this exceedingly high disapproval rating aligned with all the candidates who were associated with the authoritarian vestiges, thus suggesting the

inability of the anti-democracy factions to escape their general crisis of legitimacy.

Data from the post-election IRI survey (2022)[5] not only demonstrates the same trend, but also confirms the further erosion of the base of support for the authoritarian vestiges, while enhancing the public support for the pro-democracy incumbent. The PM's favourability rating in the June survey stood at 53 %, while Robert Kocharyan's stood at 23 %. The 30 % disparity between Pashinyan and Kocharyan is consistent with the results of the 2021 parliamentary elections, indicative of the diminishing risk of authoritarian reversal. Further, whereas the unfavourability rating of the pro-democracy incumbent stood at 33 %, the anti-democratic opposition's leaders faced an unfavourability rating ranging from 63 % to 61 %.

When disaggregating the opposition's disapproval numbers, society's rejection of the authoritarian vestiges becomes more acute. With Kocharyan, for example, the "highly unfavourable" metric stands at 49 %, the highest rating after Artur Vanetsyan (another opposition figure), whose "highly unfavourable" rating stands at 50 % (with the total unfavourable rating at 64 %). Contextually, Kocharyan and Vanetsyan remain the most intensely disliked figures in Armenian politics, followed by third president Serzh Sargsyan, whose disapproval stood at 63 % (with "highly unfavourable" at 48 %), and the head of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Ishkhan Saghatelyan, with an unfavourable rating of 60 % (with "highly unfavourable" at 47 %). Pashinyan's "highly unfavourable" rating at 22 %, in this context, strongly correlates with Kocharyan's own favourability at 22 %. Thus, those who support Kocharyan are "highly unfavourable" towards Pashinyan, however, those who are "highly unfavourable" towards Kocharyan and the rest of the opposition leadership surpass Pashinyan's support base. The indication here is straightforward: even those who do not support the pro-democracy incumbent still adamantly oppose the non-democratic opposition.

Overarchingly, the robust tilting of public support in the elite-level power balance towards the Velvet government is directly correlated with the entrenchment of emancipative values within Armenia's political culture, as well as a robust diminishing of an authoritarian reversal. The more

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5    Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia, International Republican Institute (IRI) survey, January 2022.

widespread the emancipative values of a society, the "more mass support shifts away from antidemocratic forces and towards prodemocracy forces" (Welzel, 2021: 136). The consistent public support for the pro-democracy incumbent, both before and after the Karabagh (Artsakh) 44-Day War 2020, as well as before and after the 2021 parliamentary elections, strongly supports the relationship between Armenia's growing democratic culture, democratic governance, legitimacy of the pro-democracy incumbent and the positive trajectory of the consolidation process.

## Concluding with Empirical Referents

This chapter contributes to expanding the scholarly work on Armenia's transition and democratisation process, thus supporting the purpose of this volume and providing a multi-tiered understanding of how Armenia is consolidating the democratisation process after the democratic breakthrough of 2018. Just as importantly, this chapter fills a gap in the extant literature on the relationship between democracy and security, demonstrating that authoritarian reversal, based on promises of security, fails in the face of extensive empirical evidence. More so, democratising societies such as Armenia value democracy equally with security, and further qualify the enhancement of their security environment with the enhancement of their democratic safeguards.

In their seminal work *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*, Levitsky and Way (2010) qualified Armenia as a competitive authoritarian regime, but in their follow-up work (2020) on the 35 regimes that were measured in 2010, Armenia was one of fifteen that had democratised since 2019. Armenia's "pluralism and electoral competition", the decline of authoritarian indicators and the robust increase in democracy promotion reaffirmed the transition from competitive authoritarianism to democratisation after the Velvet Revolution. The subsequent and continuous "free and fair" elections after the Velvet Revolution, which allowed Armenia to escape the continual problems of electoral "fraud and manipulation" that were common prior to the revolution (Lanskoy and Suthers, 2019: 86), also remain fundamental to the country's democratic breakthrough. By 2021 the Varieties of Democracy Index ranked Armenia

in the "top 20 %–30 %" within the LDI, noting the country's transition from "electoral autocracy to electoral democracy" (V-Dem 2022).[6] *The Economist*'s Democracy Index (2021) ranked Armenia at 89, qualifying Armenia as the most democratic country in the South Caucasus and the second most democratic country in the post-Soviet space after Ukraine (ranked 86).[7] In the Social Progress Global Index (2022), Armenia was ranked 48 in the world, with the highest social progress rating in the entire post-Soviet space.[8]

Further empirical referents supporting Armenia's democratisation and consolidation process are observed in the expansive improvements Armenia has made in battling corruption, enhancing media freedom, as well as collectively improving the country's democratic characteristics. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2021)[9] ranks Armenia 58th in the world, second only in the post-Soviet space behind Georgia, with Armenia displaying one of the highest score increases in the world after the 2018 Velvet Revolution. In Freedom House's Democracy Score Index, Armenia joined Georgia and Ukraine as the only transitional regimes in the post-Soviet space, while in the Internet Freedom ranking, Armenia is qualified as "free" and joins Georgia as the only two countries with the highest freedom score in the post-Soviet space. Finally, in the 2022 Press Freedom Index, produced by Reporters Without Borders, Armenia ranked 51st in the world, the highest press freedom ranking in all of Eurasia, while at the same time perhaps displaying one of the more robust improvements in the world, jumping from an 80th ranking in 2018 to 51st within a four-year period. Further, amid war, continuous security crises, martial law and domestic political upheavals, Armenia's press freedom ranking actually improved from 61 in 2020 to 51 in 2022. Collectively, macro and structural considerations of democratic progress, as well as specific indicators such as corruption, media freedom, press freedom and social progress, all empirically demonstrate consistent and strong progress towards democratic consolidation.

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6    <https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf>

7    <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/>

8    Global Index 2022: Results | Social Progress Imperative, <https://www.socialprogress. org/global-index-2022-results/>.

9    2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – Explore, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/ 2021>.

In conclusion, this chapter displays the broad social consensus on the country's democratic path, the burgeoning of its democratic political culture, the consistent electoral success of the pro-democracy faction, the societal and electoral safeguards against authoritarian reversal, the growing interpersonal and institutional trust of the citizenry, and the resilience of Armenia's democratic aspirations amid a continuing security crisis. As the transitology framework suggests, Armenia's inroads remain substantive and demonstrate a positive trajectory towards democratic consolidation. At the same time, the "careening" and fluctuating nature of Armenia's institutional reforms, the slow pace of structural and systemic improvements, the labyrinthine limitations to pluralism in the electoral field and exogenous concerns specific to irredentist neighbours remain important variables that can intermittently delay the consolidation process.

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Khatchik Der Ghougassian

# 3. Social Protest and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century: The Left Turn in Latin America and a Critical Comment on the Velvet Revolution

**Abstract:** Putting Armenia's Velvet Revolution within the wider context of the popular mobilisations in the aftermath of the post-Cold War transition at the end of the 1990s, this brief comment in the form of an essay takes a critical path to question the assumption of democratisation per se, and proposes to focus on the ideological drive that lies behind it. It assumes that: (1) democratisation is closely linked to economic inclusion; (2) populist uprisings are not ideologically impartial; and (3) extreme wealth concentration disables any structural reforms aimed at deepening democracy, widening tolerance and diversity, promoting inclusion and strengthening a socially just order. The main argument maintains that Armenia's Velvet phenomenon closely followed the script of the "democratic revolutions" in its abstention from any criticism of the dominant assumption of free market economics with respect to the question of wealth redistribution. From this perspective, it was a neoliberal populist upheaval that ended in a regime change, and opened the way to the seizure of the state and the rise to power of a group who widely represented a generation that had grown up in an independent country but felt marginalised from politics and from the aspirations to the "good life" that previous power holders enjoyed.

**Keywords:** left turn, populism, ideology, Velvet Revolution, neoliberalism

> From a political perspective we are not liberal, we are not centrist, we are not social democrat, we are a civil [society] party. (Nikol Pashinyan)

I don't believe in those who don't believe in political "ism's". (Abraham Gasbaryan) Early assumptions of scholars who were engaged with the Velvet Revolution, who supported it, and who even became its organic intellectuals in a Gramscian sense, assumed that Armenia's popular uprising stood apart from other "colour revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine and the so-called "Arab Spring". Despite the similarities, including the geopolitical context, the name chosen, the organisation of the mobilisation, the political formation and worldviews of its leading figures and intellectuals and funding sources

among others, "Velvet is not a colour", as one of these scholars famously declared. Accordingly, the Velvet Revolution's singularity lay in the fact that it was bottom-up, grassroots-based and non-elitist driven and respectful to the existing institutions of the state rather than opposed to them. It also differed from the post-Soviet "colour revolutions" in that its leaders were wise enough to avoid alienating Russia. (Broers and Ohanyan 2020)

Either because of a realistic appraisal of Armenia's dependence on Russia for its national security and foreign trade, or because of lessons regarding the price that Armenia could not allow itself the luxury of paying learned from the fatally over-enthusiastic Western turn of Georgia and Ukraine, not much changed in Armenia's foreign and security policy after the Velvet Revolution. Velvet is not a colour, nor is Armenia a Georgia or Ukraine; however, Armenia's democratic transition could become a model for others in the post-Soviet Eurasian space, such as the Belarusian opposition to Lukashenko. (Ohanyan 2020) The political marketing of Armenia's democratic revolution went further in its discourse to frame it as a "threat" to the survival of Ilhan Aliyev's totalitarian regime in Azerbaijan. This was before the disastrous defeat of Armenia in the 44 Days War, which revealed the emptiness of the over-enthusiastic expectations of the Velvet phenomenon to become a model for others, let alone fulfil its promises in its own country.

In this brief chapter, I propose a critical approach to the Velvet phenomenon in Armenia from the perspective of other social upheavals in the twenty-first century, specifically the 'left turn' in Latin America, on the basis of an argument that assumes: (1) that democratisation is closely linked to economic inclusion; (2) that populist uprisings are not ideologically impartial; and (3) that extreme wealth concentration disables any structural reform aimed at deepening democracy, widening tolerance and diversity, promoting inclusion and strengthening a socially just order. Accordingly, it maintains that the underlying ideological worldviews of the leading factions of the social protests in Latin America and the "democratic revolutions" in the former Soviet republics, including the Velvet variant in Armenia, differ in their approach to neoliberalism and the post-Cold War world order. Whereas the former is critical of the basic assumptions of neoliberalism, liberal democracy and free market economics, the latter finds in these its sources of legitimisation and its "brand", as the leader of the Velvet Revolution has claimed again and again.

The ideological underpinning is not merely a social construct. Historical-structural as well as global geopolitical factors explain the divergence in these worldviews, despite both Latin America and former communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union being part of what Samuel Huntington characterised as the "Third Wave of Democratization" in his 1993 classic The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century – an argument that Michael McFaul, in his 2002 article, reconsiders in terms of a "fourth wave of democracy and dictatorship".

My general argument is based on two previous articles on the social nature of the political polarisation in Armenia in the aftermath of the bloody clashes of 1–2 March 2008 following the presidential elections (Der Ghougassian, 2011), and the coming to power of the left in Latin America in 2002–2003 (Der Ghougassian, 2016). This brief chapter is not a comparative analysis following the classical method of defining variables and a theoretical perspective. My critical reflection is centred on the difference between the ideological underpinnings of both the "left turn" and the Velvet "democratic revolution", to open a space of debate about the latter from a post-Marxist leftist perspective. Post-Marxist perspectives, as Razmig Keucheyan argues in Hémisphère gauche: Une cartographie des nouvelles pensées critiques (2010) are part of the re-emergence of critical thinking after its decline in 1977–1993. The perspective chosen here is in line with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's 1985 seminal work Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (2010), and both authors' further elaboration of the concept of populism (Laclau 2010; Mouffe 2018).

My comment, therefore, takes sides in the debate about the Velvet phenomenon from a leftist critical perspective, which is scarce if not nonexistent in the literature that deals with the issue. Indeed, the clash of ideas in the aftermath of the regime change in April 2018 at its best was structured through an opposition between the "nationalist" and the "democratic", and at its worst reduced to the simple "us and them". A leftist perspective on the debate about the Velvet phenomenon and its aftermath aims at opening a new space for the enrichment of the discussion and the broadening of the understanding of the situation. A comparative analysis of "social origins", to use Barrington Moore's classical concept in his study of democracies and dictatorships from a historical sociological perspective (Moore, 1966), for instance, could further, and empirically, highlight the differences.

Without deepening theoretical and methodological formulations, three key concepts in particular need brief presentation to make clear that "taking sides" is not synonymous with an approach that overlooks certain basics for an objective analysis: neoliberalism, ideology and populism. Neoliberalism refers to the context of the global political economy, which defines the structure in which any social phenomenon, including mass protest, has taken place since the 1980s, and more specifically after the fall of the Soviet Union. It is the topic of a vast literature, both in favour and against, as the entry for the term in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2011) shows. This chapter relies on the critical perspective of the political philosophy that F. A. Hayek and Milton Friedman founded respectively in politics and economics; more specifically, it uses Wendy Brown's radical criticism of neoliberalism in Undoing the Demos. Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution (2015) and In the Ruins of Neoliberalism. The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West (2019), which maintains that neoliberal economics undermines democracy, which, as she explained in an earlier article, "does not require absolute social and economic equality, but it cannot withstand large and fixed extremes of rich and poor that undermine the very possibility of legislating our lives in common" (Brown, 2011).

The ideological factor reveals the worldviews of the leading actors in social protest and the way they perceive change. "Ideology" in this chapter follows the reasoning of Paul Ricoeur's L'Idéologie et l'utopie[1] (1997) and focuses on the role it plays as a factor in political legitimisation.

Populism refers to the performance of the masses during protest rallies, challenging mainstream institutional channels to address social and political demands. As in the case of neoliberalism, there is a huge literature on the concept of "populism", which has become a central topic of interest and research in political science. María Esperanza Casullo is among those scholars who have studied the outburst of populism in the world since the beginning of the twenty-first century, in Latin America in particular. According to her broad analysis of the phenomenon, the common characteristics of all populist mobilisations are "strong and personal leaderships, people rallying around this kind of leadership, and the use of ever-present antagonistic impulses" (Casullo, 2019). These characteristics are a mirror image of the Velvet phenomenon; hence, Casullo's approach to populism as a discourse that succeeds in building convincing narratives in a world in crisis is the one that this chapter follows.

In what follows, I briefly elaborate on social protest in the context of the post-Cold War neoliberal order, to highlight the differences between the divergent ideological trends of the left turn in Latin America and the Velvet Revolution in Armenia. Next, I focus separately on each and explain the social historical reasons that explain this divergence. In the final part, I come back to the main argument to question the originality of the Velvet phenomenon as a genuine democratisation, and not as yet another failure in understanding and addressing the deeper social polarisation that the neoliberal system inevitably produces, with the extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of a minority and the exclusion of large sectors from participation in the decision-making process of the economy.

Social protests and "democratic revolutions" are post-democratic transition phenomena at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, in a unipolar world order in which, according to Francis Fukuyama's famously framed "End of History" thesis in 1989, liberal democracy and the free-market economy model of political development had prevailed. Social protests and upheavals in Latin America did not question democracy but aimed to break the hegemonic model with the inclusion of an understanding of social justice in general, and wealth redistribution in particular. "Democratic revolutions" understood social justice in terms of ending the semi-authoritarian regimes of the former Soviet republics, and targeted corruption as the main obstacle to a "good life" for everyone; wealth redistribution was not included in the scripts of mass protest rallies and/or government programmes. The "left turn" in Latin America built its legitimacy on its criticism of the limitations of liberal democracy and the neoliberal economy; the Velvet phenomenon aimed at monopolising the liberal democratic "brand" and positioned itself as a guarantor of neoliberal economics.

The fall of the Soviet Union and the failure of the historical experience of state socialism discredited the left, which, in all its variants, has been the dominant ideology of social mobilisation and the conviction of the progressive trend of history towards a fairer redistribution of wealth and a just social order since the early nineteenth century. The hegemonic drive of the "end of history" Fukuyaman worldview imposed liberal democracy and free market economics as the only model of development and modernisation. As the winner of the Cold War and the only superpower after the end of the bipolar confrontation, the US became the guardian, rule-maker and promoter of global capitalism.

Within this geopolitical landscape, "socialism", as the left was termed in the mindset of Soviet societies, entered a deep coma in Eurasia. Former communist leaders followed Russia's lead to "shock therapy"-style privatisation and the liberalisation of the economy while simultaneously "capturing the state" and using it as a vehicle in what ironically became the Marxian first accumulation of capital. Democracy was equated with electoral formality and the free market with oligarchic capitalism. All this happened with the active participation of foreign advisors and the support of international financial organisations.

Having already embraced the Reagan–Thatcher conservative revolution's neoliberalism as the capitalist mode of production in the mid-1980s, European social democracy, the soul of the welfare state and the once successful alternative to both the Soviet-style planned economy and American laissez-faire ideology, completed its "right turn" after the end of the Cold War. It followed the Blairite path of social liberalism, increasingly disengaging from the struggle for a fair wealth redistribution and the defence of the rights of the workers and workers' unions, which were its historical bases of support. The 2002 French elections, when the socialist party fell into third place behind Jean Marie Le Pen's far right, was perhaps the final proof of the metamorphosis of European social democracy in the 1990s, and the alienation of the working class from their proposals.

Like the rest of the world, Latin America experienced the "end of history" in the 1990s under the so-called Washington Consensus, or the "Ten Commandments"-type series of free market reforms that the late economist John Williamson proposed in 1989 and which became a guiding reference. The reforms seemed to be an exemplary success in practically all countries, but especially in Mexico and Argentina, as they opened the way for the return of international financial flows and foreign credit. The region bade farewell to the "lost decade" of the 1980s of null economic growth, hyperinflation and defaults on the payment of foreign debt, through a set of programmes involving liberalisation, privatisation, the downsizing of the state, fiscal discipline and capital flows. All these reforms received solid support through successive "certificates of good conduct" from the International Monetary Fund and the backing of other financial organisations and international investors.

The democratic transition in the previous decade survived the challenge of economic downturn, military insurrections and civil war in Central America. The market reforms in the 1990s were implemented within a

broad social and political consensus, though each country followed its own economic premises and priorities. The democratic transition opened the way to a new era of conflict resolution, rapprochement and regional integration; market reforms that followed the return of the constitutional orders deepened these trends, and the first Summit of the Americas in Miami in 1994 projected the horizon of a hemispheric free trade area. Within this broad euphoria and optimism, however, the Mexican peso crisis and its "tequila effect" in 1994 came as the first signal of the looming failure of the model. Other regions, such as Southeastern Asia in 1997 and Russia in 1998, followed; yet the reform-minded governments in Latin America were confident about their capacity to handle the international shocks, and with few exceptions, especially Brazil, were reluctant to modify the free market economic policies put in place.

The euphoria of the economic growth that market reforms brought overshadowed the dark side of neoliberalism, especially in countries where the welfare state had been dismantled: the systemic exclusion of the poor and the marginal sectors of society from wealth creation and redistribution dynamics. In Argentina, the unemployed workers' phenomenon, for instance, identified the once vibrant middle class of industrial workers who lost their jobs and fell into poverty and marginalisation. It gradually became a collective identity and gave birth to the social movements that took to the streets and performed the first protest rallies by blocking inter-provincial highways and main routes in big cities starting from the mid-1990s. The broad mobilisation of the Landless (Sem Terra) in Brazil, the coca leaf farmers' movement (Cocaleros) in Bolivia are other examples of the excluded of the neoliberal economy, who before Seattle 1999, Occupy Wall Street, Indignados and other social mobilisations in the North, started the wave of protest rallies. The left that came to power in Venezuela (1999), Brazil (2002), Argentina (2003), Uruguay (2005), Bolivia (2005), Ecuador (2006), Chile (2006, though in different circumstances) and for a short period Paraguay (2008) in the early twenty-first century and marked the historical period known as the left turn built on these social mobilisations, included them in their broad electoral coalitions and won elections.

This was a new Latin American left that had abandoned the armed struggle of the 1970s, made the critical choice between the once romantic and dogmatic belief in the virtues of revolutionary violence and the idealisation of the Cuban Revolution and its idols, and embraced democracy and a commitment to human rights. It did not deny its

revolutionary legacy of a historical struggle against imperialism but re-evaluated the ethics and opportunities for change that democracy provided (Rodríguez et al. 2007; Natanson 2008). In the 1990s, instead of aligning with centre-right governments and adopting the Washington Consensus programme, the Latin American left began its pragmatic incursion into public administration by winning municipal elections, showing its mobilisation and social inclusion capabilities in Montevideo (Uruguay) and Porto Alegre (Brazil) – to mention only two of the most successful experiences of new leftist public administrations in municipal government that became models and inspired trust in its management abilities and political pragmatism – and exhibiting sensitivity to environmental issues. The critical revision of the balance between armed struggle and successful experiences in public administration, therefore, marked a true transformation of the Latin American left, which came to power with a commitment to an alternative model that, in its general features, consisted of (1) the return of the state as a regulator of the economy, (2) a commitment to social justice, (3) an integrationist vocation, (4) anti-imperialism and (5) reform of the international order.

The Latin American left turn was history when the mass mobilisation in April 2018 and regime change in Armenia made international headlines with the label of the Velvet Revolution. The overall balance of the left turn and its social achievements showed a mixed bag of successes and failures, leaders who handled power with unprecedent levels of popularity and shameful corruption scandals. Except for the so-called Bolivarian states that followed Venezuela's radical model of "socialism for the twenty-first century" (Boron 2008; Bilbao 2008) and fell back on authoritarian rule, or were tempted to, the new Latin American left remained engaged with democracy and human rights. The centre-right had regained power in Latin America by mid-2010, and in some countries, among them Brazil as the paradigmatic case, it had metamorphosed into a far-right variant of a mixture of populist authoritarianism and a push towards libertarian economics as the purest expression of neoliberal capitalism, echoing some European political forces, but above all Trumpism in the US.

The populist conservatism that characterised the far right, or the International Reactionary as some scholars have characterised the phenomenon (MacKay 2018; Tokatlian 2023), questioned the liberal virtues that the "colour/democratic revolutions" pretended to implement in public policies and international relations when challenging any variant

of an authoritarian, semi-authoritarian or illiberal democratic regime in their countries. Understandably, therefore, the Western media perceived the Velvet Revolution as the mirror-image of the "colour revolutions", or gave it credit, basically moral credit, as such. The same could be said also for the hopes or wishful thinking of all the intellectuals who enthusiastically supported the regime change. To be fair, the perception of the latter was justified because the regime in place in Armenia was the guardian of the oligarchic order of the political economy that had emerged and consolidated after the transition from the Soviet system, which through a manouevre of constitutional reform from a presidential to a parliamentary system in 2015 aimed at perpetuating its power in 2018. Ironically, the move was reminiscent of Mikheil Saakashvili's 2010 constitutional amendment, through which the leader of the 2003 Roses Revolution and two-term president of Georgia wanted to perpetuate his power; he lost the elections two years later to his less pro-Western rival.

As in Latin America, social polarisation was both the origin and the structural context that the leaders of the April 2018 mass mobilisation capitalised on for regime change. Their move was populist in the sense that it relied on an institutional failure to meet the bottom-up social demands for a just and inclusive social and economic order, and featured a charismatic figure and a rhetoric that pleased the crowd. The outcome, the Velvet Revolution, diverged from the left turn in its ideological perspective and the script of the political programme, which was far from being critical of the premises of neoliberalism.

The decade prior to the April 2018 mass protests, the turning point of which was the bloody repression on 1–2 March 2008 of those who contested the outcome of the presidential elections the previous month, is crucial to understanding the political polarisation that the leadership of the Velvet Revolution successfully used for popular mobilisation and withheld as a tool of governance in the aftermath of the regime change. It remained in place and proved effective enough to secure an electoral victory for those whose handling of the 44-Day War proved to be woefully incompetent and led to the disastrous agreement of 9 November 2020, which the opposition framed as "capitulation". However, the origins of this political polarisation lie in the social polarisation that the economic transition in the 1990s generated and consolidated: the oligarchic order of Armenia's neoliberal political economy. The political polarisation was driven by deep grievances within a large sector of the population who had

not seen improvements in their social and economic conditions. These grievances were exacerbated by the unequal wealth distribution resulting from the free-market economic system implemented during the post-communist transition.

Armenia's first president Levon Ter Petrosian's return to the political stage ten years after his resignation on February 1998, which political analysts consider a "soft coup" regime change, became a catalyst for the political mobilisation of a large segment of the population, first in the presidential elections as the main challenger of the candidate of the Republican Party, Serge Sargsian, and then in the violent protests that rejected the result of the ballot that gave the latter victory. Despite not presenting a clear alternative or addressing economic and social needs, Ter Petrosian successfully capitalised on the grievances of the population, gaining significant support and becoming the leader of the opposition, thanks to his leadership skills, political ability, personal charisma and support from powerful allies in the local oligarchy.

Thus, the post-March 2008 political polarisation in Armenia stemmed from unsatisfied demands for social justice, which in turn resulted from the uneven wealth distribution caused by the neoliberal economic model. As in almost all other former Soviet republics, the economic transition in Armenia followed the Russian "shock therapy" model of radical market liberalisation, which led to a corporatist model of wealth accumulation embedded in the state. This resulted in the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the new oligarchic class born of the first accumulation of capital. The shock therapy transition also left a social policy deficit, as it focused primarily on trade policy, market liberalisation and privatisation, while neglecting social sector restructuring.

In Armenia, the transition model did not face any real opposition, in part because of the scepticism of ordinary citizens of the former Soviet republic towards any alternative that was associated with the failed communist experience. The oligarchic order that was put in place adopted the formalities of democratic governance, mainly elections, to assure a state structure that perpetuated the privileges of the few. Moreover, the manouevre of forming coalition governments after elections left little if any space for the rise of strong and efficient oppositions to enable a healthy space for checks and balances and assure alternation of governments. Despite some reforms and constitutional amendments before March 2008, and despite the economic boom that created the euphoria of Armenia

becoming a "Caucasian Tiger", large segments of the society did not perceive significant improvements in their everyday life; and when the impact of the 2008 global financial collapse reached Armenia in 2009–10, they felt the whole weight of the economic downturn.

Social polarisation and the grievances of large segments of Armenian society as a result of the lack of improvement in their well-being, upward mobility and/or opportunity to emigrate, as practically one third of the population did after independence, was the structural basis on which the future Velvet Revolutionaries built their leadership and gained wide support for the regime change after the April 2018 popular mobilisation. As mentioned earlier, their public discourse, script for political action and ideological orientation followed closely the northern and Middle Eastern "democratic revolutions", and differed from the left turn in Latin America. In other words, Velvet is a colour, another one, and, so far, the last in the list of political initiatives that rightly believed in the virtues of democracy but failed to understand that extreme concentration of wealth severely limits the scope of democratisation, since they neglected any commitment to wider inclusion of the masses in the process of wealth creation and redistribution.

At the end of the day, the regime change provided the opportunity for the leadership of the Velvet Revolution to capture the state, to seize, maintain and expand power, and to use this as a vehicle to assure their participation and share in the "good life" that the oligarchic system has provided to the holders of big capital in Armenia. They aimed at controlling the system without any project or ambition to change or reform it beyond the economic orthodoxy of neoliberalism. They capitalised on the grievances that the social polarisation of the post-transition produced in Armenia, and in the absence of an alternative to the liberal populist ideological "brand" of democracy they put in place, they remained in power even after the disastrous defeat in the 44-Days War.

To conclude, this chapter does not deny the legitimacy of the April 2018 popular mobilisation and the regime change that followed; it only refers to the political capitalisation of the grievances that the social polarisation inherent to the neoliberal political economy produces; and it maintains that the ideological approach and perspective matter when it comes to building political capital and leadership for a project of change, and for different outcomes. Before the April 2018 popular mobilisation, no political force showed the interest or ability to capitalise on social polarisation so as to

assume leadership of a change focused on social justice and an inclusive economic system. That does not mean that there was no space for it.

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Hrayr Manukyan

# 4. The Roots of Armenia's Democratisation after the 2018 Velvet Revolution

**Abstract:** This chapter argues that (1) Armenia has substantially democratised since the 2018 Velvet Revolution, and (2) this democratisation is (at least partially) due to the 2018 Velvet Revolution presenting itself as a case of civil disobedience. Some scholars and intellectuals have downgraded the significance of Armenia's democratic transition or even rejected the observation that Armenia has democratised since 2018. This chapter demonstrates that Armenia was a semi-authoritarian country before 2018, and became a democracy (though not a consolidated democracy) after 2018, despite the challenges of Covid-19, the 44-Day Karabagh (Artsakh) War in 2020, and the pressure from outside authoritarian regimes and internal authoritarian tendencies. The chapter uses various reports and analyses to show that after 2018 there was progress in elections and media freedom to a sufficient extent to characterise Armenia as a (weak) democracy. In addition, in light of the main theories of civil disobedience, the chapter argues that the 2018 protests might be considered acts of civil disobedience that democratised Armenia by exercising *constituent power*.

**Keywords:** Velvet Revolution, democratisation, civil disobedience, constituent power, elections, media freedom, democracy indices

This chapter is about Armenia's recent democratic transition. It argues that Armenia has democratised sufficiently since the 2018 Velvet Revolution that the country can be characterised as a democracy. Some Armenian scholars and intellectuals (ARCH, 2021; 168.am, 2021; Abrahamyan, 2022; Srbinovski, 2022; Voskanyan, 2021: 63) have downgraded the significance of Armenia's democratic transition or even rejected the observation that Armenia has democratised since 2018. This chapter demonstrates that Armenia was a semi-authoritarian country before 2018 and became a democracy (though not a consolidated democracy) after 2018, despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, the 44-Day Karabagh (Artsakh) War in 2020, and the pressure from outside authoritarian regimes and internal authoritarian tendencies. It does so by using various reports and analyses, including, among others, international observers' reports concerning

elections, statistical analyses of election outcomes and democracy indices published by several organisations. Almost all these reports and analyses show progress in elections and media freedoms to a sufficient extent that Armenia can be characterised as a (weak) democracy at present.

The chapter also argues that the main reason for Armenia's recent democratisation is the 2018 Velvet Revolution. In a nutshell, the argument is as follows. (1) Civil disobedience is a democratising political practice. (2) The 2018 Armenian Velvet Revolution was a case of civil disobedience. Therefore, (3) the 2018 Armenian Velvet Revolution has democratised Armenia. The structure of this argument is similar to the following classical argument: human beings are mortal, Socrates is a human being, therefore Socrates is mortal. This argument is a theoretical/philosophical argument, not an empirical one. One does not need to record the deaths of all human beings of all times (past and future) to make this classical argument a sound argument. The argument implies that there is something in the nature of humans that makes them mortal. Similarly, the main theories of civil disobedience imply that there is something in the nature of civil disobedience that makes it a democratising political practice (Arendt, 1972; Celikates, 2021; Habermas, 1985).

This chapter uses the main theories of civil disobedience (religious-spiritual, liberal, democratic and radical democratic) to show that (1) there is something in the nature of civil disobedience that makes it a democratising political practice, and (2) the 2018 Armenian protests were acts of civil disobedience. If (1) and (2) are true, the conclusion is that (3) the 2018 Armenian protests (or Velvet Revolution) enacted Armenia's democratisation.

Analysing the 2018 Armenian protests in terms of theories of civil disobedience is a new approach: all other studies concerning the 2018 Velvet Revolution have employed different theoretical frameworks (see, for example, Abrahamian and Shagoyan, 2018; Broers, 2021; Derluguian and Hovhannisyan, 2018; Grigoryan, 2018; Ishkanian, 2018; Iskandaryan, 2018; Ohanyan, 2021; Silaev and Fomin, 2018). A common approach looks at the 2018 revolution as the culmination of the development of Armenia's civil society "preceding the uprising and partially explaining the roots of the seemingly spontaneous mobilisation [in 2018]" (Paturyan and Gevorgyan, 2021: 4). Therefore, standard analyses focus on the concepts of "civil society" and "social movements", as well as on related theories. This

chapter suggests an alternative conceptual and theoretical approach: civil disobedience and its theories.


## Characterising Armenia's Political System before and after the 2018 Velvet Revolution

### *Armenia's Political System before 2018*

Not long after the collapse of the Soviet Union, many scholars noticed that most post-Soviet countries (including Armenia) were stuck in a "grey zone" between democracy and authoritarianism (Carothers, 2002). In this normalised situation, which can last for many years or decades, the typical pattern "is one of dubious but not outright fraudulent elections in which the ruling group tries to put on a good-enough electoral show to gain the approval of the international community while quietly tilting the electoral playing field far enough in its own favour to ensure victory" (Carothers, 2002: 12). Various terms have been suggested to describe these post-Soviet and other similar countries. The most widespread terms are semi-authoritarianism, hybrid regime, anocracy, electoral autocracy and competitive authoritarianism. A seminal study (Levitsky and Way, 2010) postulates that these "regimes are competitive in that opposition parties use democratic institutions to contest seriously for power, but they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily skewed in favour of incumbents. Competition is thus real but unfair" (Levitsky and Way, 2010: 5). Thus, the defining feature of countries stuck in the "grey zone" concerns elections: they might be free, but they are not fair.

Besides this general description referring to many semi-authoritarian regimes, some studies also provide detailed descriptions of Armenia's pre-2018 regime. For example, political theorist Manvel Sargsyan describes the political order of the second half of the 1990s as a military oligarchy, which was replaced by a criminal oligarchy in 2003 (Sargsyan, 2010). According to Sargsyan, there is no leader with unquestionable authority in a criminal-oligarchic system. Rather, claims Sargsyan, there is an agreement between those with significant capital to distribute the country's wealth, territory

and key political positions. In a criminal-oligarchic system, elections are merely formal, similar to elections in other (semi-)authoritarian systems. However, instead of falsifying the elections by using brute force (as in standard authoritarian systems), the falsification in a criminal-oligarchic system involves significant financial resources, including bribing the general public (Sargsyan, 2010: 49–50). Anthropologists Levon Abrahamian and Gayane Shagoyan describe the pre-2018 regime in slightly different terms than Sargsyan. Abrahamian and Shagoyan notice Soviet-style governance in post-Soviet Armenia mixed with medieval feudal features (Abrahamian and Shagoyan, 2018: 510–12). They also describe the history of electoral fraud and the concrete mechanisms of falsification in post-Soviet Armenia (Abrahamian and Shagoyan, 2012), which aligns with Sargsyan's characterisations.

In short, before the 2018 revolution, there were many opposition parties contesting elections, some degree of freedom of speech and assembly and a more or less well-functioning civil society (including diverse grassroots movements and Western-financed NGOs) in Armenia. However, elections in Armenia were "marred by fraud and in some instances by violence" (Ishkanian, 2018: 271). Popular mobilisation and powerful demonstrations following fraudulent elections challenged the dominant party but could not change it. The semi-authoritarian regime seemed stable, and there was little prospect of an alternation of power in the foreseeable future (Broers, 2021: 7; Fumagalli and Turmanidze, 2018).

## Contradictory Characterisations Concerning Armenia's Political System after 2018

Some scholars have noticed that Armenia's political system has fundamentally changed since 2018. For example, according to Manvel Sargsyan (2019), the Velvet Revolution demolished the pre-2018 criminal-oligarchic system and put the country in need of a new political system. Focusing on Armenia's democratic transition, Broers and Ohanyan (2021), interestingly, refer to Armenia's democratisation as a self-evident fact that does not need to be demonstrated or argued. Instead, the authors (especially Ohanyan) highlight similarities with (or differences from) other countries' democratisations. The authors also try to identify the reasons

for the revolution, the roles of civil society and various actors in it as well as global and regional contexts and foreign policy implications for Armenia.

Western governmental organisations have also noticed Armenia's democratisation. The Netherlands opened an embassy in Yerevan right after the revolution, justifying its decision by the need to support the revolutionary government's "modernising" efforts and "fighting corruption" (Harutyunyan, 2019). The US invited Armenia to the 2021 and 2023 Summits for Democracy, despite Armenia's strategic partnership with Russia (US Department of State, 2021; US Department of State, 2023).[1] According to a resolution passed in January 2022 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, "Armenia has made marked progress in its democratic development since 2018" (Parliamentary Assembly, 2022). One co-rapporteur of the resolution announced that Armenia is "a shining star of democracy in the region" (Prime Minister, 2021). In September 2022 the speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, visited Armenia, announcing that "Armenia is an important front in the battle between democracy and autocracy" (Pelosi, 2022).

However, many Armenian scholars and intellectuals living in Armenia reject the observation that fundamental changes and democratisation have occurred since 2018, arguing, for example, that there has been no improvement in terms of democracy since the revolution because the revolutionary PM Pashinyan is a populist who presents himself as the voice of "the people" against "the corrupt elites", and who establishes a direct emotional connection with his constituencies by bypassing state institutions (ARCH, 2021; Voskanyan, 2021: 63); that after the 44-Day Karabagh (Artsakh) War in 2020, Armenia's political system became similar to the pre-2018 system: an unformed party system with weak authorities relying on the majority's apathy and weak opposition (168. am, 2021; Srbinovski, 2022); and that after the 2018 revolution, "change of systems, surely, did not take place: as there was a personalised autocracy, so it remains, as there was nomenclatural-oligarchic capitalism, so it exists now" (Abrahamyan, 2022). This chapter puts forward the idea that the question of whether Armenia has democratised after the 2018 revolution

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1    As this book goes to press, Armenia remains a member of both the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union and the military Collective Security Treaty Organization.

or otherwise may be taken and addressed seriously, as opposed to being stated as a self-evident fact.

*Democracy Indices: Methodology, Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks*

This sub-section looks at various democracy indices published by respected international and academic organisations to examine whether Armenia has democratised or not. It focuses on the methodology underlying these indices, including the conceptual and theoretical framework they apply. The following organisations and their publications are considered: the Polity Project, V-Dem, IDEA, Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). These organisations usually identify three or four types of regimes or political systems. The Polity Project identifies three general types: autocracies (with a so-called polity score of –10 to –6), anocracies (–5 to +5) and democracies (+5 to +10) (Polity IV, 2014). The Polity Project also identifies various subtypes. Closed anocracy (–5 to –1) and open anocracy (+1 to +5) are subtypes of anocracy, and democracy (+6 to +9) and full democracy (+10) are subtypes of democracy. As Table 1 shows, from 1998 until 2018, Armenia's score was +5 (anocracy), while at the end of 2018, the score was changed to +7 (democracy) (Polity5, 2018).

Table 4.1: Armenia's polity scores, by the Polity Project

| Years | 1991–1995 | 1995–1996 | 1996–1998 | 1998–2018 | December 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Polity score | +6 | +1 | –6 | +5 | +7 |

Similarly, IDEA identifies three main regime types: democracies, hybrid and authoritarian regimes, and several subtypes of democracy: weak, mid-range performing or high-performing democracies (IDEA, 2022: 2). This organisation changed Armenia's status from "hybrid regime" to "democracy" in 2018 and continued to consider Armenia as a (weak) democracy in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 (IDEA, 1991–2022). V-Dem classifies countries based on four regime types (V-Dem Institute, 2022: 45): liberal democracy, electoral democracy, electoral autocracy and closed autocracy. Before 2018 Armenia was considered an electoral autocracy (V-Dem, 2018: 94). From (including) 2018 until 2020, Armenia was considered an electoral

autocracy with a "plus" mark, indicating substantial democratisation (V-Dem, 2019: 52; V-Dem, 2020: 26; V-Dem, 2021: 31). Since 2021 Armenia has been considered an electoral democracy (V-Dem Institute, 2022: 45; V-Dem, 2023: 39). Similarly, in its 2022 report, Freedom House designated Armenia as an "electoral democracy" for the first time and continued to do so in 2023 (Freedom House, 2021: 1461; Freedom House, 2022; Freedom House, 2023). The EIU also identifies four regimes: full democracies (with a score of 8.01–10), flawed democracies (score of 6.01–8.00), hybrid regimes (score of 4.01–6.00) and authoritarian regimes (score of 0.00–3.99) (EIU, 2023: 3–5). As Figure 4.1 shows, the EIU usually gave a mark of 4 to Armenia for more than a decade before the 2018 revolution. However, the EIU has increased Armenia's mark to 5.5 since 2018.
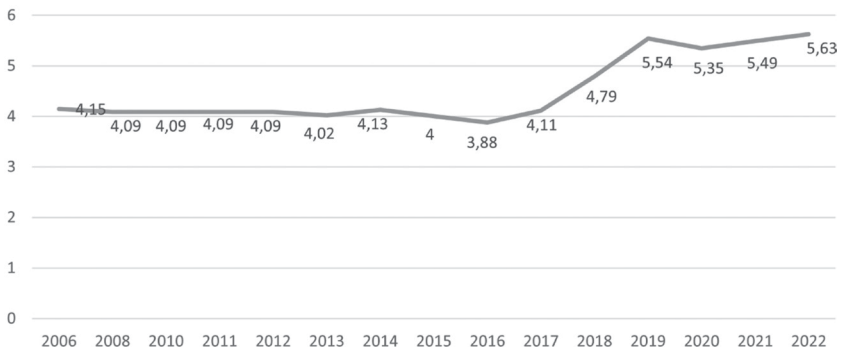


Figure 4.1: Democracy Index, Armenia, EIU (source: EIU, 2023: 14)

Thus, except for the EIU, all other organisations have recorded a regime or systemic change in Armenia since 2018. The EIU has recorded significant democratisation but not a systemic change. The answer to the question of why these organisations registered systemic change and substantial democratisation can be found by closely looking at their methodology, including the conceptual and theoretical framework utilised. These organisations use two main approaches to categorise countries. The first is a qualitative approach. This identifies necessary and sufficient conditions for democracy. According to this approach, a necessary and sufficient condition for a country to be considered a democracy is de facto free and fair elections accompanied by some minimum standards of freedom of association and freedom of expression guaranteeing such elections.

For example, according to the IDEA report, "democracies are defined as regimes that hold elections that meet minimal standards of meaningfulness, competitiveness and suffrage" (IDEA, 2022: 2). Hybrid regimes, according to this typology, "do not meet this electoral standard" (IDEA, 2022: 2). Similarly, according to V-Dem reports, several institutional features (first of all, freedom of association and freedom of expression) "guarantee free and fair elections" in electoral democracy (V-Dem Institute, 2022: 50). The authors of V-Dem reports state that "[i]n addition to fulfilling the criteria for electoral democracy, liberal democracies are characterised by an additional set of individual and minority rights beyond the electoral sphere, which protect against the 'tyranny of the majority'" (Lührmann, Tannenberg and Lindberg, 2018: 63). In electoral autocracies "electoral accountability is evaded", and these countries "fall short of democratic standards due to significant irregularities [in elections], limitations on party competition, or other violations of [Robert] Dahl's institutional requisites" (Lührmann, Tannenberg and Lindberg, 2018: 63). After reviewing the extensive literature concerning the concept of democracy and various regime classifications, the V-Dem authors state that,

> Dahl's theory of polyarchy (1971, 1998) provides the most comprehensive and most widely accepted theory of what distinguishes a democracy based on six … institutional guarantees (elected officials, free and fair elections, freedom of expression, alternative sources of information, associational autonomy, and inclusive citizenship). This conception requires not only free and fair elections but also the freedoms that make them meaningful, and thus avoids the electoral fallacy. (Lührmann, Tannenberg and Lindberg, 2018: 62)

Thus, the central criterion to distinguish (weak or electoral) democracy from (electoral) autocracy or hybrid regime is de facto free and fair elections and some other freedoms that guarantee such elections. In other words, de facto free and fair elections are the first thing that matters in assessing the country's political system.

The Polity Project employs a quantitative approach, which implies that democracy is a matter of degree, not a matter of a kind. According to the Polity Project, "there is no 'necessary condition' for characterising a political system as democratic, rather democracy is treated as a variable" (Marshall, 2017: 15). In other words, this approach identifies several central elements and multiple sub-elements, assigns them numerical values and then draws a line between democracies, anocracies and

autocracies at some number (−5, +5, etc.). The central characteristics on which countries are assessed are (1) the degree, openness and competitiveness of political participation, (2) the role of elections in executive recruitment, and (3) the degree of constraints on the chief executives (Marshal, 2017: 15–16). Thus, competitive, free and fair elections are crucial also in this classification.

The EIU seem to use a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The problem with the EIU democracy index is that it separates a category called "political culture" and assigns it a weight equal to "electoral process and pluralism". All other organisations and the most widely accepted democratic theories (for example, Dahl's theory, IDEA, Polity Project, V-Dem) do not consider political culture as a separate category and do not support its weight equation with the weight of elections. Besides that, assessing cultures in relation to democracy may be biased towards Western cultures. Armenia has a strongly authoritarian mark in the category of "political culture" (3.13). If we exclude this category, Armenia's democracy score in 2021 becomes 6.08, which is enough to be considered a flawed democracy.

Thus, the most widely accepted theories of democracy and indices of democracy based on these theories highlight de facto free and fair elections and conditions that guarantee such elections as the central feature to distinguish democracy from hybrid regimes. Before 2018 Armenia was considered a hybrid regime, anocracy or electoral autocracy because it failed to arrange de facto fair elections. As the next sub-section of this chapter demonstrates, Armenia has managed to hold de facto fair elections (in addition to free elections) since 2018, and has guaranteed at least the minimum freedoms for such elections. Therefore, currently, Armenia should be considered a weak democracy or electoral democracy (as IDEA, V-Dem, Polity Project and Freedom House do). Claims that Armenia has not democratised or that there was no systemic change after 2018 are wrong because these downgrade free and fair elections in matters concerning the political system. For example, Iskandaryan assesses the political system by focusing on parties (Iskandaryan, 2018; 168.am, 2021). However, the focus should be on elections because the party system cannot develop without free and fair elections (Sargsyan, 2019). As for Voskanyan, not only does the author ignore elections, but he also fails to distinguish populism from *constituent power* (this concept is explored further in this chapter).

*Elections in Armenia before and after the 2018 Velvet Revolution*

At least four sources confirm that elections had not worked in independent Armenia as a democratic tool to form and control the government before the 2018 revolution. The first source is the OSCE reports of international observers, the second is the statistical analysis of the elections' outcomes, the third is the presence or absence of serious post-election protests, and the fourth is outcomes of local elections.

The OSCE observers considered the presidential elections of 1996, 1998 and 2003 as undemocratic. For example, they stated that "the extraordinary Presidential Election of March 16 and 30 [in 1998] does not meet the OSCE standards to which Armenia has committed itself in the Copenhagen Document of 1990" (OSCE, 1998: 3). They also stated that the 2003 presidential elections "fell short of international standards for democratic elections" and that "voting, counting and tabulation showed serious irregularities, including widespread ballot box stuffing" (OSCE, 2003: 1). The OSCE observers published more nuanced reports for the 2008 and 2013 presidential elections. They wrote that while international standards were generally met during the pre-election period of the 2008 presidential elections and during the voting hours, these standards were violated during the vote counting and after the election day (OSCE, 2008: 1). Similarly, "while fundamental freedoms were generally respected" during the 2013 presidential elections, "abuse of administrative resources" and "instances of intimidation and pressure on voters" were observed (OSCE, 2013: 1).

In contrast to the presidential elections held before the revolution, two parliamentary elections that took place after the revolution were characterised as democratic and competitive by the OSCE observers, although inflammatory rhetoric and polarisation were also observed (OSCE, 2019, 2021):

> The December 09, 2018 early parliamentary elections in the Republic of Armenia were held with respect for fundamental freedoms and enjoyed broad public trust that needs to be preserved through further electoral reforms. Open political debate, including in the media, contributed to a vibrant campaign, although cases of inflammatory rhetoric online were of concern. The general absence of electoral malfeasance, including vote-buying and pressure on voters, allowed for genuine competition. (OSCE, 2019: 1)

The statistical analyses for the 2008 and 2013 presidential elections show that votes for the incumbent candidate were disproportionately high in those polling stations where the number of participants was significantly higher than average. Besides that, observed polling stations, on average, reported far fewer votes for the incumbent candidate than polling stations that were not observed (Helsinki Citizens, 2013: 49; Policy Forum, 2008: 31). According to experts on electoral fraud, these irregularities are an indication of ballot-box stuffing and vote stealing. Analyses of the 2018 (Helsinki Citizens, 2019: 111) and 2021 (Helsinki Citizens, 2023) parliamentary elections do not show such irregularities.

Another indication that elections before the revolution were not fair is the fact that widespread post-election protests took place. After the presidential elections of 1996, 2003, 2008 and 2013, massive demonstrations erupted, the main demands of which concerned the ending of electoral fraud. For example, in 2008, ten people were killed in post-election clashes, and about a hundred opposition leaders were arrested (US Department of State, 2009). After the revolution, there were no post-election protests or clashes. This fact can be taken to demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of Armenians (including those who voted for opposition parties) generally trusted (the official results of) elections after the revolution.

The fourth indication that elections started to work after 2018 but did not work before that is the outcomes of local elections. After 2018, candidates from (or associated with) opposition parties sometimes won while the ruling party lost, despite serious attempts to win (Aslanyan, 2021; Azat TV, 2022; Khulyan, 2021; Sahakyan, 2021). Before 2018, the opposition rarely participated in local elections, and when they participated, they almost never won.

## Other Freedoms, Indices and Benefits

The RSF, which publishes the annual Press Freedom Index, ranked Armenia in terms of press freedom in position 74 or worse among about 180 countries until 2018 (RSF, 2023a). From 2019 onwards, Armenia has been ranked in position 63 or better. In 2023, the press freedom situation in Armenia has been classified as "satisfactory", while in all four neighbouring countries, the situation has been considered "problematic", "difficult" or

"very serious" (RSF, 2023a). According to Armenia's fact file published by the RSF, "[s]ince the 'velvet revolution' of 2018, the media landscape has grown" and "[i]ndependent online news sites are prospering, among them Civilnet.am, hetq.am, Factor.am and Azatutyun.am" (RSF, 2023b).

Armenia has significantly improved its performance in several other respects, including in terms of media sustainability (IREX, 2019) and in the scores for the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, corruption and protection of human rights (Despotović, Gamser and Gajić, 2020: 13, 21, 22, 24, 27). Since democracy and justice are intimately linked, mutually implicated and go hand in hand (Shapiro, 1999: 18–19), there is also no doubt that the post-2018 Armenian society is more just than the pre-2018 society. However, democracy should not be associated with "all good things", as often happens (Shapiro, 1999: 18). Democracy is a crucial good thing that effectively prevents civil war and creates the conditions for justice and sustainable development. However, democracy does not guarantee wealth and happiness for everybody at all times.

An important consequence of Armenia's democratisation is that the number of serious attempts to resolve political issues/tensions via armed groups and violence has decreased since 2018, while they were common in the 1990s and continued to be in the toolkit of Armenian politics until right before the revolution. Moreover, one such violent attempt in 2016 generated widespread public support and a broad political coalition (Silaev and Fomin, 2018): a sign that the country was moving down a dangerous path. Luckily, the success of the Velvet Revolution demonstrated that non-violent means of struggle were effective and much more acceptable than violent means. As a result, the political crisis in Armenia caused by the 44-Day Karabagh (Artsakh) War in 2020 was resolved peacefully and democratically (via the early parliamentary elections in 2021), despite tremendous polarisation (Parliamentary Assembly, 2022: 2).

Interestingly, the 2021 early parliamentary elections were noticeably better and more competitive than the 2018 elections. First, after an "inclusive and transparent procedure", substantial amendments concerning elections and political parties were adopted in April and May 2021 "which addressed the majority of recommendations raised in previous Venice Commission opinions and OSCE/ODIHR election observation missions' final reports" (Parliamentary Assembly, 2022: 3). Second, the 2021 elections involved strong candidates (Nikol Pashinyan and Robert Kocharyan) with almost equal access to financial, media and other resources, and the results of

the elections were unpredictable/undetermined. Armenia has never had such elections. Currently, the second biggest group in parliament has a solid oppositional stance, and there is no ruling party's "client" party in parliament, as there was before 2018. It does not seem a coincidence that Freedom House considered Armenia an electoral democracy only after the 2021 elections. The 2018 elections were predictable, less competitive, and were managed within the framework of electoral legislation adopted in 2016.

## Some Old and New Challenges for Armenia's Democratisation

Armenia's democratisation over the last five years has not been smooth. It had four main stages: post-revolutionary dismantling of the criminal oligarchy (May 2018–September 2020), democratic backsliding during the 44-Day Karabagh (Artsakh) War in 2020 (manifested mainly in restrictions on freedom of expression), post-war political crises (November 2020–June 2021) and strengthening of democracy after the 2021 parliamentary elections. The last stage, the strengthening of democracy since 2021, has been accompanied by authoritarian tendencies. For example, the use of state machinery in several municipalities after the local elections was recorded, and the government recently suggested a problematic law allowing Internet blocking during future wars. However, these authoritarian tendencies are much less important than the free and fair elections and related freedoms that Armenia has achieved.[2] Moreover, various authoritarian tendencies exist also in many Western liberal democracies.

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2   While V-Dem currently considers Armenia an electoral democracy, the expert assessments by V-Dem on Armenia's recent democratic and authoritarian tendencies are problematic. According to these assessments, Armenia is a democracy "in steep decline" (V-Dem, 2023: 6, 23) within the three-year window of 2020–2022, and the Armenian government "is severely restricting press freedom and prosecuting journalists" (V-Dem, 2023: 24). The categories "clean elections" (including subcategories such as the electoral management body's capacity and autonomy) and "judicial constraints on the executive" (including subcategories such as compliance with the high court and judiciary, and lower courts' independence) are the main indicators that lowered Armenia's index in 2020–2022. However, as mentioned in the previous subsection of this chapter, in 2021 there was a substantial improvement in electoral legislation, and Armenia held the best general elections in its history in terms of fairness, freedom and competitiveness. Expert assessments in this respect are arbitrary and unwarranted.

Besides various authoritarian tendencies within Armenia, Armenia's new democracy is under pressure from two authoritarian countries: Russia and Azerbaijan. According to Broers, "the unlikelihood of democratic transition for as long as Armenia was in a Russian geopolitical orbit had long been a prevailing assumption both inside the country and among external observers of the South Caucasus" (2021: 10). Understandably, as Pavel K. Baev rightly notices, "Moscow expects Armenia's post-revolutionary government to follow the 'natural' trajectory of regressing to a personalised authoritarian regime, and it applies a range of economic and propaganda means to stimulate such a degradation" (2021: 174). Azerbaijan, in its turn, keeps Armenia under the constant threat of war. Despite these challenges, Armenia has managed to become and remain a democracy. We should expect changes of governments via elections in

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Similarly, the Armenian government has actually taken measures "to promote the independence of judges" (Parliamentary Assembly, 2022: 4), and there is no indication that there was a worsening in executive compliance with the high court and judiciary. Overall, as noted by the Venice Commission's opinion papers, "there has been a general public mistrust in the judiciary in Armenia" (Venice Commission, 2022: 3) and, therefore, a need for judicial reforms. The Armenian authorities, according to the Venice Commission, demonstrate openness, engage in a "genuine dialogue with the Council of Europe" and show "continued effort to improve the system of judicial governance in line with European standards, within the boundaries set by the national Constitution, and in view of the overall legal and political context of the country" (Venice Commission, 2022: 3). Moreover, the V-Dem Institute, 2023 report cites a one-sided journalistic article with factual mistakes to support its claim that the Armenian government severely restricts freedom and prosecutes journalists. For example, this article claims that Raffi Hovhannisyan, an Armenian politician, "was barred from entering Karabakh [Artsakh] at the request of the Armenian government", while in reality, the Armenian government does not have any control or influence over the Lachin corridor connecting Armenia and Karabakh (Artsakh) (see, for example, Amnesty International, 2023). Similarly, as evidence of serious authoritarianism, the article mentions several cases where foreign nationals of Armenian descent were named *persona non grata* in Armenia. Furthermore, the cancellation of the accreditation of a Russian journalist during the 2020 war and unconfirmed information that the Armenian government uses Predator spyware were considered by the author of the article (and perhaps also the writers/experts of the V-Dem 2023 report) as evidence of government censorship of the media and/or persecution of journalists. Overall, the cases mentioned in the article, even when true and even when they can be considered manifestations of authoritarian tendencies, do not support the statement that Armenia's government severely restricts press freedom and prosecutes journalists.

Armenia in the foreseeable future (such changes were not possible before 2018). Nonetheless, considering all the challenges (some of which were mentioned in this sub-section), the prospect of Armenia becoming a full, consolidated or liberal democracy in the upcoming decades seems unrealistic.

## The 2018 Armenian Velvet Revolution as the Main Reason for Armenia's Democratisation

As it was mentioned in the introduction, the argument of this section is as follows: (1) there is something in the nature of civil disobedience that makes it a democratising political practice; (2) the 2018 Armenian protests were acts of civil disobedience; (3) therefore, the 2018 Armenian protests (or Velvet Revolution) enacted Armenia's democratisation. The first sub-section here addresses premise (2). In short, the 2018 Armenian protests were acts of civil disobedience because they were in the form of non-violent lawbreaking (or playing at the outer edge of the law) predicated on deep respect for the rule of law. In a broader sense, civil disobedience is defined in terms of three components: non-violence, lawbreaking and respect for (the rule of) law (Scheuerman, 2019: 49). As for premise (1) – the claim that civil disobedience is a democratising political practice – three ways have been identified which relate to the concept of democratic *constituent power*. The second sub-section here briefly explains this concept and the three ways through which civil disobedience democratises a country or a society.

### The Revolution as a Case of Civil Disobedience

The central feature of the protests in March–May 2018 was that their leaders continually characterised the protests as acts of civil disobedience. Particularly, Pashinyan started his march on 31 March 2018 by announcing that they would "try to prevent the third term of Serzh Sargsyan's rule by active actions of civil disobedience" (1in TV, 2019a). Later, one of the key

members of Pashinyan's party stated that "the idea of the march is based on Mahatma Gandhi's teaching on the non-violent struggle" and that they used "the technologies applied during the 'Salt March' in 1930" (Hovhannisyan, 2018). No wonder that leaders of the 2018 Armenian march organised discussions for those who "do not know what civil disobedience is" and who "could harm the common cause because of ignorance" (1in TV, 2019e). Pashinyan has continually used the expression "civil disobedience" to describe his team's actions throughout the revolution. On the one hand, the academic community may choose to take this characterisation seriously, especially because the success of the revolution indicates that its leaders carefully considered and knew what they were doing. On the other hand, the main theories of civil disobedience cannot be ignored when it comes to characterising the 2018 Armenian protests. The scope of this chapter does not allow a thorough and nuanced discussion of the 2018 Armenian case in the framework of theories of civil disobedience. Therefore, mostly rough and simplified conclusions of such an analysis are presented below.

By studying key texts referring to civil disobedience, contemporary political theorist William Scheuerman (2018) has identified three main theories: religious-spiritual (Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King), liberal (John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin) and democratic (Hanna Arendt and Jürgen Habermas). These three standard theories significantly differ in many respects, including in their definitions of civil disobedience. However, three common components are interpreted more or less similarly in all their definitions. Particularly, these traditional models view civil disobedience as a particular type of (1) non-violent protest that (2) implies public and symbolic lawbreaking or playing at the outer edge of the law, and (3) is predicated on a deep respect for (the rule of) law. The 2018 Armenian protests manifested all the three common components.

1. On the third day of the march (2 April 2018), Pashinyan ordered marchers not to use violence even if the police reacted violently.

   We exclude violence in our actions, not only as an initiative or action from our side but also as a counteraction. In other words, not only we will not use violence, but also we will not respond by violence to the attempts of violence or violence directed against us. We will counteract that violence with passive forms of civil disobedience. (1in TV 2019b)

   Pashinyan claimed that he would not cooperate with the civic initiative titled "For the State of Armenia" because the initiative's positioning

concerning violence (or violent actions) was not fully clear to him (Aslanyan, 2018; Gabrielyan and Kaghsvantsyan, 2018). After his arrest on 22 April 2018, Pashinyan's team members read his instructions during rallies: "under no circumstances go into a collision with police" (Epress.am, 2018). Also, neither Pashinyan nor other leaders of the revolution said or did anything during March–May 2018 that can be interpreted as a call to or justification of violence (in the sense of physically harming other people).

2. Organisers of the revolution skilfully played at the outer edge of the law. First, road blocks and traffic disruption, which many protestors widely practised, is considered a violation of public order. Secondly, leaders of the protests covered the traffic cameras that measure how fast cars are travelling and called it "operation anti-Sashik" to emphasise the unjust or oligarchic nature of many businesses, including the importation of traffic cameras, which (they claimed) was associated with the third president's brother Sashik Sargsyan (1in TV, 2019c). Thirdly, as a symbolic protest against the "information blockade", protestors entered the public radio building, broke the door to the studio and disrupted the broadcast (1in TV, 2019d). This building was (and remains) a specially protected state zone to which such entrance is prohibited. Two protestors were arrested for this offence (Yerkir.am, 2018). When Pashinyan was asked about the unlawfulness of this action, he replied that in Armenia, "many laws are not based on the rule of law" (1in TV, 2019e).

3. Pashinyan demonstrated fidelity to (the rule of) law in many respects. First, he seemed to be willing to accept legal punishment (theories of civil disobedience understand fidelity to (the rule of) law in these terms [Scheuerman, 2021: 16]). Responding to questions regarding his possible arrest, Pashinyan stated: "Prosecutors and police do not interest me. I am interested in citizens. If the support of the citizens exists, prosecutors and police are powerless. If there is no support, it does not matter whether I am in parliament or in prison" (1in TV, 2019e). He also vocally demonstrated respect for the laws that he considered to be in line with the rule of law. For example, he publicly read articles from the law "On Freedom of Assembly" while negotiating with the police (1in TV, 2019f; 1in TV, 2019g). Besides this, Pashinyan's respect for the rule of law was especially manifested after the resignation of the third president. Pashinyan strictly followed all constitutional procedures to

become PM and to organise early parliamentary elections, even though he could have chosen the easy way to take both the executive and legislative branches of power.

## The Democratising Nature of the 2018 Protests

The concept of *constituent power* better captures the relationships between powerful political mobilisations and the creation or transformation of state institutions. Radical democratic approaches understand civil disobedience in terms of (among others) this concept (Celikates, 2021: 129). The notion of constituent power has been used to highlight the power through which people create legal and political orders. Constituent power is closely related to the idea of democratic self-determination. Constituent power "acts as a reminder that the source of constitutional normativity lies in the will of the people" and "functions as a 'bridge concept' between the sphere of law and that of politics" (Colón-Ríos, 2021: 926–27). Scholars who have studied the political dimension of constituent power usually present it "as the capacity of the demos to act, its capacity to overturn an old order and to establish a new one in a collective act of creativity and spontaneity" (Celikates, 2021: 129).

There are slightly different understandings of constituent power, but the 2018 Armenian case matches all of these understandings. For example, Scheuerman presents constituent power as "a supreme, autonomous, legally unlimited source of law and constitutional legitimacy" that is indissolubly linked with revolutionary politics (Scheuerman, 2019: 53). According to Scheuerman, constituent power is associated with the French Revolution, which negated the heritage of monarchy in the name of the unified and homogeneous people. Scheuerman's description of constituent power entirely matches the 2018 Armenian practice of civil disobedience. As Derluguian and Hovhannisyan noticed,

> [t]he powerful, yet non-violent blow seemed to unite the entire population across the lines of social class, gender, and age in unanimously rejecting the ruling elite in an "us versus them" manner … At the peak of the protests, one could see in the city squares of Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, students side by side with elderly peasants, intellectuals and taxi drivers, ethnic Armenians as well as the minority Yezidis and Assyrians, even soldiers in uniform and mothers with babies in strollers. (Derluguian and Hovhannisyan, 2018: 442).

No wonder the movement's leaders continually spoke and acted on behalf of the people. Pashinyan declared himself "the candidate of the people" (1in TV, 2019b) and has been perceived so by protesters and many other political parties, at least at the level of discourse. This discourse referring to the people and the people's candidate intensified especially in the aftermath of Sargsyan's resignation, and when Sargsyan's party tried not to elect Pashinyan as PM at some points. The following quotes represent typical expressions characterising the discourse of this period: "They are trying to cancel the election of the people's candidate" (Asekose.am, 2018); "'The people will force the National Assembly [parliament] to choose the people's candidate', the participants of the march on prime minister's candidate" (Azatutyun.am, 2018); "Tsarukyan will support the 'people's candidate' in the prime minister's elections" (Panarmenian. net, 2018).

Radical democratic approaches to civil disobedience highlight three ways that civil disobedience democratises the political system from the bottom up and through the exercise of constituent power. First, civil disobedience creates a kind of horizontal interaction and relationship between individuals perceived as equals, in contrast to vertical relationships between citizens and state/state institutions. In other words, through civil disobedience, "the vertical form of state authority (or *constituted power*) is confronted with the horizontal *constituting power* of the association of citizens or of those who are governed" (Celikates, 2021: 141–42). Second, civil disobedience exemplifies "what it means to be a citizen in reasserting their political agency against entrenched and often seemingly invisible forms of domination" (Celikates, 2021: 134). Third, disobedient people "acknowledge some kind of civil bond with their adversaries, which goes hand in hand with certain forms of self-limitation and self-restraint that exclude military or quasi-military action aiming at the destruction of an enemy" (Celikates, 2021: 134–35). This self-limitation (in the form of, among other things, non-violence, willingness to give public justification for their actions and willingness to accept punishment) underscores the recognition of society's pluralist nature, which is crucial for constitutional democracies. Thus, despite conceiving themselves as unified and homogeneous people acting against the ruling elite, disobedient people (especially the leaders) in Armenia in 2018 recognised the society's pluralist nature.

*Another Reason for Armenia's Democratisation*

Another reason for Armenia's recent democratisation is its transition from a (semi-)presidential to a parliamentary rule. About three decades ago, comparative theorist Juan J. Linz famously argued that parliamentarianism is much more likely to sustain stable democratic systems than presidentialism, at least in newly independent countries (Linz and Valenzuela, 1994). Linz's analyses seem true also for post-Soviet countries. Not only Armenia but also other (relatively) democratic post-Soviet countries (Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan) have undergone a transition from (semi-) presidential governance to parliamentary systems. "Meanwhile, the other seven, which have heavy restrictions on political freedoms and political competition – Russia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan – remain presidential or super-presidential republics" (Iskandaryan, 2018: 472). However, Armenia's transition from presidentialism to parliamentarianism would not have democratised the country without the 2018 Velvet Revolution. Without free and fair elections, parliamentary rule would create a system of governance similar to Brezhnev-era one-party rule. Now that free and fair elections have been established in Armenia, parliamentary rule is a factor working in favour of stabilising democracy.

# Conclusion

Armenia has democratised since the 2018 Velvet Revolution and is currently a (weak or electoral) democracy, despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, the 44-Day Karabagh (Artsakh) War in 2020, and the pressure from outside authoritarian regimes and internal authoritarian tendencies. Most importantly, Armenia has managed to break the pre-2018 cycle of fraudulent elections. Free and fair elections accompanied by some minimum degree of freedoms guaranteeing such elections are both necessary and sufficient conditions for a country to be considered a democracy, as the most widely accepted theories of democracy (and indices of democracy calculated based on these theories) suggest. Thus,

Armenia has passed the bar of having free and fair elections after 2018, and we can expect changes of governments via elections in the foreseeable future. However, Armenia is not a consolidated or liberal democracy and probably will not become so in the coming decades, considering the authoritarian challenges it faces both internally and externally.

The main reason for Armenia's democratic transformation is the 2018 Velvet Revolution. This revolution unfolded in the form of civil disobedience, a political practice that is defined as non-violent, public and symbolic lawbreaking predicated on a deep respect for (the rule of) law. The 2018 Armenian civil disobedience enacted Armenia's democratisation from the bottom up and through the exercise of *constituent power*. It created a horizontal, egalitarian interaction between the vast number of citizens who confronted and transformed the entrenched semi-authoritarian system. Importantly, the 2018 Armenian civil disobedience recognised society's pluralist nature, acknowledged civil bonds with its adversaries and excluded military or quasi-military action aimed at the destruction of an enemy.

Considering the increasing authoritarian tendencies of the last decade in the world and the challenges Armenia has faced and is currently facing, one might wonder why Armenia's newly born democracy has not collapsed and how long it can last. This chapter suggests looking at the 2018 civil disobedience to find the answers. This movement was a powerful political practice that predetermined Armenia's democratic transition and has kept Armenia a democracy over the last five years. Moreover, the culture of civil disobedience and the accumulated knowledge and skills of civil disobedience in society will most likely prevent Armenia from having fraudulent elections and a semi-authoritarian political system in the future. The hopes are that any attempt to usurp power in Armenia will be confronted by this powerful political practice called civil disobedience.

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Alen Shadunts

# 5. Trauma and Ontological Insecurity after the Second Karabagh War 2020

**Abstract:** The 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh (the Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War), as well as causing widespread devastation, was a moment of identity dislocation for Armenians. It challenged some of the most sedimented narratives of self-identification, especially those articulated around the notions of revival and victory. The chapter tries to shed light on how this traumatic event can be categorised as a situation of identity crisis that was disruptive of the stable sense of a collective *self*. It also demonstrates how different mechanisms have been used to cope with this situation, aiming at bringing self-certainty through different articulations of subjectivity. This chapter presents a discourse analysis of various articulations of the situation, discussing their attempts to provide answers and mitigate the disorienting effects of the Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War. It shows how contrasting narratives, often built around antagonistic frontiers, are used to articulate the traumatic experience of the war. These narratives create a polarising environment, which makes it difficult to establish a middle ground even in regard to the most basic aspects of the conflict and the developments related to it.

**Keywords:** Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, identity, trauma, ontological security

The 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh, commonly referred to as the 44-Day War, is seen as yet another devastating event for Armenians in their long history of being victims of violence and subjugation (Troianovski, 2020). Many lives were lost, dozens of towns and villages were depopulated, and the basic human rights of thousands of people were and continue to be violated (Open Society Foundations – Armenia et al., 2022). The Armenian side emerged from the war exhausted and with a compromised security infrastructure. Moreover, the post-war configurations have created a plausible threat of ethnic cleansing in NK (Harutyunyan, 2022).

The war was not just destructive in terms of physical security, it was also a traumatic experience for Armenians that has shaken their sense of collective *self*. The narratives of national revival and victory, which were key to the construction of Armenian collective agency after the first

NK war, have been challenged. In other words, the second NK war, the Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War, has triggered an identity dislocation, which is studied here as a case of ontological insecurity. The latter involves a lack of self-certainty and the sense of instability regarding individual and/or collective identity (Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2020). This chapter argues that Armenia is experiencing an ontological security crisis, where the previously stable narratives and practices of self-identification have been disrupted due to the trauma of the Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War. The chapter shows how observing the impact of the war from this perspective can help in understanding certain important features of the current social atmosphere in the country. The overwhelming feelings of insecurity, distrust and disorientation can be explained by treating the war as a political trauma. It is a situation of existential anxiety – a critical and transient moment between old and new articulations of self-identification.

It is also a period when different narratives compete to make their interpretation of the traumatic event the dominant one. In this particular case, there are two widespread but contrasting articulations of this situation put forward by the authorities and the political opposition, where each considers the opposite side to be the primary antagonist. The stakes are high in this struggle, as whichever narrative becomes hegemonic will give shape to the ontological security of the national self. The new dominant narrative will determine how the war should be remembered, which actors should be delegitimised, and what general orientation the nation should have. Now, Armenia stands at a critical juncture with a bewildered and anxious population and two political camps fighting to historicise the 44-Day War in their preferred way in a highly antagonistic and polarising manner.

The chapter makes this argument based on a discourse analysis of official documents, speeches by government representatives, politicians and public figures, media coverage, as well as observations of survey data and secondary sources. In this process, the texts produced by government officials and politicians were observed first, considering the centrality of these articulations to the intertextual links in the Armenian discursive space. Their formulations of subjectivity in spatial, temporal and ethical dimensions were studied (Hansen, 2006; Howarth, 2005). The examined intertextual links of these sources were then used for orientation in the second stage of data collection and analysis, where articulations by different figures and media outlets were investigated. As for the discussions

concerning public perception and attitude, data from opinion surveys and other sources were used.

The results of this analysis are presented in two sections. The first shows that the outcome of the war has caused an identity dislocation. It starts by arguing that the NK conflict was a central issue in the narratives of the Armenian national self before the 44-Day War. It was an issue of high symbolic value on which the ontological security of the country relied. Hence, the outcome of the war in 2020 has created foundational uncertainty for many Armenians in regard to their sense of national self. This situation is studied here as a case of political trauma. The second part shows how different discourses compete in this moment of ontological insecurity in order to formulate the traumatic experience in a certain way. While this section does not provide a comprehensive observation of the variety of articulations in the post-war environment, it touches upon two of the most potent and politically charged discourses. Their highly antagonistic nature has created a struggle that has exacerbated the pre-existing polarisation in the country, where a frustrated populace is offered contrasting narratives of the traumatic event.

## Literature Review and Conceptual Framework: Why Ontological Security?

In the aftermath of the Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War in 2020, various studies were published in an attempt to analyse this transformative event and observe its political, socio-economic, psychological and ideological causes and impact. While there is significant variety, it appears that there is an overarching emphasis on the need to understand what went wrong and what should be done next. A number of these works concentrate on unravelling the geopolitical developments related to the war, as well as the foreign policy decision-making processes in Armenia (Cheterian, 2022; Gamaghelyan and Rumyantsev, 2021; Hakobyan, 2021a; Nikoghosyan and Ter-Matevosyan, 2022). Here, issues related to strategic thinking, populist notions, mythmaking and relations with allies and adversaries are discussed. Some works analyse the conflict in the context of systemic

factors, such as the ongoing transformation in the international order (e.g., entering an era of multipolarity) and the legacy of imperial rule in regional affairs (Broers, 2021; Ohanyan, 2022; Oskanian, 2021). A few others pose questions and call for introspection in order to learn lessons from the war in a proper manner (Minassian, 2022; Saradzhyan et al., 2021).

There are also studies that look beyond the foreign policy-related aspects of the military conflict. Assessing the psychological toll of the war has been of special interest in this regard. A number of research initiatives have looked into the mental health effects of the war among people that have been directly impacted by these events, such as army personnel and their families, as well as displaced people (Azizian et al., 2022; Kricorian et al., 2022; Markosian et al., 2022; Movsisyan et al., 2022). Many investigations have provided insights into the human dimension of the conflict by shedding light on individual experiences (Gall and Troianovski, 2020; Ghazaryan and Isayev, 2021; Mkrtchian and Rustamzade, 2022; Williams, 2021).

Certain studies investigate societal perceptions of the war. In this regard, Socioscope NGO has carried out a valuable study where the reflections of displaced people concerning war and peace in the region, as well as their thoughts about the future, are illustrated (Abrahamyan et al., 2022). Another study looks into the phenomenon of "societal trauma" in the context of the war (Sotieva, 2021). These studies show how difficult it has been for people from Armenia and NK to come to terms with the new reality created by the war. Public opinion surveys that were conducted after the war also hint at such tendencies by showcasing how there is an overwhelming sense of insecurity and uncertainty about the future (International Republican Institute, 2022, Civilnet, 2021). In general, while emphasising different aspects of the war and presenting varying articulations of it, many of these studies, in one way or another, discuss the war as a traumatic event. This particular study aims to put that discussion into a more conceptual framework and demonstrate how looking at the second NK war as a case of political trauma can help to investigate issues of identity and existential anxiety and how they shape the current sociopolitical environment in the country.

For this purpose, an ontological security perspective is used in this chapter. Its application in research on geopolitical confrontations and national security issues has become commonplace through integrating the theoretical notions introduced by Anthony Giddens and R. D. Laing

into the field of IR (Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2020). During the last few decades, a burgeoning literature has emerged that has drawn attention to the importance of political communities' sense of wholeness and self-certainty – ontological security.

An ontological security approach, first and foremost, looks at subjects, both individual and collective (e.g., a state), as social actors that seek stable identity (Giddens, 1991). The latter is not a priori given, as identities are not fixed properties but social constructs that require to be reaffirmed on a regular basis. This point hints at the existentialist notion in the dynamics of ontological security. As Mitzen and Larson put it:

> on a deep level all humans know that life is actually not reliably stable, but fundamentally fragile, fraught with uncertainties, and above all finite. We know that we are mortal. However, if we were constantly aware of and thinking about our fragility and mortality we would be consumed by existential dread or anxiety and it would be impossible to live our lives. The starting point of ontological security is that this awareness must be suppressed. (2017: 3)

The pursuit of existential certainty is a key feature of states as well (Zarakol, 2017). Here, alongside their preoccupation with physical security, states try to achieve certainty with regard to their agency. Establishing and maintaining such a stable sense of who they are is carried out by constructing autobiographical narratives (Steele, 2008) and having routine practices (Berenskötter, 2020). The clarity of those narratives, where certain past and present events are put together to build a sense of continuity, and the repetitive and predictive nature of the routines provide the abovementioned certainty. Being attached to those narratives and routinised practices becomes an integral part of a state's behaviour, as they shape the understanding of its identity.

In this way, states and their citizens become dependent on and sensitive towards these narratives and practices, since their own understanding of who they are relies on these notions. In times of rapid change, these issues become especially important. For instance, Caterina Kinnval demonstrates how the uncertainty caused by globalisation is dealt with through the use of nationalist and religious narratives, which provide ontological security by reaffirming a continuous sense of self in an ever-transforming global environment (Kinnvall, 2006).

When there is a disruption in these narratives and practices, the collective self-experiences ontological insecurity – its identity is dislocated.

It is a moment of existential trauma. This notion of trauma has appeared in a number of ontological security-oriented works (Innes and Steele, 2013; Zarakol, 2010). As Innes and Steele state:

> Trauma can then be understood as resulting from a particular disturbing or shocking event proving difficult to narrate collectively … A particular traumatic event for a nation that becomes important in the creation and reproduction of ontological security tends to be one that upsets a nation's idea of itself – that is, it upsets a certain understanding of the collective biographical narrative. In this way, trauma produces ontological insecurity… (2013: 20)

Such situations are moments of foundational uncertainty that trigger attempts to fit the traumatic event into the pre-existing discursive structures, or to revise the latter. It is not an easy task, as "traumatic experiences disrupt the ability to channel certain events into a coherent narrative" (Steele, 2008: 56). Jenny Edkins's canonical work entitled *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* provides valuable analysis in this regard. Here, it is shown how traumatic experiences are often seen as "unspeakable", since it is hard to situate them within the existing discursive structures. As Edkins argues:

> Communication takes place in language and language itself is social and political, not individual. Relations of power are produced through and reflected in language. Words get their meaning from their place in chains of meaning, through their associations with other words based on sound, metaphor and layers of usage. Meaning can shift and words can be rearticulated with new associations and new contexts. For language to work at a particular time and in a particular context, it is necessary for there to be a linguistic community that shares or is subject to something that will temporarily fix meanings. There has to be some provisional agreement, accepted ideology or central authority structure that will halt the fluidity of terms and make language meaningful. (2003: 7)

Alongside showcasing the difficulty of defining a traumatic experience, this analysis demonstrates another important aspect – articulating traumas is a political act and becomes a terrain of struggle between different actors and their narratives. The narrative that becomes the hegemonic one determines how the trauma is to be remembered, how the collective autobiographical narrative is (re)written, and what actors, discourses and policies become legitimate in this process. In other words, the articulation of a traumatic event becomes a matter of power relations. Put together, these observations provide the conceptual arsenal that helps to analyse the 44-Day War from a new perspective. They are used to show how the Armenian community

experiences this traumatic event, what behaviour is triggered as a result of it, and how different measures are taken to restore the shaken ontological security of the polity.

## The Second Karabakh (44-Day) War and Identity Dislocation

When the war started on 27 September 2020, patriotic articulations, which were an integral part of collective self-certainty, were amplified. The conflict became the terrain on which Armenia's national identity was performed. These affectively charged narratives presented the new war as yet another struggle for existence from which the Armenian side was going to emerge victorious. Tying the war to narratives of self-identification was instantaneous and appeared very natural. The reason is that the struggle for Artsakh (the Armenian name commonly used for Nagorno-Karabakh) was integral to the formation and reproduction of Armenian national identity in the post-Soviet period. Through acquiring significant symbolic value, the issue was linked with the ontological security of the newly independent republic. One of the most vivid expressions of this is the Declaration of Independence of Armenia signed in August (The Government of the Republic of Armenia, 1990). Here, it can be seen how a national autobiographical narrative is constructed, where the NK conflict is tied to national "destiny" and "restoration of historical justice". The last expression is indicative of how historical traumas were summoned to construct meanings in such tumultuous times, where the struggle for NK became a fight to take back what was stolen from Armenians. It is a not-uncommon situation in national storytelling, where a retroactive reconstruction points to a loss of national wholeness that needs to be reclaimed (Žižek, 1993). In this way, national identity acquires messianic attributes and finds a sense of purpose.

As is widely discussed in the literature, the Armenian Genocide and the loss of the historic homeland in western Armenia were the main traumas that were linked with the NK conflict (Abdul-Ahad, 2021; Broers, 2019; Zurcher, 2009). In this way, fighting for NK became unanimous

with having the right to exist, restoring justice and reclaiming Armenia's national wholeness. It should be emphasised that this struggle was not just about upholding the right of self-determination of the Armenian community living in the area. It was the primary means through which Armenia's mission-driven national identity was performed. The self-identification of the newly born Armenian republic became inseparable from the NK conflict, where the very existence of Armenia's political agency was at stake. The famous expression, "if we lose this land, we turn the last page of Armenia's history" – attributed to the Armenian national hero Monte (Avo) Melkonyan – is very telling in this regard (Melkonian, 2008: 229). In all, this dynamic of intertwined emergence set the necessary precondition for the NK conflict to become a central aspect of Armenia's ontological security.

Hence, in a country that has gone through tectonic changes in the form of a revolution, the position concerning NK represented a major case of continuity. For around three decades, a set of routine and ritualised discursive practices have sedimented the place of NK in Armenia's self-identification narratives. The conflict was at the front and centre of national security priorities before and after the Velvet Revolution (The Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2020 [2007]). In their speeches, representatives of the political authorities often stated how Armenia would always stand by NK (Armenpress, 2005), how no efforts and resources would be spared for this struggle (Panorama.Am, 2019), or how NK and Armenia were inseparable (The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 2019). The rhetoric was accompanied by efforts to create a sense of communal ownership, where assuming the patriotic duty to contribute to the fight for NK becomes an integral part of being a citizen of Armenia (Broers, 2019: 304; Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, 2017).

This discourse was internalised by the general population in Armenia (Mikaelian, 2017; International Republican Institute, 2018; Zolyan, 2017). To a great extent, the Armenian public "enjoyed" its sense of national pride and belonging in the context of the NK conflict. The victory in the first war was reflected in national holidays (Ghazaryan, 2016) and patriotic songs (Armenpress, 2013). Many of Armenia's modern-day heroes were army

personnel who were directly involved in the military operations against Azerbaijani forces.[1]

The narrative of carrying the legacy of this victory, continuing the struggle and not giving in to the pressure and threats of the enemy has become a "rhetorical commonplace" (Jackson, 2003). The steadfastness of Armenian officials that often took the shape of statements such as "Nagorno-Karabakh will never be part of Azerbaijan" (Demytrie, 2016; Khachatrian, 2002) or "Artsakh is Armenia, period!" (Nikoghosyan and Ter-Matevosyan, 2022), became part of the ritualised and repeated discursive practices that were meant to demonstrate continuity in upholding a heroic and principled position. It is also noteworthy that these articulations were accompanied by the narrative of remaining victorious. The army that won in the 1990s in a heroic war was meant to remain undefeated. The articulation of the Armenian armed forces as an unbeatable and invincible entity was crystallised in elite narratives and became central to the national pride of the people (Hakobyan, 2021b).

As a result, triumph became a key attribute of the narratives on the Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War through analogies with past events, such as articulations of unmatched heroism and great sacrifices. For instance, on the first day of the 2020 war, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, in a speech at the Armenian National Assembly, stated that he was ready to sacrifice his life for the fatherland and claimed that the Armenian side was not going to deviate from its principled position (Parliament of Armenia, 2020). The speech was followed by statements from different parliamentarians that used the first NK war as a reference point to argue that this war, much like the former one, would end in Armenia's victory despite the monumental challenges. Many government officials, politicians and public figures made similar remarks, stating that Armenia would not be defeated (Armenpress, 2020; Hetq 2020; MediaLab, 2020). Stories about acts of heroism, devotion and willingness to make sacrifices were made part of the autobiographical narrative of a nation that was united in the goal of achieving the inevitable victory. For instance, the spokesperson of the Armenian Ministry of Defence posted several photos of Armenian soldiers on Facebook with

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1    See the webpage, Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, Orders of the Republic of Armenia, available at: https://president.am/en/orders/46/ (accessed 22 August 2023).

the caption "Նոր հաղթանակ կերտողները" ("The makers of a new victory") (First Channel News, 2020a). Another example is Armenian outlets widely disseminating the story of a grandmother donating part of her pension to the army (Ararat News, 2020). Acts of heroism from the battlefield were widely circulated as well (Sputnik Armenia, 2020). Scenes of Armenian youth collecting supplies to send to soldiers were presented as a demonstration of public solidarity and unity (Aravot, 2020). These matters were often brought together to back the claim that it was not possible to defeat the Armenian side.

In a way, Armenia's national self was celebrated during the war, and defeat was not an option. The popularity of the slogan "հաղթելու ենք" ("we will win") is indicative of this disposition (Armenian Public TV, 2020). Losing the war appeared incomprehensible and demonstrated the importance of victory not only for defending the rights of the people in NK but also for maintaining Armenia's ontological security. Even when the situation became dire as the war proceeded, victory was considered the main imperative. Nikol Pashinyan's address to the nation on 3 October 2020 is illustrative of this position. In this speech, the PM stated that the Armenian side was under heavy attack and that Armenian servicemen and volunteers were showing "unimaginable examples of heroism" (Azatutyun Radiokayan, 2020). He said that Armenia would no longer become a victim of the enemy's genocidal policies; hence, there was no alternative to victory. Articulations of past traumas and historical analogies were a key aspect of the speech. For instance, Pashinyan called the war "a new Sardarapat", linking it with the 1918 battle between the Armenian army and Ottoman forces. The Sardarapat analogy was meant to provide a sense of certainty and predictability with regard to the desired victory by demonstrating how Armenians had managed to defeat their enemies during uneven military confrontations.

Such narratives became commonplace several weeks after the beginning of the war. Arayik Harutyunyan, the president of the de facto Artsakh Republic, often stated that they had been in much more difficult situations during the first NK war, and yet the Armenian side had still managed to win (Infocom, 2020). Artsrun Hovhannisyan, who was the key figure in charge of public communications at the Armenian Ministry of Defence, made similar claims (First Channel News, 2020b; 1in.am, 2020). His call for victory by any means and regular public comments about the

possibility of achieving it were crucial for maintaining the "հաղթելու ենք" ("we will win") narrative.

As happens in such situations, "political actors rhetorically trap each other into the existing narrative … Alternative narratives stop making sense; they do not sound coherent and are not compelling" (Subotić, 2016: 6). In this way, the ontological security of the Armenian *self* – its stable sense of identity – is articulated around the subjectivity of a victimised state that has shown heroic efforts to restore justice and does not deviate from that honourable path. The hegemonic position of this narrative draws the boundaries of what is acceptable in policymaking (Goddard, 2006). The discourses on which the ontological security of the state is based define "common sense" and manage to persist even in cases where they create actual threats (e.g., steadfastness increases the risk of military clashes) (Mitzen, 2006).

And then the night of 9–10 November came. The publication of the trilateral statement signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia was a major shock that shattered the hopes for winning the war (BBC News, 2020). The eruption of anger that immediately followed shows how sudden and unfathomable this development was for many Armenians (Mejlumyan and Kucera, 2020). As Armine Ishkanian (2020) writes: "On November 10, Armenians the world over woke up hoping the events of the previous night were a nightmare. There were a few seconds of respite, before we checked our phones and realised, that no, it was not a nightmare, we are now living in new, uncertain, and dangerous times…" (para.1).

The notion of defeat was so hard to grasp that Pashinyan posted on Facebook: "This is not a victory, but there is no defeat until you recognise yourself as defeated. We will never recognise ourselves as defeated and this should be the beginning of our era of national unification and rebirth" (Civilnet, 2020). A few months later, Armen Sarkissian (2021), the president of Armenia at the time, stated: "We are in a difficult situation, but we cannot allow Armenia, Artsakh and the Diaspora [to] feel defeated." It is the recognition of being defeated (not so much the defeat itself) that felt so disorienting because it triggered ontological insecurity. The calls to bracket this revelation was meant to shield the sense of national self from this traumatic event, considering how disruptive and anxiety-inducing the latter could be for the communal identity of Armenians.

The difficulty in accepting the new reality is a key component of a traumatic experience (Bell, 2006). The structures of meaning of the

Armenian collective self were shaken. The canonical narratives of national revival, where the victory of the first NK war and the conflict, in general, had acquired symbolic significance, were disrupted by the outcome of the second war. The routine practices that often took the shape of celebrating past glories on national holidays and not giving in to the threats of the enemy (who had been defeated before) felt out of place. The pre-existing social configurations were not able to accommodate this new development. As a result, the hegemonic articulations of national identity were dislocated.


## The Struggle to Narrate the Political Trauma


The previous section showed how the traumatic experience of the Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War had a noticeable impact on the sociopolitical atmosphere in Armenia. However, that trauma is yet to be defined. There is an ongoing debate about what happened and why. Whichever narrative becomes the dominant one in its articulations of this experience will play a key role in redefining the collective self-identification in the country. While traumas can be disruptive for certain ontological security narratives, they can be used by new ones as a reference point in their attempts to construct meanings and provide a sense of wholeness and certainty (Innes and Steele, 2013). It is a political process, where different actors are competing to make their version of the autobiographical narrative of the nation's self the dominant one.

After the war, there were multiple attempts to fit this traumatic experience within a narrative as a way of restoring ontological security. Partisan politics is the arena where the struggle between different articulations of the war mainly plays out. In an already polarised environment, drastically different interpretations have been put forward that try to make specific constructions of meaning and normative judgements a rhetorical commonplace. In particular, Armenia's political opposition has targeted the anxiety-inducing notion of defeat in their articulations. They put their efforts into maintaining the pre-existing structures of self-identification by associating the traumatic experience primarily with the current government. Here, the latter represents a deviation from the sedimented narratives and practices through which

Armenia's revived and victorious agency was performed. In other words, the country was on the right trajectory, and the political camp that came to power as a result of the 2018 Velvet Revolution moved away from that path. Such an articulation tries to link the trauma of the war with the revolution and shield the pre-revolutionary set-up from the critical gaze that usually emerges in such times of identity crisis. Axiomatically, a return to the pre-revolutionary situation entails stepping on to the right path again.

In order to dissociate defeat from the collective sense of self, the opposition often claims that it was not the Armenian people that lost the war but the current authorities (ABnews, 2021a). The prime minister himself has been the main target of these narratives, in which his persona has been linked with the signifier "capitulation" (Roth, 2021). An important aspect of these narratives is the conjecture that the Armenian army would have been victorious were it not for the policies and interventions of the political authorities. Pashinyan firing top army personnel, his involvement in recruitment processes during the war, and his purchasing of military equipment that could not be used on the battlefield were among the points the opposition figures and media outlets affiliated with them often presented (Factor, 2021; Sahakyan, 2020). Another key component is the argument that the Armenian side was in a favourable position in the settlement process before the 2018 revolution, and the war would not have started if the PM had not torpedoed the negotiations (Khulyan, 2021; Panoram.Am, 2020).

These accusations do not merely claim that the current authorities have made grave mistakes, they also put forward allegations of treason. It is often argued that Pashinyan and his government conspired with the enemy in order to orchestrate the disastrous outcome of the war. For instance, former president Robert Kocharyan, one of the key opposition figures in the post-war period, claimed that there was a reasonable possibility that defeat in the war had been pre-planned (Panorama.Am, 2021). Serzh Sargsyan, the third president of the country, argued that Shushi, a town in NK, was handed to the adversary by the post-revolutionary authorities (Abnews, 2021b). Some even stated that the Pashinyan government took five billion US dollars from Azerbaijan to make sure the Armenian side lost the war (Yerevan Today, 2021). It is not surprising that "Նիկոլ՝ դավաճան" ("Nikol – traitor") has been one of the most popular slogans of the opposition rallies and protests since the end of war (News AM, 2022).

These narratives "show" an easy way out of the ontological crisis by providing "clarity" and defusing the existential uncertainty caused by the war. They present the current government as an alien and harmful element that has infiltrated the otherwise harmonic collective self of Armenia and caused a rupture. Hence, removing the government would leave the previous self as articulated by the pre-war hegemonic narratives and routine practices. In the context of this articulation, ousting Pashinyan promises to bring back what has been stolen. It is presented as a mission towards which the frustration of the disoriented public can be channelled. Joining this call for action can potentially help to overcome existential anxiety, as through this struggle a national self can be performed and validated. In a way, a nostalgic view of the pre-war and pre-revolution past is presented, with today's opposition figures in power.

The authorities put forward dramatically different narratives. Specifically, the government and their supporters have tried to dismantle the articulations disseminated by the opposition and emphasise the role of the former regime in the defeat. Specifically, Pashinyan often accuses Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan of creating an unfavourable position for the Armenian side in the negotiation processes that eventually led to the abovementioned losses (Aslanyan, 2022). He and his supporters also state that the former regime robbed the army of its resources (The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 2021). By factoring corruption into these articulations of the war they try to connect the feeling of being deceived with the former regime (Ghukasyan, 2021).

This narrative is meant to link the public frustration and sense of injustice caused by the war with similar sentiments expressed during the 2018 revolution. In this way, the war becomes yet another case of wrongdoing by the former regime, which has assumed the subject position of the antagonistic *other* in many of the articulations presented by the current government (Shadunts, 2018). As a result, the revolution is articulated not as the problem but as the solution that aims to rid the country of the harms caused by the abovementioned *other* and help to build the country that people want.

The promise that the revolution will deliver the desired outcomes, which are often undefined, is an essential component of this narrative from an ontological security perspective. The slogan "Ապագա կա" ("there is a future"), which Pashinyan's Civic Contract Party chose for the snap parliamentary elections in 2021, shows how the government tries to

present its alternative of self-certainty and a way out of the ontological security crisis (Pashinyan, 2021). While it might not be clear what exactly the hoped or promised future is going to look like, the slogan tries to convey the message that there is a way out of this disorienting and anxiety-inducing situation.

It is noteworthy that there is a crucial difference in the articulations of the authorities and their main political opposition. The latter promises ontological security by restoring the salience of pre-war narratives and routines. In contrast, the government and its supporters try to have Armenia's self-identification validated through discourses where the NK issue does not have so much presence. Pashinyan's 2023 New Year address is representative of this tendency (The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 2022). It is a speech that is meant to summarise the year and present national priorities and upcoming challenges, where a linear narrative connects past events with future scenarios. In it, Pashinyan mostly put emphasis on socio-economic development and protecting the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia. Such an articulation is an attempt to construct national self-identification in which the NK issue does not have a strong presence. In a way, it is a process of delinking the ontological security of Armenia from the conflict.

However, there is one key aspect where the government and opposition narratives appear to be similar. Neither side leaves enough room for the agency of the other to be articulated as a legitimate competitor. In both of their narratives, the opposing side is presented as a harmful element that should be taken out of the Armenian collective self. As a result of this atmosphere of high antagonism, it is improbable that the sides will reach common ground even on the most basic matters, and the frequent calls for national unity seem to go unnoticed (Hetq, 2022). The 2021 parliamentary election campaign demonstrated the polarising tendencies of the main competing sides (Avetisyan, 2021).

Today, the discursive space in Armenia is no longer dominated by interlinked narratives and practices through which the collective identity of the country is performed. The war has created a rupture, and different actors have been trying to rebuild the shattered social structures in contrasting ways. The narratives of the government and the partisan opposition have become the most popular ones, pushing other alternatives to the margins. As a result, the topography of the discursive space has become binary, where the articulations of two opposing camps have

acquired salience among large sectors of the population. However, they are not dominant enough to make their narrative the only acceptable one and construct a sense of national self on their terms.

The reason for the failure to construct a new hegemonic narrative is the impact of the war on trust. As Edkins notes: "to be called traumatic – to produce what are seen as symptoms of trauma – an event has to be more than just a situation of utter powerlessness. In an important sense, it has to entail something else. It has to involve a betrayal of trust as well" (2003: 4). Among Armenians, trust in the social structures that played an important role in embedding a certain sense of national self was broken. It was not just the enemy that caused damage but also the system that was meant to deliver victory and provide ontological security. Perhaps the most vivid representation of this is the dramatic change in the public attitude towards Artsrun Hovhannisyan, the Ministry of Defence representative in charge of keeping the public informed about the course of the war. People went from considering him one of the most reliable sources to associating his persona with deception (Barseghyan et al., 2021).

Such a radical change in public trust can be observed in the post-war opinion surveys (Caucasus Research Resource Center Armenia, 2022; International Republican Institute, 2021). It is important to note that the lack of trust does not necessarily have to be related to particular institutions or figures. The very notion of trusting becomes much harder (Hakhverdyan, 2022). The fact that many people feel insecure about the future, as shown in the post-war surveys, is illustrative of this atmosphere. The situation in this regard is especially striking when compared with the jubilant and hopeful public mood after the 2018 Velvet Revolution (International Republican Institute, 2019).

The inability to fit this traumatic event into the pre-existing discourses of self-identification and the loss of trust have left people disenchanted and disoriented. There have been multiple comments about public inaction and fatigue, especially when discussing why people do not join the opposition forces to topple the current government despite the tragic developments under the latter's rule (Tosunyan, 2020). Factoring in the effect of a traumatic experience can help to understand this situation. Another movement, *à la* Velvet Revolution, might require "a combination of anger and hope" (Lawson, 2019: 88). While there might be plenty of the former to go around, having hope in certain mission-driven narratives is very difficult because people are not ready to trust yet. In such a moment of

ontological insecurity, all-encompassing anxiety becomes the norm, and there are no effective social structures to provide a sense of certainty and predictability in these difficult times.

The public reaction to Azerbaijan's attack on Armenia proper in autumn 2022 and the blockade of the Lachin corridor since December 2022 show how the collective trauma of the second NK war has led to these tendencies. A close observation of the developments within Armenia when these new challenges appeared reveals striking differences between people's attitudes and behaviours before the war and after it.

On 12 September 2022 the Azerbaijani armed forces launched a large-scale attack on Armenia across the latter's eastern and south-eastern borders (OC Media, 2022). It was the largest escalation of conflict since the Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War. This time, public reaction was very different: the affectively charged patriotic narratives that revolved around the idea of an inevitable victory were replaced by expressions of anxiety, distrust and panic (Hovhannisyan, 2022; Muradyan, 2022). It is telling that Pashinyan's vaguely phrased statements at the 14 September session of Parliament triggered protests and speculation that yet another painful document had been signed behind the curtains (Civilnet, 2022a). The prime minister later had to make assurances by denying the speculation (Armenpress, 2022).

The blockade of the Lachin corridor on 12 December 2022 is yet another distressing development for Armenians. The only road connecting NK with the outside world has been closed by the Azerbaijani side, creating a full-blown humanitarian crisis (Zaman, 2023). In this case, the public reaction has been mostly muted, triggering questions about whether people are indifferent (Civilnet, 2022b). To explain this situation, some observers draw attention to the psychological toll of the war, arguing that it has led to inertia as a defence mechanism (rearrange with Narek Amirkhanyan, 2023; Tadevosyan, 2023). This hints at the role of trauma. In this particular context, public inaction is yet another instance of a post-traumatic society resisting the interpellation of the abovementioned narratives of self-identification through which the meanings of certain agencies and corresponding actions are constructed. It is the overarching lack of trust that stands in the way of subscribing to another collective mission.

On the whole, the fact that people in Armenia showed a different reaction to the attack in September 2022 and the blockade of the Lachin

corridor demonstrates how the traumatic experience of the 44-Day War has caused ontological insecurity. In other words, the Armenian collective self is experiencing an identity crisis. It is a watershed moment when the previous discursive structures of self-perception have been disrupted, and new ones are yet to replace them. While ontological security is highly desirable at such times, the lack of trust makes it difficult for any particular narrative to become hegemonic and shape the sense of a national self in Armenia.

## Conclusion

The last few years have been transformative for Armenia, and have also brought identity-related challenges. In a matter of a few years, the country went through two major events – the 2018 revolution and war. This chapter has tried to show one dimension of such a shake-up by discussing how Armenians are processing collective trauma after the war. The first section of demonstrated how the outcome of the war triggered an ontological security crisis. The national self-identification narratives that revolved around notions of triumph and revival in the context of the NK conflict were dislocated, as they could not fit the idea of defeat in their structures of meaning. It was a moment of political trauma that became destructive of what had embodied the national common sense for around three decades. Using an ontological security perspective to study this issue helps to highlight the existing sense of disorientation and deep anxiety about the future.

The second part illustrated how this traumatic experience has triggered varying attempts to restore the ontological security of the nation. While this section did not present an exhaustive account of the discourses that have attempted to construct a new sense of certainty after the war, it touched upon the most popular articulations put forward by the authorities and their political opponents. The former has tried to create new ontological security narratives that are detached from the NK conflict. In contrast, the opposition has promised a sense of restored self-certainty in the framework of pre-war discourses, and depicts the current government as the main obstacle on that path. This section also argued that neither of the

post-war articulations has become hegemonic. After the 44-Day War, it has become difficult for Armenians to put their trust in new narratives that would shape their collective self. As a result, the situation of ontological insecurity persists.

The chapter has examined one aspect of the social and political transformations which are explored by the contributions to this edited volume. It argued that the notion of trauma can be used to understand the post-war moment of identity dislocation. In a way, this crisis is a moment of transformation too. It is not surprising that there is fierce political competition to define what the war was and how it should be fitted into broader discursive structures of national identity. Armenia is in the process of (re)writing its modern history, especially with regard to the events of the past few years. The way this recent past will be remembered will eventually influence how the national *self* is constructed, considering that identities are shaped by autobiographical narratives as a way of having ontological security.

In the case of Armenia, this is yet to be achieved, as no articulation has managed to become hegemonic in giving a discursive shape to the collective trauma. Consequently, the country is still experiencing an ontological security crisis. The fundamental rupture in the social fabric, the omnipresence of anxiety and the popularity of antagonistic narratives (where the deceived public is positioned against either thieves or traitors) show how this moment of ontological insecurity is played out. Hence, the question of where Armenia is heading amid the major challenges it faces – one of the main issues this book discusses – becomes very difficult to answer. However, one can state with certainty that things will not be the same.

On a final note, further research can provide deeper and broader analyses of the current sociopolitical situation in the country from this perspective. For instance, developments in relation to Armenia's significant and antagonistic *others*, its main allies and enemies, can be observed using an ontological security approach (Mitzen, 2006). Looking into the role of such external others in the narratives of self-identification is a crucial matter that is not discussed in this chapter. In addition, the chapter does not provide a thorough discussion of narratives that deviate from the popular articulations (presented by the government and the political opposition). Hence, there is a need for more research that can help to develop a proper understanding of these and related matters.

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Aghasi Tadevosyan

# 6. Life after War: Loss and Trauma among Civilian Population after 2020

**Abstract:** After the Second Karabakh War, Armenia faced new challenges. Serious political and security problems arose. In the context of all this, it seems that the issue of around 20,000 forcibly displaced people who immigrated to Armenia as a result of the war has been neglected . This chapter discusses the problems of this group of people and the challenges that arise in integrating them into the civil environment of Armenia. It is not the problems of providing material assistance to these people that are emphasised, but the losses and traumas they have suffered as a result of the war, and the difficulties of overcoming this. It is shown how the war destroyed the lives of people and what complications they faced in the way of rebuilding new lives. The chapter discusses the issues related to how to help displaced people to get involved in public life, to become full members of society and not to be pushed into marginal situations, as is usually the case with displaced people who have not managed to overcome losses and traumas as a result of war.

**Keywords:** Second Karabakh War, civilian population, ethnic cleansing, forcible displacement, total displacement, cultural genocide, post-war trauma

This chapter is devoted to studying the anthropology of the impact of the Second Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War (27 September–9 November 2020) on the civilians who were at the focal point. The First Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan ensued after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The main reason for the war was the desire for independence of the Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) Autonomous Oblast, created by Stalin as a counterbalancing adjunct to the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. Azerbaijan strongly objected to the independence claims. This disagreement turned into a military conflict between Azerbaijan and NK. Armenia joined the conflict to protect the ethnic Armenians of NK. On 2 September 1992 NK declared its independence. The First Karabakh War was over in May 1994, and a termless agreement on ceasefire was signed. For almost thirty years NK was considered an

unrecognised independent country. The OSCE Minsk Group co-chaired by the US, France and Russia envisaged a peaceful settlement of the conflict through negotiations (Geukjian, 2015: 1–18). On 27 September 2020 Azerbaijan broke the ceasefire agreement and started large-scale military actions against NK. The war lasted for 44 days and was terminated by the military defeat of Karabakh and Armenia, as a result of which, with Russia's mediation, a ceasefire was signed on 9 November 2020. According to the ceasefire stipulations, Azerbaijan was to control all the seven regions lost in 1994, as well as the Shushi and Hadrut regions of NK. Almost 90,000 Armenians were displaced and moved to Armenia (DTM Armenia, 2020). Russian peacekeeping forces entered the Armenian part of NK, after which some of the displaced Karabakh population returned to their settlements. It was impossible for the Armenians to return to those settlements that were under the control of Azerbaijan. Almost 20,000 people stayed in Armenia.

From the perspective of migration, Armenia's independence period had more to do with a history of emigration rather than immigration (Tadevosyan, 2014; Galstyan et al., 2022). Imigration flows were more connected to wars in Near East countries and immigration from the Armenian communities in those countries.[1] Armenian immigration from Iraq and Syria has been particularly significant (Hakobyan, 2017; Tanagyan, 2018); these people are still in the process of economic, political and cultural integration. Thus, migration to Armenia has been mainly a result of population displacement due to war (Mollica and Hakobyan, 2021). However, there is a significant difference between the abovementioned cases and the Second Karabakh (44-Day) War. If in the other cases the Armenian population was escaping to avoid the damage caused by military activities, the displacement resulting from the 44-Day War took place on the basis of nationality under the threat of death or torture at the hands of Azerbaijani soldiers (Pomiecinski et al., 2022: 89–90). Both during the war and in the period that followed, Azerbaijan's policy was aimed at deporting the Armenian population of NK through terror, which was repeatedly condemned by international organisations and interpreted as an act of genocide (Statement Condemning the Azerbaijani Blockade of the

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1    At the time of preparing this chapter, there is also a steady influx of Russian migrants to Armenia due to Russia's war in Ukraine.

Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), 2023; Statement on Azerbaijani Aggression Against the Republic of Armenia and the Indigenous Armenians of the South Caucasus, 2022) and ethnic cleansing (The Humanitarian Crises in Nagorni-Karabakh, 2023; Fact-Finding Report, 2022: 41–46).

In general, studies devoted to wars or warfare mainly discuss the military particularities of wars and their political consequences. It might seem that the life of a person or people in general do not appear significant in such studies. People are generally considered as components of military forces, little more than a head count. But the ways in which wars affect civilian populations, who usually become the target of military activities, their suffering, traumas and losses are mainly absent as research foci. The complex situations in which civic populations find themselves are a consequence of the inability to exercise participation in or direct influence on political decision making, so as to halt the cruel processes of war and aggression. They are obliged to follow the programmes of political elites and the interests of those who facilitate wars (Ferguson, 2009: 39–40).

This chapter presents the Second Karabakh (44-Day) War from the perspective of the people, the civilians who were the target in the war. It reflects on issues related to suffering and losses as a result of war, and shows the ways in which war destroys lives, and the difficulties faced in attempting to rebuild lives anew. One of the objectives of this chapter is to consider the problems of the displaced population, emphasising that they are part of Armenian society and that their problems must be at the centre of attention of Armenia's government and civil society. The losses as a result of war are numerous and diverse. This chapter attempts to provide an understanding of the types of help that might be developed to support the displaced population in overcoming the past, rebuilding their lives and becoming full members of Armenian society. This chapter is based on data from 70 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with displaced refugees as well as ten expert interviews. The interviews were conducted with people from different age and sex groups whose settlements were in Hadrut and Shushi, which were bombed during the war and came under the control of Azerbaijan. A total of 60 IDIs out of 70 were conducted with refugees who migrated to and settled in Armenia and ten interviews were conducted with displaced persons who have returned to NK after the ceasefire. The data collected was analysed using the thematic analysis method (Nowell et al., 2017; Clarke and Braun, 2013).

## War, Trauma and Loss in Anthropological Context

Many documentary studies have been conducted related to the Second Karabakh War and its outcomes (Hakobyan, 2020; Iskandaryan, 2020; Pukhov, 2021), related, for example, to human rights (Fact-Finding Report, 2022) or the war's economic outcomes (Khachikyan and Qtoyan, 2021). One of the latest studies is in the field of anthropology, which describes and analyses the war based on the oral stories of its participants (Tadevosyan, 2022). Studies related to the displacement of refugees as a result of the war were also conducted. One of them is devoted to studying the education and protection needs of the displaced children (Assessment Report, 2021). In another article, the problems of the social protection of refugees displaced from NK to Armenia and their expectations related to the future are discussed (Manusyan, 2022). This is also based on the displaced people's stories of the war, and it presents the impact of the war on people in general. It discusses the social aspect of the war and people's expectations of a peaceful community. The study is a follow-up to a similar study conducted before the war (Manusyan, 2021).

In general, though anthropological studies of war were on the rise at the beginning of the twentieth century (Evans, 2003; 2010; Hanna, 1996; Price, 2008; Wallace, 1988), they started to develop particularly after the 1990s. Anthropology studies wars from different perspectives, starting from physical anthropology, the regularity of war and folk culture in the war period (see, for example, Scheer, Marchetti and Johler, 2010: 20) and theories of war prehistory (Campbell and Tritle, 2013; Ferguson, 2008, 2009, 2018; Haas, 1990). Anthropologists study wars in general (Evans, 2010) or local wars (Bornstein, 2009; Gill, 2009; Hoffman, 2011; Manz, 2009; McCutcheon, 2006; Rosen, 2011). Wars are not limited to military activities, and often involve attacks on peaceful populations. Such cases are referred to as total wars, where, among other things, everyday life becomes a war (Ludendorff, 2015: 19–43). The experience of war is horrific because it legitimises the crime of one group of people being killed by another (Ferguson, 2009: 39–40) and becomes a common cause of death, loss and deep traumas (Bradby and Hundt, 2010: 5–8; Leister, 2013 754; Liebling-Kalifani, 2010: 73–80; Lutz, 2002: 723–25). The depredations of war in civil areas ruin not only the social and cultural life of a society (Koeck

2019), but also the very meaning of this for the person (Wool, 2015: 21–24). Though the person might stay alive physically, their entire social lives and environment, which represent the basis for the continuation of life, are destroyed (Roscoe, 2017) . From this perspective social suffering plays an important role among war damages (Gamboa and Cian, 2020: 111–12, Koeck 2019).

During the Second Karabakh 44-Day War, as well as the violent and total displacement of peaceful populations, the loss of social environment has been the most painful outcome. Another painful form of loss and suffering which is evident from the interviews with study participants is the loss of the cultural environment, their entire identity, and the problem of suffering in the aftermath of war. This phenomenon is an aspect of the war-and-loss anthropology area, meriting special attention (Bille, Hastrup and Sørensen, 2010).

The question of loss and suffering in anthropology literature is very important for analysis, as this becomes part of the inner life of a person, having a serious impact on life expectations, as well as becoming an inseparable part of the present (Briggs and Pehrsson, 2008: 32–33; Silverman, Baroiller and Hemer, 2021). It is difficult to find one's place in the present circumstances, much less have expectations and visions for the future. This is one of the main problems among displaced people, which makes the possibility of their integration and starting a new life rather difficult.

The theoretical part of this chapter is based on synthesising the abovementioned approaches regarding the anthropology of war, loss, suffering and trauma. The main approach asserts that among the fundamental issues of integration it is crucial to rebuild the destroyed lives of displaced people as a result of war. The important factors are the fundamental problems of social and cultural environment loss and their role in "rehabilitation" events and processes.

Combining some of the key concepts employed in research on war has helped to prepare the analysis for this chapter. First, the idea of "total war" has been important. The combination of this idea with the idea of "social suffering" has helped to establish the displaced population as the victims of total war. They, despite managing to avoid death, have become victims of severe social suffering and are unable to redefine their lives in their new place of residence. Second, the classification of the experience of loss and its types in the literature devoted to the anthropology of loss has also

been of great assistance. This has allowed me to differentiate and describe the types of loss, and to discuss the experience of loss in the context of the difficulties of building the present often encountered in the displaced population.

## Civilian Populations as a Target of War: Displacement Stories and Escape

This chapter is an attempt to make audible the voice of *a person* who has lost their voice during the war and is now trying to escape that experience to stay alive. There are no tools by which the ordinary population, usually the target of wars, can exercise meaningful decision making regarding the processes of war. The people who bear all the pain of war, who are directly affected by it, who know its damage at first hand, who are wounded, lose their health, lose their loved ones – these people do not have any influence on war.

According to many of the recorded stories, the main peculiarity of the 44-Day War was that it started very abruptly and in an intensive way (Manusyan, 2022; Pomiecinsky, 2022: 89–90; Tadevosyan, 2022: 16–17). In parallel to the military activities, from the very first hours of the war Stepanakert, Shushi, Martuni, Martakert, Hadrut and nearby villages were bombed intensively. In general, around fifty settlements were targeted (Interim Report, 2020: 3). Populated settlements, schools, hospitals and other public facilities were bombed. According to the testimonies of many refugees, they were obliged to leave their houses from the very first hours of the war, and to find shelter in basements or in other comparatively safe places.

> So, I dressed the kids very quickly, we are staying at home, we don't go to the basement and during that period we watch from the balcony window how they bomb, the smoke is everywhere. Fear, stress, the kids are asking: "what is this mummy?", until my husband came and took us to the basement. (Interview #47, 43-year-old woman, Shushi city)

According to interviewees, the abrupt start of the war and the bombing of populated settlements was a part of Azerbaijan's military strategy.

According to most of the displaced participants, this policy aimed to spread fear and panic among civilians so that they would leave their settlements. The findings of this research show that these bombings targeted civilian population and became the main reason for panic, escape and displacement. In studies of wars the creation of fear and panic among the population is often discussed as one of the military aims. This creates a feeling that war is everywhere (Ludendorff, 2015: 19–43), and that the only way of avoiding it is to escape. Such a strategy is applicable in cases where war is pursued not only to capture land and other material resources, but also to "purify" the ethnicity of the attacked areas (Wool, 2015: 21–24). The displacement of the NK Armenian population started from the very first day of the war (Fact-Finding Report, 2022: 41–46). During the second half of the first day of war it became clear that Azerbaijan was targeting the populated areas, followed by the start of panic and large-scale displacement.

> We had a two-floor apartment. From the very first day they started bombing. I could only take the kids out when it started burning, I will show you the photos [shows the photos from the phone]. Everything is vanished. (Interview #34, 45-year-old woman, Shahumyan region, Knaravan village)

According to the stories of the displaced persons, the main reasons can be identified for escape and displacement, as follows. First, the fear of death was enormous. People were afraid and understood that the reason for bombing civic settlements was to make staying in their homes dangerous. The second great fear was being captured as prisoners on their home territory. People were more afraid of being captured and tortured than of being killed:

> There was a bombing that destroyed Nor Karmiravan bridge. I thought to myself, oh the bridge is destroyed, no cars will come and the Turks will take me as a captive. I am more afraid of being taken as a captive, than being killed. Then a car came, my acquaintance was in it, they came after me. (Interview #37, 67-year-old woman, Martakert city)

Listening to these stories, we might reflect that the main peculiarity of civilian population displacement in this war is that it was not an evacuation, but rather a forcible ejection related to national ethnicity, so as to find safety during military actions and escape the danger of being physically destroyed or tortured. It is noteworthy that the fear of being subjected to genocide was often mentioned among the reasons for fleeing. Many

Armenians are certain that one of the goals of the Azerbaijani army was the destruction of the Armenian population of the territories. According to them, in the case of a settlement being captured it was impossible that the civilians would remain alive, as any person of Armenian nationality would be killed, or in the best scenario tortured and taken captive to an Azeri prison. All those who did not manage to escape and stayed in their settlements were killed or were captured and tortured physically and mentally (Fact-Finding Report, 2022: 129–40). In fact, all the areas that the Azerbaijan armed forces conquered underwent a full ethnic cleansing (Fact-Finding Report, 2022: 129–40).

The displacement of the population from the war areas started on the very first day of the war. People were displaced from Karabakh along two main roads connecting to Armenia. For many, the displacement process occurred in an extremely hasty and panicked way. Many people did not manage to take with them either warm clothes, necessary resources or even documents. Most of the displaced people felt deep trauma. According to most of the displaced people, the decision to escape was made because of the possible risk of death. The main factors producing such fears were the bombing of settlements, residential buildings and other civic infrastructure, as well as raids by unmanned aerial vehicles.

> They provided me with a room at the workplace and I stayed there. I was there when that building was bombed twice. The place where I stayed was attacked by a projectile twice. I was wounded and moved to hospital. They were bombing on the way, and we could hardly drive in the ambulance through the forest. The ambulance could hardly reach hospital. I was taken to the hospital and after that to this centre. I could only take my passport, nothing else. I had with me whatever I had on me, and my passport. (Interview #36, 56-year-old man, Shushi city)

Unmanned aerial vehicles were very serious causes of fear and danger. There are many descriptions of people hiding under trees or in buildings to escape the attacks of unmanned aerial vehicles, which were used not only on the battlefield but also in civic settlements with the aim of terrifying the population, disseminating fear and panic.

> People went outside, saw the unmanned aerial vehicles, there was panic and we had shelters in the basement. (Interview #13, 56-year-old woman, Mets Taghlar village)

> I went home to bring clothes for my child when an unmanned aerial vehicle came and stayed over our heads. At that moment we didn't pay attention to whatever it is:

a bush, a tree or whatever, we just hid under it and lay, it went away. We started to run and then it came again. Then we went to the basement, and at that very moment an unmanned aerial vehicle just passed over us. (Interview #61, 61-year-old woman, Karmir Shuka village)

According to the interviews, the escape route was dangerous as the two roads connecting to Armenia were regularly shelled by Azerbaijan artillery and the refugees were attacked by unmanned aerial vehicles.

Reflecting on the displacement stories, one of the most distinguishing features is the fact that the occupied settlements were entirely depopulated, informally speaking "until the last person". No resident dared to stay in the settlements that were being bombed. In general, not many wars lead to a total displacement of the civilian population. Total wars usually produce such outcomes where military actions occur everywhere, or on the entire territory (Ludendorff, 2015: 19–43). It is evident that Azerbaijan did not aim solely to occupy the territory, but also to displace the Armenian population.

They intentionally bombed civic areas from the very first day of the war so that there was panic and Artsakh was displaced. There are cities that are almost fully destroyed to the ground, and if the city population was not evacuated in time, the number of victims would have been much higher. (Interview #21, research expert)

There was no single case where, after the occupation of Armenian territory, the Azerbaijanis allowed the local population to continue to live in their settlements. The research findings show that the results of total displacement are significantly different from other cases of displacement, being deeper and sometimes insurmountable. Total displacement of a civic population makes return impossible; it creates collective psychological traumas, namely, the fear of irreversible loss of the homeland and the fear of being exposed to genocide. It is noteworthy that the fear of being subjected to genocide is one of the main fears caused by the war among many of the displaced. People consider the reason for this to be the unconcealed hatred of Azerbaijanis towards the Armenian population. According to respondents, the goal of this war was not solely to capture the territory of NK, but also to kill the Armenian population. People are convinced that if they had failed to leave their homes in time, they would have been killed by the Azerbaijani soldiers. It is noteworthy that not only the displaced people but also the international entities studying the situation came to such a

conclusion about Azerbaijan's policy towards the Armenians of NK during the war (for example, Statement Condemning the Azerbaijani Blockade of the Artsakh, 2023; Statement on Azerbaijani Aggression, 2022) .

## The Feeling of Loss and Post-war Trauma

As a collective action, war transfers the issue of life and death from the personal to the social level (Ferguson, 2009: 45–46). The fear of death becomes a collective feeling and affects social life. The extreme narrowing of the border between life and death affects social behaviour and adapts social structures to the reality of war (Lutz, 2002: 723–25; Price, 2008 5–34). It might create a deep feeling of destroying existing structures, inner and outer worlds (Wool, 2015: 21–22). The losses of war have an axial impact on this change. It is important to note that the feeling of loss in the Armenian reality has deep connections with displacement, migration and genocide fears (Eng and Kazanjian, 2003: 127). During the Second Karabakh War, forcible displacement on the basis of ethnicity and the feeling of loss under the threat of death and genocide have tremendously changed the lives of the displaced population.

The feeling of loss conceptualised in the framework of this war appears to be multidimensional. The personal feeling is usually combined with the collective one. Many people lost family members or close relatives. However, the personal loss does not appear in isolation. From the perspective of collective trauma and constructing the future, the death of so many young men is experienced as overwhelmingly harsh. "The loss of an entire generation" is one of the most discussed and painful themes.

Among deep traumas, there is also the sense of loss of family integrity, and the loss of parents (Halilovich, 2013). Many young men who were killed had young families and children. Among the displaced population, women who have lost their husbands, in particular, seem to have a feeling of uncertainty. They do not know what will happen to them and how they will continue life with their children, and without their husbands.

Many of the participants in this research consider the loss of their settlements as another type of loss with traumatic consequences. To them the settlement was not only a place where they lived, but also a part of

their identity. The loss of the settlement where the person was born and grew up is also a loss of social environment and status (Gamboa and Cian, 2020: 111). This not only relates to the past and to memories, but appears as very important for living in the present and constructing the future. For many the loss of hope and the fear of losing their settlement irretrievably seem to have generated an extreme lack of interest in the future. This is a serious obstacle to adapting to the new situation and giving a new interpretation to life. Such feelings of loss are deeper than the feeling of loss of social environment. After the war the loss of social connections has had very deep traumatic consequences (Gamboa and Cian, 2020: 112; Lovrić and Pećanac, 2020: 125). In general, from an anthropological perspective the trauma is directly explained in terms of losing connections with the social environment, and the loss of feelings of support and security (Lester, 2013 754).

In this case, we witness the feeling of loss of the settlement, which is accompanied by a collective feeling of loss of the hometown. Particularly for those people who lived in settlements that have a long history and traditions, nature and the landscape have strong symbolic connections to cultural identity (Amiryan, 2021: 213–27). The displaced population takes very seriously the loss of holy places and churches. In the context of loss of settlements that are now occupied by Azerbaijan, among different traumas people experience is the fear of the violation, destruction and irreversible loss of holy places, and their exposure to cultural genocide.

The strongest feeling as a result of the war is the trauma of an irreversible loss, and this has two causes. First, people are certain that because of their national identity they will never be able to return to their settlements. Secondly, Azerbaijan's state policy of destroying Armenian culture in the settlements and in captured NK areas generally (CERD, 2022: 2) has caused many people to become alarmed that in a very short period of time the Azerbaijanis will have simply destroyed and vandalised cultural values related to Armenian identity, which will result in Armenians losing these areas irretrievably as part of their homeland.

> The first is the loss of the homeland; the land where you planted trees, spent your childhood, grew up, and in just a few days, the region of Hadrut with its monuments, holy places and nature passed into the hands of Azerbaijanis. The sad thing is that they are already eliminating all that and losing the traces. Hadrut has always belonged to Armenians . We have lost everything, starting with the house, mountains and valleys, monasteries and holy places, graves. Everything that is important for a person, what

makes a human beeing a person, we have lost, and now we don't know what to do. (Interview #62, 56-year-old man, Hadrut region)

Life is quite different before and after the war. The war has destroyed people's lives, and for most of them it seems it will be impossible to rebuild them. People who have lost their settlements, their status and identity have great difficulties in rebuilding their everyday lives.

> I didn't want to go out. Until now, I look away, I am constantly upset that I had to leave my home. I lost my youth, secondly, I lost my land, thirdly I lost my own world, my friends, my job. (Interview #65, 59-year-old man)

The situation seems to have become even more difficult, considering that the problems of the refugees (among numerous problems in the post-war period) have gradually become a secondary issue, through losing any public voice. If in the immediate aftermath of the war the issue of the displaced population remained at the centre of public attention, now, several years on, the issue seems to have lost its public voice. However, it is important to realise that this is a matter of the lives of 20,000 people, many of them young, and the necessity to overcome their difficult conditions by building their lives anew. The findings show that the difficulty of the situation is that for most of the displaced people, war is the reason for such heavy losses and traumas. They not only lost whatever they had before the war, but they lost *themselves* and cannot find motivation or goals in life, much less think about how to achieve them.

> Well, our whole life, our life turned 360 degrees, our daily life, our friends, environment, way of thinking, everything that is related to human life. We are still in shock. All that has not yet come out of us. We cannot imagine how we will live further. (Interview #49, 55-year-old woman)

Such reflections suggest that these people reside not on a so-called *zero level*, but even lower than that. In general, loss of identity is one of the most problematic results of war (Jonnes, 2002: 1357–71). Thus, the total displacement of the population has doubled and tripled the problem. The war not only deprived people of the possibility of making a step forward, but it seems to have deprived them of the ability to think. Therefore, the main problem at the current stage is not solely their integration but the rebuilding of people's ruined lives. It is preferable to consider integration as an important part of the rehabilitation process. And here, the factor of

primary importance is the rehabilitation that would allow a person to re-find the ability to set goals and take steps towards their implementation. From this perspective, three main issues come to the fore: to provide support in terms of (1) a permanent or a long-term settlement, (2) economic activity (finding a job with a stable income) and (3) gaining status in the new social environment. Supporting processes that will help people to develop their thinking towards the long-term planning of their lives is of primary importance.

The development of analytical thinking and continuing education as well as counselling services can strongly promote the rehabilitation process. Analytical thinking is important in the way that it helps a person to leave an emotional condition and operate exclusively on a rational level. This is very important from the perspective of overcoming trauma, because one way of overcoming such trauma might be its reconceptualisation (Young, 1995: 6). In general, according to research findings the most characteristic feature of those who are impacted by war is difficulty in initiating long-term projects. The great uncertainty that refugees have hinders such a possibility. The data allows the conclusion that policies must be directed towards gradually overcoming such uncertainties.

Also, according to expert interviews, housing refugees and providing them with long-term social assistance appears to be problematic. People tend to adapt to their status, refusing to make any further effort to return to a normal life.

> We do not want them to have the same destiny as in the cases of Baku and Sumgayit massacre having affected refugees who stayed in dormitories and healthcare facilities for long periods. They got adapted to receiving assistance and thus ghettoisation. At present, similarly, we have the threat of ghettoisation. This means distorted futures. We won't let the same mistake happen again and we will try that everyone has his/her own independent life. (Interview #25, CSO deputy director)

That is why, first, it is necessary to replace humanitarian and social assistance projects with rehabilitation projects, followed by doing everything possible to get these people out of compact inhabited areas, and help them settle in social environments where the possibility of isolation would be close to zero. It is also important to integrate them into Armenia's social, economic and political life so that they feel they are part of Armenia's life and development processes. Here civil society organisations can play an important role.

## Conclusion

The Second Karabakh (Artsakh) 44-Day War did not lead to solely military and political consequences, but caused extremely deep and serious humanitarian problems. The war was accompanied by ethnic cleansing in the territories occupied by Azerbaijan. Among the Armenian population, the fear of being killed on the basis of their nationality, and the danger of being subjected to genocide in a broad sense, was very high. This war differed from other wars in that the civilian population was evacuated not simply to avoid the risks of hostilities, but because of the fear of being killed on the basis of ethnicity. This has had deep traumatic consequences, as it created a sense of irreversibility of the loss of the foundations for personal and family life. The overwhelming majority of the displaced people who participated in this research believe that it is impossible for them to return to their former settlements now occupied by Azerbaijan, because the latter wants those territories to be free of Armenians. One of the significant social challenges after the war is to overcome the post-war traumas of 20,000 displaced people, meeting their needs and integrating them into society.

The data presented in this chapter allows the conclusion that in the processes of integration of the displaced population it is extremely important to carry out complex work aimed at rehabilitation, apart from satisfying housing conditions and basic needs. The feeling of loss and trauma inherent in the displaced population has a direct impact on their post-war rehabilitation and integration. For this reason, it is important to consider the peculiarities of everyone's displacement story in the policies of post-war rehabilitation and integration.

It bears repetition that the main reason for displacement in the 44-Day War was the fact that it was a total war, occurring beyond the battlefield, accompanied by intensive bombing of civic settlements that threatened the death of the population. One of the main characteristics of this war was that Azerbaijan intended to "purify" the ethnicity of the region, and on the basis of national identity tortured and killed the Armenians. That is why there was not a simple evacuation of the population from the captured settlements but a total displacement.

Such a displacement forms multidimensional feelings of private and collective loss. These can be divided into several categories: human losses, material and livelihood losses, social environment, hometown and cultural identity losses. The deep trauma of these losses is not temporary but is of an irreversible type. As a result of total displacement, this situation is significantly different from other cases of civilian population displacement during wars. Its traumatic outcomes are much deeper as they are related to the impossibility of return, the feeling of irreversible loss of the hometown and of the cultural values that form our identity. The loss of human lives has left the deepest traumatic mark on the displaced. There are two aspects to the feeling of loss here. First of all, there is the loss of a family member, relative, friend or acquaintance. Second, there is the loss of a large number of young men, which causes the pain of the loss of a new generation.

One of the forms of loss that has serious traumatic issues is the loss of social environment. The main negative aspect of this is that it causes people to have status uncertainty, feelings of the meaninglessness of life and indifference to the future in general. The main negative part of this is that it creates uncertainty among people, destroying *one's own world* and creating a sense of lack of possibilities for rebuilding. One of the complexities is that all these things are projected in the present and it becomes difficult to give meaning to the present and plan for the future. The main problem for most displaced people is the loss of the meaning of life which makes it difficult to integrate them into a new environment in Armenia.

In integration processes the primary issue is to rebuild destroyed lives. In this regard the integration of refugees is no easy process. It is necessary to approach it as a rehabilitation process which aims at rebuilding the destroyed worlds of people in a new environment and the ability to find new meanings in life, in dealing with the present and forming visions for the future. In this regard, among important issues are first of all to provide people with settlements. This is the basis that allows a person to feel that they are standing on solid ground and can form the motivation to take a step forward. The second problem is to create possibilities for employment and economic activity. The third is to create favourable conditions for a new social environment. And last, it is very important to develop people's ability to think long-term and to develop planning skills.

Armenia failed to integrate more than 300,000 refugees as a result of the First Karabakh War and make them full members of society, the

main reason for which was the neglect of the abovementioned four issues. For years, the refugees were allocated separate spaces, which led to the ghettoisation of that community, and formed a special psychology of extreme lack of confidence in their own strength, dependence on social assistance and poverty. Neglecting the importance of socio-psychological problems and rehabilitation work in the policy towards this generation of refugees led to most of these people never being integrated into Armenian society and instead joining the ranks of the poor. That is the reason why, among the post-war social problems and transformations, we give special importance to the problem of diagnosis, the overcoming of post-war traumas and the complex integration of the displaced.

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# 7. Imagined Future[s] of Armenia after the Second Karabakh War 2020

**Abstract:** Based on qualitative sociological research with various civil society actors in Armenia, this chapter examines how different political crises and dimensions impact the perception of the social and political future. The chapter asks how the expert community in Armenia imagines the future of the country after the devastating Second Karabakh War within the broader trajectory of regional transformations and the idea of peaceful coexistence with Azerbaijan. The chapter explores and brings together social and political theories of the future, agency and the liquidity of modern times. It analyses how the crisis of the war and the ambiguity of the future affect peace narratives and the vision of peaceful coexistence in the region. At the same time, the chapter analyses what role and political agency experts attribute to Armenia in terms of developing regional relations and producing its future.

**Keywords:** agency, future, uncertainty, peace, peaceful coexistence, peace narrative, Second Karabakh War, Armenia

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno Karabakh (NK) (a formerly autonomous region within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic with a majority ethnic Armenian population) began in 1988. The First Karabakh War (1991–1994), which took the lives of more than 25,000 people and left almost one million refugees and displaced people on both sides, ended in 1994 with a ceasefire without a peace agreement followed by a period of "no war, no peace" (Mkrtichyan, 2020), described by experts as a "frozen conflict" (Bláhová, 2019; Broers, 2015). The irreconcilable demands of self-determination versus territorial integrity resulted in a stalemate that lasted until 2020, when the Second Karabakh War erupted as the Azerbaijani military launched an aerial and ground attack on 27 September. The war resulted in the defeat of Armenia, which agreed to sign a Russia-brokered ceasefire agreement on 9 November 2020.

Since the Second Karabakh War, Armenia has been led into a situation where the many devastations left by the war have been compounded by internal political crisis, social and political polarisation, and socio-economic issues relating to the displaced people, among others. Views regarding this situation range from Armenia having lost the battle due to internal, "treacherous" disagreements (between Karabakh and Armenia; between segments of the Karabakh protection forces and others; and/or between opposing sectors within Armenia) to Armenia having used its resources (i.e., armaments and human resources) inefficiently; it failed to finish the mobilisation process, and Armenia became negligent (e.g., incomplete fortification of protected areas). Many accuse the authorities of incompetence, loss of organisational skills or lack of anticipation of feasible battle scenarios. There is widespread despair, disillusionment and reflection as many now ask what could or should have been done to prevent the war and loss of life (Aydabirian, Libaridian and Papazian, 2021). While rethinking the past, the concept of the future became central to understanding the upheavals of contemporary Armenian society after the Second Karabakh War.

The war's outcome not only caused a political crisis in Armenia but heightened the experience of political and human insecurity and an uncertain future. As Sotieva writes: "An experience as traumatic as war destroys many of our beliefs and undermines our internal sense of security, that which has been established since childhood and gives most of us a feeling of protection and belonging in a social space where we can live and thrive and envisage our future" (Sotieva, 2021: 10). Findings from surveys measuring public attitudes and perceptions demonstrate that 79 % of respondents are worried about the uncertainty of their and their family's future after the war (Caucasus Barometer, 2022) (Figure 7.1).
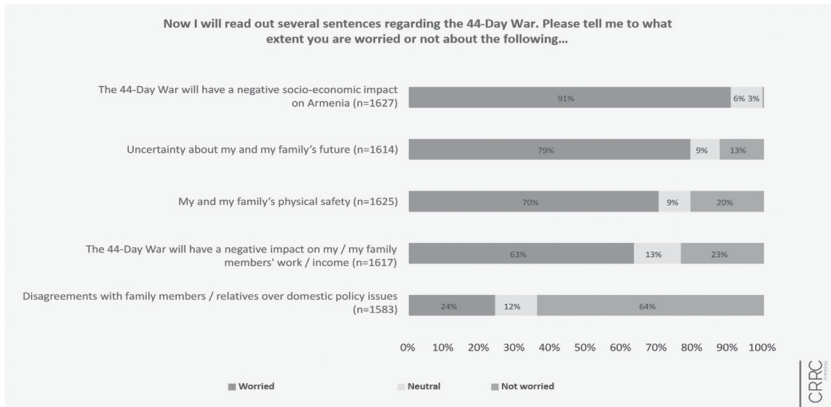
Figure 1: The Extent of Public Doubts in the Aftermath of the 44-Day War
(accessed: https://www.crrc.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Barometer-2021_pptx_ENG_F
inal_14%E2%80%A406%E2%80%A422.pdf)

A recent study of the people displaced due to the Second Karabakh War shows that the consequences and experience of war forced people to think solely about the short-term solution of everyday socio-economic issues and limited the possibility of a broader vision of the future. The unpredictability of the situation affects all spheres of life (Abrahamyan, Khalatyan and Manusyan, 2022). Social insecurities make it even more unrealistic to imagine the future. The feeling of insecurity is not the sole collateral result of war. Bauman writes:

> As we live on a planet that is open to the free circulation of capital and commodities, whatever happens in one place has a bearing on how people in all other places live, hope, or expect to live. Nothing can be credibly assumed to stay in a material "outside" … In Milan Kundera's succinct summary, such "unity of mankind" as has been brought about by globalisation means mainly that "there is nowhere one can escape to". (Bauman, 2007: 6)

It looks as if societal fears have become self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing; as if they have acquired a momentum of their own – and can go on growing by drawing exclusively on their own resources (Bauman, 2007).

Thus, drawing on the concepts of the future, agency and the liquidity of modern times, looking at how different social and political forces, crises and dimensions impact the production of the social and political future, this chapter aims to provide an understanding of how civil society actors in

Armenia imagine the future of the country after the war within the broader trajectory of regional transformations and the idea of a peaceful coexistence.

This chapter is focused on a diverse range of civil society actors – representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs), independent local and international analysts, researchers and scholars who have profound expertise in analysing the Karabakh conflict and Armenia's social and political issues. The conceptual framework draws on social and political theories of time, future and agency (Bell, 1996; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Nowotny, 1992) to analyse the production of the future in post-war and "liquid" (Bauman, 2007) contexts. The social and political theories of the future and agency bring together temporality and "contexts of action … that reproduce and transform structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 970). This chapter contributes to the research and literature on the concept of the future and peaceful coexistence in social sciences by advancing our understandings of how wars affect the production of the future, "modes of projectivity" (Mische, 2009) and agency. The chapter begins by introducing its methodology and discussing the theoretical and conceptual framework. It follows by discussing the findings, which examine perceptions of Armenia's future after the Second Karabakh War within the broader spectrum of regional transformations and the idea of peaceful coexistence.

## Methodology

This chapter is based on in-depth qualitative sociological research methodology.[1] It reveals how the war, the transformed power dynamics

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1   This research is part of a broader study initiated and implemented by the research team of Socioscope NGO. "The Consequences of the Second Karabakh War: Public Perceptions of the Future" research project aimed at exploring the effects of the Second Karabakh War on public and expert perceptions of the future. The research was implemented in two stages. During the first stage, expert interviews were conducted with civil society actors to understand the roots and causes of the war, as well as its consequences for Armenia's future. During the second stage, focus group discussions were conducted throughout Armenia. Overall, 24 focus group discussions were conducted in Yerevan and in the provinces (four in Yerevan, 20 in ten provinces of Armenia). Research fieldwork for focus group discussions took place from 3 July to 23 July 2022.

in the region and the broader post-Soviet space (for example, the Russian invasion of Ukraine) affect the political agency of Armenia to shape its present and future. A total of 14 expert interviews were conducted with social researchers, NGO representatives, political analysts and conflict specialists. The experts were selected based on their profound expertise in studying the Karabakh conflict and its consequences in academia and beyond, working on conflict and peacebuilding issues in the non-profit domain, as well as their specialisation in conflict studies and political science with fundamental expertise in analysing the Karabakh conflict and publicising their analysis in the Armenian media. All the experts have either widespread analytical and academic publications or noticeable representation in local, regional and international media. All the experts are Armenian. Although a few live outside Armenia, their activities are predominantly linked with Armenia and the Karabakh conflict.

The interviews took place in the period of March–May 2022. A literature review informed the research scope and the questionnaire's development. The authors of this chapter acknowledge that the timeframe of the interviews might have impacted the interviewees' perspectives and responses. Six out of the fourteen respondents are female, and eight are male. Some interviews were held virtually via Zoom or Skype due to Covid-19 and differences in location. Interviews lasted approximately an hour. All interviews were transcribed, anonymised and coded.

## Social Time, the Future and the Uncertainty of Modern Life: Literature Review

Social theory and research have long been focused on the question of the social future (Nowotny, 1992). But the dominant approach to futures studies in social science has traditionally lain in predictive analysis. The fundamental issue has always been to understand whether there is a concept of "social time" that is grounded in social theory or not (Nowotny, 1992). Emile Durkheim's observations in 1912 placed the category of time at the epistemological centre of sociological theory, claiming that time has social origins (Nowotny, 1992). In the framework of Durkheimian sociology of knowledge, "social time" was regarded as a cultural phenomenon and was

put in the broader realm of "symbolic time". The domain of sociology of knowledge requires a theory of time that is a social construct.

Norbert Elias's sociology of knowledge and his essay on time starts with the claim that the essay is about time, but is not concerned solely with time (Elias, 2007). What bothers Elias is understanding and explaining time as a social tool. For Elias, time is a significant symbol in human interactions and orientations in the course of history. If "social time" exists, then it becomes crucial to acknowledge that time is socially constituted and that various societies manage "time problems" differently. Niklas Luhmann, on the other hand, proposes a more radical notion of time, suggesting replacing the subject/action paradigm with a time/action one. Within Luhmann's temporal perspective, social action occurs as an event which comprises the social present but gives rise to questions linking past and future. Luhmann's approach eliminates the agency of the actors and substitutes them solely with expectations. Social structure for Luhmann is a selection of possible ways of connecting events and complex systems (Luhmann, 1976).

While Luhmann eliminates the agency of actors, Giddens attempts to link social structure and human agency. Agency can be approached as encapsulating "self-hood, motivation, will, purposiveness, intentionality, choice, initiative, freedom and creativity" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 962) and involves both the "reproduction or transformation of relations of power and inequality" (Ortner, 2006: 11). Giddens's structuration theory, which gained dominance in the late twentieth century, advances the notion of the "duality of structure" and "expresses the mutual dependence of structure and agency" (Giddens, 1979: 69), recognising how even in circumstances of unequal power relations, actors are always partially knowing and thus able to resist the structures. Therefore, Giddens's concept of "duality of structure" means that structure is simultaneously a medium and a result of human agency. It addresses the question of how structurally constituted actors act in such a way that their collective action changes the substance of the structure. The main question for Giddens, then, becomes how social systems constitute their temporality (Giddens, 1984). For Giddens, the time-space scheme is not a mere "environment". In his theory time constitutes social systems and can become a radical mode of social and political change in the future. Human agency is an intervention into the natural and social order of the world. Giddens does not correlate social action with intentionality, but for him it is always oriented towards the past and the future. Thus, it has always a temporal dimension.

Bauman analyses the passage from the "solid" to the "liquid" phase of modernity, described as a condition in which social structures are no longer able to keep their shape for long because they decay and melt faster than the time it takes to cast them (Bauman, 2007). Bauman also notes that long-term thinking collapses, and we can observe the weakening of social structures that leads to a splicing of both political history and individual lives into a series of short-term projects (Bauman, 2007). Society is no longer protected by the state, or at least it is unlikely to trust its protection. Society does not have control over the ruling forces. Moreover, it no longer hopes or intends to recapture and subdue them. "Liquid modernity" and the "age of uncertainty" become the dominant features of "the negatively globalised planet" (Bauman, 2007), where global problems do not have local solutions. Our successive attempts to resolve those issues destroy most of our energy and attention, leaving little room for introspection.

Cultural and critical sociology, on the other hand, suggest interpretative epistemologies that have been developed to study social futures and future possibilities which are not based on probabilistic evaluations of future possibilities because of ongoing risks. As scholars argue, the ability to imagine the future is a crucial part of the social world and social agents (Delanty, 2020). Moreover, modernity and post-modernity have exacerbated social orientation towards the future. Since any action has a temporal dimension, projected futures are crucial for any discussion of action and agency (Mische, 2009). The concept of the future is a temporal category and a rupture from the present (Luhmann, 1976). The future can be experienced as a horizon of possibilities or uncertainties, but it disappears when we approach them. The future is a rupture, but it is also a continuity. Whether the future will be fundamentally different from the present or whether there will be considerable continuity remains to be studied in the frames of the sociology of the future.

Within the sociology of the future (Bell, 1996), we can examine how future projections – which are often vague and uncertain – shape social and political processes. As Mische suggests, examining future projections does not mean that they will come true. The examination reveals the ways they deeply infuse social interaction (Mische, 2009). In this sense, to imagine the future we need to understand the dynamics of current social and political transformations of major societal structures. Here we also draw on approaches within social science, arguing that major transformations

and crises in political and societal structures affect the perception of social futures. In this sense we argue that the future is both actuality and possibility – it is of the present but also goes beyond the present (Delanty, 2020). The space for the future and future expectations unfolds the space beyond the horizons of the present.

## Peace Narratives and the Future of Peaceful Coexistence in the Region after the Second Karabakh War

The First Karabakh War, formulated as a victory, left little or no room for articulating and popularising peace discourse in Armenia. The lack of substantive public and political discussions on the Karabakh conflict and its possible resolutions, and the articulation of the dominant narrative of a "victorious" state by the political elites and the media, led to the marginalisation of critical thought that could question the dominant societal and political narratives on the conflict and the war (Abrahamyan, Khalatyan and Manusyan, 2022). Under the prevailing ideology of a "victorious" state, the voices of peace were rare, unheard and lacked public support. Both public and political narratives of peace remained marginal for years. In the absence of grassroots peace movements, individual anti-war and anti-nationalistic voices were quickly targeted and were ineffective in changing public attitudes. Those articulating the peace narrative, the restoration of economic and political ties with Azerbaijan and advocating for the political process of returning the seven adjacent territories of Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) occupied by Armenia during the First Karabakh War were always portrayed as "traitors" and "enemies" of the nation:

> We see clearly that all participants [of peacebuilding initiatives] became the biggest warmongers [during the war]. There was no peace plan or even a peace narrative in Armenian society that was grounded. Moreover, in the nationalistic environment we were living in, if anyone even suggested that we give up those occupied territories in the way they were intended to be used for negotiation, was tantamount to treason. So as soon as they started saying Artsakh is Armenian, any opposition or critique of that was like treason. (Expert/political analyst and conflict specialist, interviewee #4)

Civil society that was engaged in peacebuilding projects was often targeted by right-wing groups for being funded by Western organisations and for "selling the homeland" (Dilanyan, Beraia and Yavuz, 2018). Despite the peacebuilding efforts of the past thirty years, some experts retrospectively criticise the peacebuilding process as "artificial", considering the militarised rhetoric of peacebuilders during the Second Karabakh War. Others point out the inefficiency of peacebuilding from the perspective of the unilateral demand for peace and the crisis of civil society after the war. While some experts discuss and criticise the nature and characteristics of the peace narrative, others question its existence at all. They argue that there was no peace narrative; instead, there were narratives of "no war, no peace" and "maintaining the status quo". Throughout these years, both at public and political levels, the peace narrative was determined to be "capitulation". There was no practical notion of peace, according to experts. "Peace" was mainly in the sensuous domain rather than being rational at the public level.

The Second Karabakh War has significantly changed the discursive course of peace and created a "window of opportunity" for new conversations. These are fragile but are articulated on the political level.[2] While acknowledging the politics of authorities in shaping the peace narrative after the war, experts also mention the issues in that process – ambiguity, inconsistent political behaviour, and lack of support for the peace agenda before the war. Some experts argue that in a post-war context that is characterised by numerous security issues, the discourse of peace articulated by the authorities is controversial. As one of the representatives of civil society said, the existing peace narratives in Armenia are "the result of a political collapse".

It is important at the political and public levels to make joint efforts to develop a peace discourse. However, it is essential to consider that the perception of peace is eclectic and fragmentary both in the public and political domains. In the context of the predominance of pessimistic approaches to the future, the formulations of peace and peaceful coexistence

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2    In April 2022 Prime Minister Pashinyan announced that his government was working towards reaching a peace deal with Azerbaijan. His speech was met with daily protests and accusations of making unacceptable concessions on the status of Karabakh. The protesters demanded Pashinyan's resignation, labelling him a "traitor" and a "Turk". The protests were led by the political satellites of the second president Kocharyan inside and outside Parliament (Ishkanian et al., 2023).

are fragmented. The opposing ideas of "there is nothing better than peace" and "the lands lost due to the war should be returned" often belong to the same person (Abrahamyan, Khalatyan and Manusyan, 2022). Those articulating peace were raising the question of compromise in relations with neighbours in the region, peaceful coexistence and returning the territories, without forgetting injustices and war crimes. These formulations were not popular and did not gain broad public support; instead, they were subjected to wide criticism.

In this regard, the war has not brought any significant change, and the general public continues to be detached from engaging in the peace process. Moreover, the opposing notions of peace in Armenia and Azerbaijan make it even harder to imagine a meaningful dialogue on peace and peaceful coexistence.

> We speak about peace in Armenia and Azerbaijan, but our understandings vary. For Azerbaijan, peace is a situation where Armenia should relinquish everything, give a corridor at the end, and delimit the borders by whatever means they want. Do we want that kind of peace now? (Expert/NGO representative, interviewee #1)

The peace narrative in Armenia since the war is articulated as "good political relations with neighbouring countries", but civil society representatives have doubts and concerns about whether Armenia has a political vision of a "peace plan" and the capacity to implement it. For some experts, that "peace plan" equates to acquiescence to the maximalist demands of Azerbaijan. Acknowledging the importance of peaceful coexistence in the region, some experts notice the shift in Armenia's agency in forming relations with regional counterparts. They all discuss the importance of peaceful coexistence for both countries but also emphasise the conditions under which it will happen. Peaceful coexistence also supposes "mutual exploitation", and political agency is the capacity to be the least "exploited". Among the necessary conditions for peaceful coexistence, experts also mention regime change in authoritarian Azerbaijan and Turkey. This would guarantee peace and economic development in the region. A possible peace can become a reality only in the case of bilateral demands and desires; otherwise, according to experts, "Armenia is threatened with annihilation."

Some experts reflected on the price of peaceful coexistence. The notion of "price" leads to accusations that the price for peaceful coexistence is

Karabakh, but "those who agree on it, never talk about it publicly".[3] Analysing civil society's perspectives on peaceful coexistence in the region, it is also essential to explore the historical roots of the concept. Peaceful coexistence was a term coined by Nikita Krushchev in a 1959 article about the state of East–West relations in the US geopolitical magazine *Foreign Affairs* (Krushchev, 1959). The theory of "peaceful coexistence" was developed and applied by the Soviet Union and later adopted by the "socialist states" under Soviet influence during the Cold War. It was developed in the context of Marxist-Leninist foreign policy, which at its core aimed to deny the opposition that communism and capitalism cannot coexist peacefully. The debates on "peaceful coexistence" extended beyond the communist-capitalist political order and in various contexts included such principles as the mutual respect of states for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, the mutual commitment of non-interference in the internal affairs of different states, the absence of mutual aggression, equality and mutual benefit (Fifield, 1958).

Universality is another principle of peaceful coexistence, which suggests that each country chooses the type of neighbourly relations itself. The only precondition of those relations is for them to be cordial and peaceful. In other words, theoretically, peaceful coexistence recognises the existence of different social systems, respects the sovereignty of states, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of countries, and emphasises that all international issues should be resolved through peaceful negotiations. In practice, we observe how various regions and societies worldwide are torn apart due to armed conflicts and wars.

The Second Karabakh War ended with the Russia-brokered ceasefire agreement signed by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, PM of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 9 November 2020. It stated:

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3    On 9 May 2022 a group of people initiated and circulated a peace manifesto entitled "Peace, with no 'buts'". More than 60 people signed the manifesto. It went viral on the Internet receiving both words of praise and admiration, as well as criticism that the authors and signatories of the manifesto were subordinating the security of the population of Karabakh to peace. The manifesto is available at <https://epress.am/en/2022/05/09/peace-with-no-but-s.html>.

> All economic and transport connections in the region shall be unblocked. RA shall guarantee the security of transport connections between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic to arrange unobstructed movement of persons, vehicles, and cargo in both directions. The Border Guard Service of the Russian Federal Security Service shall be responsible for overseeing the transport connections. As agreed by the Parties, new transport links shall be built to connect the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and the western regions of Azerbaijan.[4]

Despite the abovementioned agreement and the elevated social and political discussions about the need for peaceful coexistence in the region, the war dramatically impacted Armenia's societal perceptions of peace and peaceful coexistence. Socioscope NGO's (unpublished) research study *The Consequences of the Second Karabakh War: Public Perceptions of the Future* shows that both public perceptions and expert assessments remain pessimistic and despairing. Within this complex post-war situation, the region is not perceived as a political and geographical unit, where the political, historical, cultural and socio-economic relations of Armenia as a political agent develop with other states. The region is perceived as a hostile environment in which Armenia is "surrounded on four sides by enemies" (Abrahamyan, Khalatyan and Manusyan, 2022). This feeling of victimhood and oppression is interpreted as a reality that either has no prospect of change, or in which no political role and agency is attributed to Armenia in changing it. Under these conditions, the possibility of peace and peaceful coexistence leads to the idea of "peace without Azerbaijan and Turkey" (Abrahamyan, Khalatyan and Manusyan, 2022). Peace and peaceful coexistence are not seen as existing in the region, with a given regional country, but without them. On the one hand, peace is desirable, and on the other hand, it is unimaginable after the disaster of the war.

As this research shows, some experts link Armenia's future development with peaceful coexistence, which in turn, as one of the respondents put it, is "anchored on the opening of communications". On the one hand, the opening of communications in the region is qualified as an opportunity, a necessity and a key step towards peaceful coexistence, but on the other hand, civil society representatives believe it may bring additional security

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4    Statement by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation, 10 November 2020, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>.

risks both for Armenia and the region, which, however, is not considered a sufficient basis for terminating the process:

> The best way to protect yourself from some infections and viruses is to keep your body healthy, and not to stay in a closed space with a mask on forever, because even recent health events have shown that this does not help. You cannot endlessly block all the doors through which threats can come to you. Instead, you should have a much stronger border service, strong oversight bodies inside the country to protect yourself as a state from any kind of threat. In the conditions of peaceful coexistence, you must have such relations [with your neighbours] so you can transform those threats. (Expert/social researcher, interviewee #1).

Peace and peaceful coexistence are crucial preconditions that enable states to establish cooperation in various domains, which in turn acts as a guarantee to prevent war between mutually economically dependent states (Aboltin, 1958). On the other hand, sociopolitical instability emerges because conflicts and wars seriously impact the decline of private and public investments and the prospects for long-time planning (Santhirasegaram, 2008). Moreover, increased government spending on defence leads to reduced spending on socio-economic infrastructure and public goods, such as education and healthcare.[5] In Armenia, the concept of peaceful coexistence is articulated from the standpoint of economic development and economic dangers. Thus, as a result of the unblocking and reopening of communications, Armenia will have the opportunity to import and export goods with better options, bypassing, for example, Georgia. As experts note, the provision of transit roads by different states in the region is a process from which they benefit not only economically, but politically, as it is a means of creating mutual dependence, which, in turn, can play a deterrent role for future conflicts. Moreover, the opening of communications provides an opportunity to be part of regional and

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5   In the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War, we notice a significant and concerning rise of militarism in post-war Armenia. In parallel with the reforms to the armed forces of Armenia that propose a gradual transition from mandatory conscription to voluntary military service and shortening the length of military service, the government envisages allocating 509 billion AMD to the defence sector. The growth in defence spending is 113 % compared to 2018, with a year-on-year increase of over 47 % (Hergnyan and Seda, "20 % of Armenia's 2023 Budget to Defense", 2022, <https://hetq.am/en/article/149209>).

international projects that stabilise the economy and neutralise the possible negative effects in the context of the Russian invasion to Ukraine.

However, the reopening and unblocking of communications is not always reckoned as a positive perspective for Armenia, as for some experts it holds more dangers than opportunities. In other words, due to the transformed power balance in the region, civil society representatives have concerns that rebuilding political and economic relations and ties with Azerbaijan and Turkey will take place "under conditions of intimidation". According to some experts, Azerbaijan as a gas- and oil-rich country is expanding its role in Europe,[6] specifically after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and "the collective West is ready to turn a blind eye to various crimes perpetrated by Azerbaijan". On the one hand, some civil society representatives believe that Turkey, as an economically powerful state, will try to boost its economic presence in Armenia, as it did in Georgia. Eventually, "the Turkish-Azerbaijani element will penetrate the border regions resulting in 'de-Armenisation' of those regions and emigration to Yerevan and abroad". On the other hand, some experts think that the potential threat from Turkey is an emotional exaggeration rather than rational analysis, as "it is much more beneficial for Turkey to have RA in its neighbourhood than Armenia as a gubernia". Some experts see establishing peace as a process to be coordinated with Russia, which is interested in opening communications in the region. However, within this process the least agency is given to Armenia as a state.

Even though peaceful coexistence in the region is regarded as vital on various discursive levels, its realisation, by many experts, is portrayed as something unattainable, because since the war and especially since the Russian war against Ukraine, the interests of different states (especially the interests of the West) in the region do not always coincide, and the desire to obtain more prevails. The fact that three of the four neighbours of Armenia are authoritarian states is often used by Armenian civil society representatives as an argument for the impossibility of peaceful coexistence.

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6    President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen signed a new agreement with President Ilham Aliyev on 19 July 2022 to increase gas supplies, since following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Europe announced its intention to eliminate its energy dependence on Russia. Azerbaijan and EU Agree to Strategic Energy Partnership, 18 July 2022, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-and-eu-agree-to-strategic-energy-part nership>.

Thus, according to Freedom House's assessment report, Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey are considered non-free states.[7] According to experts, these states, being authoritarian, do not have peaceful coexistence within their states or in relations with other states, since they impose expansionist policies. Moreover, their authorities articulate xenophobic narratives to portray "external enemies" as an existential threat to their countries. On the other hand, civil society representatives acknowledge that regional superpowers such as Russia, whose political, economic and social interests benefit from the fact that peaceful coexistence is shattered in the region, constantly feed anti-Turkish sentiments and existential fears among Armenians, against the background of which they present themselves as "saviours" and "mediators", thus diminishing Armenia's agency.

Another issue continually discussed in the context of the normalisation of relations with the neighbouring states in the region is related to the price that must be paid for peaceful coexistence. Accordingly, experts separate the process of normalisation and peaceful coexistence in Armenia–Azerbaijan–Turkey relations from the Karabakh issue. The normalisation of Armenia's relations with Turkey is discussed and considered as an "improbable option", because Armenia is interested in the normalisation of relations and is focused on results, while for Turkey the process is a "thing in itself". When it comes to the normalisation of relations with Azerbaijan, the status of Karabakh or the fate of ethnic Armenians living in Karabakh comes to the forefront. Thus, the scenario is the postponement of discussing the issue of the status of Karabakh.

The Second Karabakh War triggered the narrative of peace and peaceful coexistence at societal, political and expert levels. The issue of peaceful coexistence became one of the sources of political and social turmoil in the country. It is also closely related to the future of Armenia and Armenian society. However, two years after the war, we observe that there are eclectic visions of peaceful coexistence within civil society and the broader public. On the one hand, the desire for peaceful coexistence in the region is indisputable; on the other hand, the set of uncertainties and

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7    Freedom House is a human rights organisation that evaluates the level of freedom by several criteria: political rights and civil liberties, Internet freedom, level of democratic governance, etc. On a 100-point scale, the status of freedoms in Azerbaijan is estimated at 9 points, Iran at 14 and Turkey at 32. Meanwhile, Armenia and Georgia are among partially free countries with 55 and 58 points, respectively.

tensions related to that prospect is extensive. In the context of the ambiguity of the post-war future and the liquidity of the changing world, it is crucial to discuss what the possibilities and limits of Armenia's political agency in producing its future are. While discussing this, the broader trajectory of regional relations, political developments and transformations may be considered.

## The Agency to Produce the Future after the Second Karabakh War

Social and political theories of agency accentuate the idea of practising power. The concept of power stresses the aspect of the political capacity of the agent, be it an individual or a collective entity. In this notion, the more individuals or collective actors isolate from one another, the more their political agency declines. Beyond this general definition of social and political agency, some authors view it as the capacity to take part in the struggle to define the models of common life, stressing the conflictual dimension of politics (Mouffe, 2005). Other scholars understand political agency as the strategic capacity to coordinate with others to settle a fair society (Sanchini and Pongiglione, 2019). Despite the broad spectrum of analysing agency in social and political theories, all approaches share the preoccupation with the issue of power and the legitimacy of imposing that power. Although social and political agency exists within a "bounded circle" of constraints (Giddens, 1979), it also has freedom and flexibility within those constraints. Agency is constituted within the social and political structures and determines the structures simultaneously by the manifestation of the agency.

The freedom and flexibility of agency within the bounded circle occurs when individual and collective agents become conscious of their situation. When there are relevant political, legal, social and other mechanisms to act politically and bring changes in the system's structures, agency has a chance to prevail. Thus, the temporal and structural context of action is crucial in shaping and reshaping agency – the temporal aspect of agency promotes types of agency. The structural contexts are essential in understanding that

individual and collective actors are always living simultaneously in the past, future and present and adjusting the various temporalities of their reality to one another in imaginative or reflective ways.

We draw from Emirbayer and Mische's definition of agency, conceptualised as "temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 970). We acknowledge the constraints of the structures and various powers but also consider the "creative reconstructive dimension of agency", paying attention to future possibilities. We argue that an imaginative engagement with the future is crucial in producing social and political futures. Drawing on this notion of agency, we ask what are the possibilities for and limits of Armenia's political agency in producing its future within the broader trajectory of regional relations, political developments and transformations.

It is possible to reveal Armenia's political agency in producing its future in several layers. First, we notice the politics of tying Armenia's future to Karabakh's future. Since the 1988 Karabakh movement, later independent Armenia formed its national and state identity around the Karabakh axis and the victory in the war. The ideology of "national unity" (Zhamakochyan, 2016) around the Karabakh issue prevailed during the years of Armenia's independence. For years, the Karabakh conflict was "naturalised" and "eternalised", thus constantly connecting Karabakh's and Armenia's presents and futures. Two years after the Second Karabakh War, the perception that the future of Armenia depends on the fate of Karabakh – and that Armenia does not have the ability to influence the issue of Karabakh – dominates the public and political discourse. At the same time, since the 2000s the "national unity" ideology has been used to suppress oppositional and radical voices in the country and to control the media. Meanwhile political and social differences are neglected as "national unity" does not propose a solid, practical political agenda for society. It becomes a goal per se, hiding the real purposes of the ruling (Zhamakochyan, 2016: 25). Secondly, concerns about Armenia's future and the political agency in shaping that future are exacerbated by the lack of political vision within the country or the uncertainty of that vision and

the political motives of the actors involved in the region. This situation is framed as risky. As experts note:

> Whether consciously or unconsciously, Armenian political thought does everything so that the Karabakh issue remains vague and does not become the subject of broader political discussion and is not connected with the problems of Armenia, even though it has always been indirectly connected with those problems. Isn't it clear that we didn't have democracy because there was the Karabakh conflict, or there is no economic growth because there was the Karabakh conflict? (Expert/political analyst and conflict specialist, interviewee #5).

Thirdly, such tectonic shifts as Russia's attack on Ukraine significantly affect the future of Armenia and the limits of Armenia's political agency to play a significant role in shaping it. However, expert assessments are divergent. According to some experts, the war's outcome will largely determine the future of the region, and in this regard, Armenia's role is negligible. Others believe that the Russian–Ukrainian war will not significantly impact the Karabakh issue or Armenia any time soon, considering that much depends on global transformations and shifts in power balances.

Despite generally desperate and pessimistic assessments, civil society representatives note the prospects for increasing Armenia's political agency, arguing "the need to be good losers and learn from our mistakes and act based on the lessons learnt". Research experts also highlight the role of civil society, which in these ambiguous and "liquid" times can assume the role of the proponent of public and political discourses on such significant topics as democracy and diversity, "because democracy is such a fundamental aspect of Armenian statehood and its survival right now, that it needs to be protected".

Despite crises and uncertainties at the local, regional and global levels, Armenia's political agency is acknowledged in the context of deepening direct dialogue and relations with its immediate neighbours. Moreover, these relations should not be based on a "winner–loser" and "dominant–subordinate" mutually exclusive logic, but on the logic of recognising and accepting each other's pains and losses. The process of shaping the future can significantly gain from analysing past mistakes and dismantling nationalist myths. In this regard, collective self-reflection and self-criticism by public intellectuals, civil society and political actors who contributed to the reproduction of those national myths is of crucial importance. The deconstruction of old myths and the production of new narratives on

peace and peaceful coexistence, and the advancement of broad public and political dialogues around them, is still to emerge.

> Armenia today is immersed in the same myths to the same degree as before the war. First, we need to rethink and re-evaluate our past mistakes. (Expert /political analyst and conflict specialist, interviewee #6).

The discussion shows that Armenia's local political agency is limited – on the one hand by the defeat in the Second Karabakh War, and on the other by regional and global transformations. Experts believe that its positioning as a so-called "powerless" and "defeated" state makes Armenia vulnerable and voiceless. At the same time, within the framework of the "bounded circle" of agency, it is possible to expand the boundaries and perspectives of political action, not by disavowing defeat but by acknowledging it and finding leverage in relations with diverse actors from that reflexive position. The current situation in Armenia resembles fluctuations that occur because of the wind. One way of dealing with those fluctuations is to let the wind blow, which is also an agentic choice. The other option is to try to *build windmills*.

## Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the impact of the Second Karabakh War on the perceptions of Armenia's future among civil society. It has done so by framing local perceptions within the definition of agency as temporal-relational contexts of social and political action that can both reproduce and transform the structures in changing historical situations. By adopting the abovementioned formulation of agency, as well as social and political theories of the future and the liquidity of modern times, the chapter reflected on the perception of the uncertainty of Armenia's future as a result of the war. Armenia's political agency in shaping its future is questioned by the lack of political vision in the country or the uncertainty of that vision, and the political motives of the actors involved in the region. The chapter also explored the characteristics of the peace narrative before and after the war, and the future of peaceful coexistence in the region. At the same time,

it discussed what role and agency experts attribute to Armenia in terms of developing regional relations and producing its future.

The discussion demonstrates that since the war, hopelessness and pessimism prevail among civil society representatives regarding the forming or construction of the peace narrative, the possibility of peaceful coexistence in the region and, in general, Armenia's agency and ability to shape its future. Despite the general disillusionment, there are attempts to create a narrative of peace on the political level, as well as on the level of civil society. At the same time, the ambiguity of the concept of peace prevails in the discourse of the Armenian authorities. This incertitude is manifested in the lack of clear vision of the concept of peace among political actors . Their capacity to overcome the position of the oppressed while negotiating peace in the region with Azerbaijan is also questioned. On the other hand, there is a widespread belief that there is no alternative to peaceful coexistence. The question is whether Armenia can maintain its political agency while shaping its regional relationships. Peaceful coexistence is mainly discussed under the lens of economic ties, which are considered both positive and risky. Experts who display "cautious optimism" regarding peaceful coexistence highlight the importance of accepting mutual pain and losses, transforming the "dominant–oppressed" logic to enable the restoration of neighbour relationships. In the context of "cautious optimism", the experts note the importance of developing democratic institutions in Armenia.

Apart from the Second Karabakh War, the hopeless scenarios for Armenia's future are heightened by the background of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, leading to a situation where the contextual or external factors influencing Armenia's future are more significant than Armenia's political agency. Despite the fact that civil society representatives are rather sceptical regarding Armenia's political agency in producing its future, two scenarios are discussed. One proposes that the outcome of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine will significantly affect the future of the region, and Armenia in particular. The other suggests that the war's outcome will not cause major shifts either in the region or regarding the Karabakh issue. However, the question remains whether Armenia will manage to find leverage within geopolitical transformations and shifts in power balances to be able to build direct relations with neighbours in the region. The discussion leads to the assumption that Armenia's agency will decline not only due to Russia's attack on Ukraine, but also in the context of the

transformation of the power balance and Western and Russian interest in the region.

Despite crises and uncertainties at various levels, Armenia's political agency has the potential to expand in the context of deepening direct dialogues and relations with its immediate neighbours. In this regard, collective self-reflection and self-criticism by public intellectuals, civil society and political actors who contributed to reproducing nationalistic narratives towards the conflict is crucial. However, the success of the production of new narratives on peace and peaceful coexistence, and the advancement of broad public and political dialogues around them, remains to be seen.

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