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DEMOCRATIC ORIENTATIONS OF THE PEOPLE IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS IN THE MID-1990S

Favorable attitudes toward democratic values held by ordinary citizens, or lack of it, have long been considered as an important factor in explaining the prospects for the democratization process. Drawing upon the third wave (1995–1998) of the World Values Survey project, this paper comparatively explores the democratic attitudes of the people in the South Caucasus region (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia) in the mid-1990s. Theoretical justification for analyzing mass orientations is grounded in the basic assumption that what people think and how they view democracy is crucial to understanding the possibilities for change and reform. The results reported here carry a positive claim and suggest that democratic orientations appear to be a shared desire in all three nations with small variations. The empirical evidence presented below may also indicate that the values and beliefs of mass publics do not seem to be an obstacle to the future democratization in the region.

Key words: South Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Democracy, Democratic Values, Politics, and Political Participation.

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Оңтүстік Кавказ халықтарының 1990-шы жылдардың ортасындағы демократиялық көңіл-күйлері

Қарапайым халық ұстанатын демократиялық құндылықтарға қатысты оң көзқарастар немесе қандай бір көзқарастардың мүлдем болмауы ұзақ жылдар бойы демократияландыру үрдіс келешегін түсіндіру талпынысында маңызды фактор болып саналып келді. Осы мақалада Дүниежүзілік құндылықтарды зерттеу («World Values Survey») жобасының үшінші толқыны (1995–1998 жылдар) негізінде Оңтүстік Кавказ (Әзірбайжан, Армения және Грузия) халықтарының 1990-шы жылдар ортасындағы демократиялық көзқарастарына салыстырмалы талдау берілген. Бұқаралық көңіл-күйді талдаудың теоретикалық негіздемесі, адамдардың қалай ойлайтыны және демократияны қалай қабылдайтыны өзгерістер мен реформалар жасау мүмкіндіктерін ұғынуда шешуші мағына болатынына жол беруге негізделген. Осында ұсынылған нәтижелер оң сипатты көрсетеді және барлық үш елдегі демократияға бағытталған көңіл-күй көзқарастардағы сәл ауытқулар болса да ортақ қалау болып табылатыны жалпы айқындалатынын болжайды. Төменде берілген эмпирикалық мәліметтер қалың жұрттың құндылықтары мен нанымдары, осы аймақты болашақта демократияландыру жолында кедергі болып табылмайтынын көрсетеді.

Түйін сөздер: Оңтүстік Кавказ, Әзірбайжан, Грузия, Армения, демократия, демократиялық құндылықтар, саясат және саяси өмірге қатысу.

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Демократические настроения населения Южного Кавказа в середине 1990-х годов

Позитивные взгляды на демократические ценности, которых придерживаются простые граждане, или вовсе отсутствие каких-либо взглядов долгое время считалось важным фактором в попытке объяснить перспективы процесса демократизации. На основании третьей волны опросов (1995–1998 годы), проведенных в рамках Всемирного исследования ценностей («World Values Survey»), в данной статье дается сравнительный анализ демократических взглядов населения Южного Кавказа (Азербайджан, Армения и Грузия) в середине 1990-х годов. Теоретическое обоснование анализа массовых настроений основано на базовом допущении того, что то, как люди думают и как они воспринимают демократию, имеет решающее значение в понимании возможностей для изменений и реформ. Результаты, представленные здесь, носят позитивный характер и предполагают, что демократические настроения, по всей видимости, являются общим желанием населения во всех трех странах с небольшими отклонениями во взглядах. Представленные ниже эмпирические данные могут также указывать на то, что ценности и убеждения широкой публики не являются препятствием для будущей демократизации региона.

Ключевые слова: Южный Кавказ, Азербайджан, Грузия, Армения, демократия, демократические ценности, политика и участие в политической жизни.

Introduction

The contemporary political culture of the people in the South Caucasus has largely been neglected by scholars, at least until recent times. Studies exploring public opinion and democratic orientations in the region were particularly rare for two main reasons. First, both the previous communist rule and the post-independence regimes made it difficult for researchers to collect individual level public opinion data in the South Caucasus. Second, politics was – and still is – elite-dominated in the region and public-say in government has been limited. However, as, after years of relative neglect, modernization theory, democratic transition, and religion (especially Islam) have started attracting the attention of scholars throughout the 1990s, some recent studies have been devoted to understanding peoples' values and cultural orientations (Collins, 2005; Grigore, 2014). Moreover, it is highly likely that more studies will make an attempt to analyze peoples' values since several 'revolutions' took place in countries like Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, showing that bottom-up changes are quite possible in the nations in 'transition'. Analyzing people's attitudes may in fact be helpful because it may improve our understanding of the level of democratic sentiments in a society (Inglehart, 1977). As Dalton and Shin (2003) have persuasively argued in their study of citizen orientations toward democracy in East Asia, a public commitment to democratic values and principles is the foundation

of the democratic process, and the extent of such orientations is essential for judging the potential for democratization. Therefore, the study may safely assume that even under the authoritarian context of the South Caucasus, what people think and how they view and understand democracy, politics and political participation matter. In addition, as Rose (2002) indicates,

Even if a country is ruled autocratically, those ruled may nevertheless hold democratic values. The fall of the Berlin Wall has shown that citizens of Central and Eastern Europe held values that were suppressed rather than expressed by communist rule. A standard way of ascertaining commitment to democratic values is to ask whether people think that democracy is better than any other form of government. (p. 107)

Thus, following Rose's (2002) path, this paper aims to understand «whether people think that democracy is better than any other form of government» in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. This study is based on the assumption that orientations of people are shaped by their historical experiences (Vachudova, 2005). A brief overview of their political history, as provided below, demonstrates that the countries under examination have both similar and different experiences. The most important similarity is that they all were under the Soviet rule for more than seven decades and proclaimed their independence, one after another, during the year of 1991. Similarly, all three shared common preconditions, including shared cultural

and historical background, as well as the common goal of joining the family of democratic states (Koryakov and Sisk, 2003). Once the Soviet system as a whole collapsed, the inevitable conclusion was the ideological victory of the Western camp and the triumph of the liberal democracy and free market model of development (Derghoukassian, 2006, p. 5). However, these countries also had different experiences under the Soviet regime and the transition that followed, with different trajectories of reform. To begin with, there are significant differences in their economic and cultural structures. Most importantly, the Azeri people, who are overwhelmingly Islamic, may be expected to display different cultural characteristics than the people of the other two countries do. Azerbaijan also stands apart economically as it has significant advantages over Georgia and Armenia, since Azerbaijan is blessed with oil and natural gas, which clearly makes the country attractive to international investment and thus foreign political influence.

Finally, the countries in question also face different political and security challenges, as discussed briefly in the following section. This was a region that probably had the most difficult post-Communist decade (Markozashvili, 2014). Azerbaijan has serious political conflicts with the neighboring Armenia. On the other hand, Armenia, in addition to political conflict with Azerbaijan, has almost a century-old historical dispute over the controversial territorial and genocide claims with the neighboring Turkey. Georgia is also not without serious political-security problems. In fact, it faces both domestic and foreign threats as the still unresolved conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the Russian traditional influence pose clear challenges to Georgia's territorial integrity and unity. In short, since the countries Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia are different in terms of their historical, cultural, and economic characteristics and relations, it is then possible to assume that their populates will also exhibit significant differences in their view of democracy and what the best form of governance is.

Thus, this paper is an attempt to understand the degree to which the people of the South Caucasus region display elements of democratic values in the mid-1990s. The elites are not the focus of this study. It instead analyzes what ordinary people in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan think about democracy and how they view it. However, it should be noted that the aim of the paper is not to provide precise policy prescriptions or statistically explain *why* people in these countries display democratic features that

they do, rather to present descriptively and examine *what* their democratic orientations are and make speculative arguments based on the assumption that democratic culture is the result of developments in history, politics and economics.

South Caucasian Nations: Background

The transition of the twenty-seven post-communist states into democracies has not been an easy process, so much so that some of these countries still cannot be termed democratic even in the most relaxed sense of the word. Freedom House ranked all three South Caucasian nations as «partly free» in its 1998 report where Armenia received 4 out of 7 (with 7 the lowest rating), Azerbaijan and Georgia were given 5.5 and 3.5 ratings respectively (Freedom House, 1998b). Economic liberalization and political reforms that aimed at establishing a new democratic system of governance have been partially successful for a variety of reasons. However, the socio-economic landscape of the South Caucasian region, representing three former Soviet Union countries, has also significantly changed over the past years of transition from a centrally-planned economic structure to a free market-oriented system. These countries, which gained independence together in 1991, have now been diversified in terms of their socio-economic and political development with varying national conditions, then and now, forming group of lower middle income countries in the region. The challenges of regional disintegration, difficult transitions to market-based economies and political regimes leading to swift polarization and the weakening of democratic processes remained to threaten the development landscape of these countries.

Armenia

The Armenian people were stateless for centuries under the Ottoman Empire and the Soviet rule, where they were politically passive and disengaged and «adapted to the prevailing political climate» (Dudwick, 1997, p. 72). A nationalist movement started in Armenia in the early 20th century but was oppressed by the Ottoman Turks, which would never be forgotten and be used by the elite as a political instrument to mobilize the Armenian people. In fact, it has become an important domestic and foreign policy goal for today's Armenia to achieve an international recognition of the 'Armenian genocide,' which is disputed by the Republic of Turkey yet still finds some significant international backing thanks in large part to the politically active and powerful Armenian diasporas living abroad. The eastern part

of Armenia which was ceded by the Ottomans to Russia, declared its independence on May 28, 1918, but was conquered by the Soviet Russia in 1920. In addition to the historical conflict with Turkey, territorial dispute which eventually result in a war with the neighboring Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh region, a largely Armenian populated area that lies within the territory of Azerbaijan, has significantly increased the sense of nationalism and politicized the people in Armenia. The nationalist groups in the country regularly mobilize against Azerbaijan and Turkey, and there has been strong nationalist sentiment in government ranks (Bremmer, 2006). Although it is no longer the basis of politics in Armenia, ethno-nationalist fervor characterized late-Soviet Armenia and the years following independence (Bremmer, 2006).

Nationalist sentiments in Armenia existed long before the emergence of political conflict with Azerbaijan. Especially between 1988 and 1990, the Armenians frequently participated to demonstrations in large number and demanded independence. Dudwick (1997) takes attention to the fact that Armenia became one of the first countries among the Soviet republics «whose population mobilized around a national and democratic agenda, the only republic to organize a referendum on independence according to Soviet law, and the only Transcaucasian republic continuously ruled since independence by a democratically elected president» (p. 69). They finally gained freedom after a referendum in 1991.

After the independence, the Armenian people faced severe economic realities as highly limited energy supplies, overall inefficiency and uncompetitive public industries and political conflicts with the neighboring countries brought about record levels of unemployment and decline in economy, which finally led large number of people with education or family connections abroad to emigrate. Politically, the existing patron-client relations create barriers for general public to participate in the process of governance, and the growing power of patrons at the expense of the general public increases «cynicism» among the Armenians. Political parties and leaders control all access channels to the government, and elections were regarded as a «competition between patron-client networks» (Dudwick, 1997, p. 91). In fact, in this environment, those who held the power suspended the largest opposition party, Armenian Revolutionary Federation (the ARF-Dashnak), and closed several opposition newspapers in 1994 (Dudwick, 1997, p. 91). Prior to 1995 parliamentary elections, eight other parties were banned, thereby ensuring the dominance of then-President Levon Ter

Petrosian's ruling Armenian National Movement (ANM)-led coalition. International monitors noted that democracy was seriously undermined by the 1995 parliamentary and 1996 presidential elections, which were fraught with irregularities (Freedom House, 1998a).

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan had a short-lived independent and democratic state experience with the declaration of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic that started in 1918, but this moment of democracy and a national awakening ended in 1920 when the Bolsheviks occupied the country and took control of the government. Although it lasted only two years, this multi-party system experience would later lay an important foundation for the re-establishment of the country in 1991.

The discovery of natural resources in the 19th century led to some level of Westernization, secularization and economic development of Azerbaijan's most important city, Baku, and its surroundings. In fact, the elite, who had emerged during this time of the first oil boom, established the Azerbaijani Republic and held the first democratic elections. However, during the Soviet occupation, this same elite group was completely destroyed. It should also be noted that Azerbaijan went through a more oppressive russification process because its people have an Islamic background. Russian colonization not only isolated the country from the rest of the Islamic world but also gradually marginalized the ulema of Azerbaijan (Cornell, 2006). However, its cultural difference and previous democratization experience created the basis for revitalization, as the cultural elite in the 1970s started searching the roots of the Azeri nation, and this period saw a revival of the Azeri history and culture. In the 1980s the Azeri people organized huge demonstrations, which were especially fueled by the territorial conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh region and the incapacity of the Soviet elite. In fact, as noted by Musabayev (2005),

From its outset, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh served as a key impulse to the awakening of national sentiment in Azerbaijan, stimulating ethnic mobilization and drawing wide sectors of the population into the movement for social and political reform. It spawned mass political opposition under the Soviet system, paving the way for the first democratic processes in Azerbaijani society. (p. 60)

Following its declaration of independence in 1991, Azerbaijan initiated a set of reforms aimed at establishing a democratic society and an economic system based on free market principles. During

the first years of independence Azerbaijan faced several complex problems that were related to the consolidation of civil society, a multiparty political system, human rights practices like freedom of speech and the functioning of a market economy. Although it made some accomplishments in all of these areas, it has to be recognized that the country has failed to carry out free and fair elections to the supreme executive and legislative state bodies back then (Koryakov and Sisk, 2003).

The first multi-party elections for the Supreme Soviet and presidential office held in 1990 and 1992 respectively. But both of the initial post-independence presidents, Ayaz Mutalibov and Abulfaz Elchibey, lost their power in the turmoil caused by civil strife and a series of defeats in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Waal, 2016). They were held responsible for the failure in the economy and also for the losses on the battlefield in the war with the Armenians, who, since then, have been occupying a significant portion of the Azeri territory. The majority-Armenian populated Nagorno-Karabakh region in the southwest of Azerbaijan officially declared independence in 1991. This *de facto* status has not been diplomatically recognized by any nation and is still considered a *de jure* part of Azerbaijan, being occupied by Armenian forces (United Nations Security Council, 1993).

In 1993, democratically elected president Elchibey was overthrown by a military coup led by Colonel Surat Huseynov, which resulted in the rise to power of the former KGB general and Soviet-era politburo member, Haydar Aliyev. During his presidency, thanks to the country's vast natural resources, Aliyev managed to reduce the country's unemployment, rein in criminal groups, and establish the fundamental institutions of independent statehood, and brought stability, peace and major foreign investment. Unlike Armenia and Georgia, Azerbaijan is blessed with natural resources. In terms of its economic outlook, «virtually all Azerbaijanis share the belief that foreign investment in oil will yield a financial bonanza and make everyone rich» (Alstadt, 1997, p. 139). At the same time, the country was infected by widespread corruption. Order and stability were imposed at the expense of political pluralism (Waal, 2016). According to the Freedom House, a western nongovernmental institution that quantitatively measures democracies, Azerbaijan was not considered a democracy throughout Aliyev's reign.

Georgia

Georgia, similar to Armenia and Azerbaijan, had also a brief independent government experience

in 1918 after the collapse of the Tsarist regime. Georgia's short period of independence ended in 1921 when the Red Army forcibly invaded the country and incorporated it into the Soviet socialist system. Georgia was part of this system until the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010). The Georgian nationalist movement as an opposition was visible during the Soviet rule from time to time with their street protests and demonstrations. Unsurprisingly, the transition period was controlled by this opposition group. In fact, the electoral rules were written by the opposition, and the first elections expectedly brought them to power. However, the opposition was fragmented soon and, because of the Moscow's influence and economic difficulties, a former communist came back to power in 1992. The political crisis in Georgia in the 1990s was the result of the disagreement between one group which placed territorial unity and integrity before democracy and another which believed that political unity and integrity should be obtained through democratic means. However, it was argued that the democratization process was initiated in Georgia more as a response to Gorbachev's perestroika than less because of any homegrown development (Nodia, 1995, p. 106). Also, the political competition between Eduard Shevardnadze and Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a radical ethno-nationalist ruler, further heightened the conflict between the two groups (Nodia, 1995). A violent coup in January 1992 toppled Gamsakhurdia and established a military council, which invited Shevardnadze to return to lead Georgia (Bremmer, 2006).

Like many post-communist countries, Georgia suffered from the economic crisis and civil unrest during the 1990s. According to Slider, Georgia, in the pursuit of independence from the Soviets, went through the most difficult transition period. It has experienced high levels of political instability and violence, ethnic conflict, and economic disruption. Although Georgia was one of the richest republics under the Soviet rule, it experienced severe economic decline after the end of the Soviet era as it suffered from a very high level of inflation, much higher than those observed in Azerbaijan and Armenia. The agriculture and industry outputs decreased. The civil war and military conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia aggravated the crisis (Slider, 1997). However, Slider (1997) also notes that elections that have been held since 1990 were freer and fairer as compared to those in its neighborhood. The most important characteristic of Georgia that puts it apart from both Armenia and Azerbaijan is the degree of

ethnic conflict that it had. As its autonomous regions Ossetia and Abkhazia actively sought separation in the 1990s, Georgia faced constant threat of breakdown.

General Assumptions and Assessment of Survey Data

A review of political, economic and historical developments of the South Caucasian states demonstrates that the countries in question have distinguishable differences as well as similarities. If democratic culture is defined as sum of values, norms and attitudes *that reflect historical, political and economic experiences, this paper then makes the claim that people in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia may exhibit different democratic orientations.* Thus, this paper assumes that the democratic orientations of the people in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia will have significant variations. However, the conclusions of this paper should be viewed cautiously. Perhaps most importantly, this paper has limitations in explaining the recent «democratic» developments in the region because peoples' orientations may change as they learn from their experiences. In fact, more than two decades have passed since the surveys for this paper were undertaken and this period is surely long enough to expect significant changes in the context of the South Caucasus. This paper should be viewed as a first step towards understanding the democratic values of the people of the region, and how the attitudes of people have changed since the mid-1990s may be recommended as the subject of a future research. Another point that needs to be acknowledged is that this paper limits its focus to the degree of differentiations of democratic attitudes in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The scope of this paper thus makes it difficult to make in-depth analyses for each country which also deserves greater attention in future research.

As mentioned earlier, primary data used in this paper is drawn from the third wave (1995-1998) of the World Values Survey (WVS) series (Inglehart et al., 2014) which were gathered by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan under the supervision of Ronald Inglehart, who also assembled and documented this three-wave dataset (Inglehart et al., 2000). Currently in its seventh wave, the survey is coordinated by the World Values Survey Association and undertaken since 1981. The WVS provides data on socio-cultural and political change based on national sample surveys, using a common questionnaire to understand how public attitudes

differ across nations regarding social, political and economic issues. The data were collected between the years 1995 and 1998 through face to face interviews, with a sampling universe consisting of all adult citizens, ages 18 and older. The number of respondents by country in the third of wave of the WVS was as following: two-thousand people were interviewed in Armenia, 2002 in Azerbaijan and 2008 in Georgia. The Armenian branch of the survey was undertaken by the Sociological Research Center at the Armenian Academy of Sciences in Yerevan and supervised by Gevork Pogosian and Hans-Dieter Klingemann from the Berlin Science Center for Social Research. The Azeri part of the survey was carried out under the supervision of Dr. Ali Aliev and Hans-Dieter Klingemann. The Georgian Institute of Public Opinion in Tbilisi carried out the Georgian branch of the survey, and it was supervised by Merab Pachulia (GIPO) and Hans-Dieter Klingemann. The Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan provides the data set used in this study in the SPSS form from its web-site at <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/>. WVS wave 3 data and documentation can also be found on the WVS web-site: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV3.jsp>. No statistical tests were conducted since the principal goal of the paper is to present 'what' people from the countries under examination think of democracy, democratic values and political participation, and to make speculations based on the obtained results and then provide questions for future research.

Viewing Democracy

Public support for democracy and democratic values is a complicated orientation to measure. In the terms of Dalton, understanding the meaning of democracy is especially uncertain in those nations where actual experience with democratic politics is limited or non-existent (Dalton and Shin, 2003). Bearing this in mind, multiple questions from the WVS will be analyzed to assess both orientations toward different regime types and the support of democratic sentiments. Table 1 and 2 below are designed to demonstrate how the people in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan viewed democracy in the mid-1990s. In Table 1, the acceptance of democratic norms («affective support») is weighed by a standard question that asks whether respondents think having a democratic system is a good idea or a bad idea. Table 2 shows the responses to a question which asks the citizens about the performance traits of democracy («evaluative support»), allowing them to «express doubts about democracy, without directly

rejecting democratic principles» (Dalton and Shin, 2003; Chunlong, 2004). Four choices were usually offered for each Likert-scale question.

It should be noted at the outset that it could be possible to collapse the four answer choices («very good», «fairly good», «fairly bad», and «very bad») into two simple categories (simply coding as «yes» and «no»), while treating DK (don't know) responses as «missing.» However, instead of doing this, the tables below present all answers without resorting to such simplification, since there is indeed a difference between the answers 'very good' and 'fairly good,' which shows the 'degree' to which people hold of the attitudes they do. In the meantime, while the tables below present the magnitudes of attitudes in such a detail, discussions that follow those tables will nevertheless do such condensation for the sake of simplicity.

Table 1 – Affective support of a democratic system (the WVS question no: V157)

	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Very Good	38.5%	25.8%	34%
Fairly Good	46.2%	50.2%	48.5%
Fairly Bad	6.6%	10.3%	1.2%
Very Bad	2.1%	3.1%	0.9%
NA	6.5%	10.5%	15.4%
(N)	2,008	2,000	2,002

Note: For the wording of each WVS question, see Inglehart, Ronald, et al.

When people were asked what they think about «having a democratic political system» as a way of governing the country, 84.7 percent of the people in Georgia and 82.5 percent of the people in Azerbaijan said it is a 'very good' or 'fairly good' idea. The percentage for Armenia was 76.0. The results show that the majorities in these nations were favorable toward democracy. On the other hand, 8.7 percent in Georgia and 13.6 percent in Armenia said it is a 'very bad' or 'fairly bad' idea. Interestingly, the same percentage for Azerbaijan was only 2.1 percent. Furthermore, as displayed above, a larger percentage of people in Azerbaijan said 'don't know.'

The relatively large number of DK and NA responses across several questions in this survey is somewhat surprising and needs to be factored in. Although «don't know» responses inform about a specific state of mind of the respondent, their

interpretation is a big challenge. My interpretation is more in line with those of Chunlong (2004) who explained DK answers in three different ways in the context of Chinese public opinion survey results. One possible interpretation of the DK responses is that some respondents were unable to answer the question because of the lack of knowledge. Others may have some knowledge about democracy and its performance, but no clear-cut idea about the meaning of support of democracy. The last explanation to this is that the DK response is not truly a DK. Under an authoritarian regime, outright support of democracy is still believed to involve political risk and therefore, these respondents may have withheld their true opinion through caution (Chunlong, 2004).

Table 2 – Evaluative support of a democratic system (V163)

	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Strongly Agree	25.2%	12.5%	19.4%
Agree	52.9%	48.8%	63.7%
Disagree	11.8%	19.5%	2.6%
Strongly Disagree	1.3%	2.9%	0.7%
DK	8.8%	16.4%	13.5%
(N)	2,008	2,000	2,002

Table 2 completes the results of Table 1 by providing information regarding how the people in the countries under scrutiny view democracy when compared to the 'alternative' forms of political systems. Accordingly, when the people were asked to state their opinions about whether democracy is better than any other forms of government even if democracy may have problems in governance, overall (combining 'strongly agree' and 'agree' answers) 83.1 percent of the people in Azerbaijan and 78.1 percent of the people in Georgia said democracy is better. The same percentage was clearly lower in Armenia: 61.3 percent. Also, overall 22.4 percent in Armenia and 13.1 percent in Georgia disagreed with the statement, while the same percentage for Azerbaijan was much lower: 3.3 percent. Although one should be cautious in interpreting these findings as the people surveyed may have a differing understanding of democracy comparing to the people in an established democracy, the survey results show that majorities of the public in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia were favorable toward democracy. Democratic aspirations appear to be a common desire in all three nations showing

high level of affective and evaluative support for democracy.

Understanding Democracy and Democratic Values

The previous tables show how the people in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan view democracy. In order to have a better idea of the democratic orientations of the general population, we should ask what people think as the best form of governance and what they understand from democracy; and, of course, we should examine why they do or do not support democracy. The following tables are designed for these purposes.

Table 3 – The idea of having a strong leader exercising power without control (V154)

	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Very Good	30.9%	17.6%	3.2%
Fairly Good	30.0%	31.0%	1.9%
Fairly Bad	25.2%	26.5%	50.1%
Very Bad	6.0%	15.8%	22.8%
NA	7.9%	9.2%	21.9%
(N)	2,008	2,000	2,002

The results presented in Table 3 are striking. One should pay particular attention to the difference between the Azerbaijanis, on the one hand, and the Georgians and the Armenians, on the other, in their desire of having a leader who should be ‘strong’ yet may undermine the very nature of the democratic process. Table 3 shows that, when people were asked how they find the idea to have a strong leader who doesn’t have to bother with parliament and elections, 60.9 percent in Georgia and 48.6 percent in Armenia said it is ‘very good’ or ‘fairly good’ idea. The rule by a strong leader is endorsed by only 5.1 percent in Azerbaijan – a lower proportion than in many established Western democracies. Approximately 73 percent in Azerbaijan, 42.3 percent in Armenia and 31.2 percent in Georgia did not support the idea. In both Georgia and Armenia, the public opinion is almost equally divided on the issue while the majority of the Azerbaijanis are against a ‘strongman rule’. It is likely that ethnic divisions and separatist movements in the South Ossetian and Abkhazian regions of Georgia and Armenia’s success in the Nagorno-Karabakh war may noticeably affect the people in a way to support the idea of having a strong leader.

Table 4 – Using violence to pursue political goals is never justified (V164)

	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Strongly Agree	42.6%	38.1%	46.9%
Agree	34.6%	35.8%	48.1%
Disagree	11.1%	16.0%	1.0%
Strongly Disagree	5.7%	3.8%	0.2%
NA	6.0%	6.2%	3.8%
(N)	2,008	2,000	2,002

Table 4 is designed to understand people’s views about using violence in a democratic system. When they were asked to tell their opinion on the statement «using violence to pursue political goals is never justified,» in line with the results displayed in the previous tables, a large portion of the people in Azerbaijan (95 percent) demonstrated a democratic attitude and agreed with the statement. On the other hand, those who agreed with the statement accounted 77.2 percent in Georgia and 73.9 percent in Armenia. Those who disagreed were 19.8 percent in Armenia and 16.8 percent in Georgia and only 1.2 percent in Azerbaijan. This finding, again, shows that people in Azerbaijan tend to exhibit more democratic orientations than those in Georgia and Armenia do, at least was that the case in the mid-1990s.

Table 5 – The idea of having the army rule (V156)

	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Very Good	3.9%	3.9%	0.6%
Fairly Good	6.8%	13.2%	1.3%
Fairly Bad	24.1%	34.7%	32.4%
Very Bad	59.5%	40.4%	52.1%
NA	5.8%	7.7%	13.5%
(N)	2,008	2,000	2,002

When people were asked what they think about having the army rule in their country, 17.1 percent of the people in Armenia and 10.7 percent in Georgia endorsed the idea. These figures are quite analogous to that in the Russian Federation (17.5 percent), though a larger minority than in Central and Eastern Europe (5 percent) (Rose, 2002, p. 107). However, the same percentage was only 1.9 percent for Azerbaijan. Though the army rule does not exist in the successor states of the Soviet Union including

the South Caucasian nations, the Azerbaijanis are less ready to favor the military rule which might be elucidated in respect to the military defeat of the Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh war that took place from February 1988 to May 1994. Also, Table 5 shows that 84.5 percent in Azerbaijan, 83.6 percent in Georgia, and 75.2 percent in Armenia found it 'fairly bad' or 'very bad' idea.

Table 6 and 7 show why people in the South Caucasus support (or do not support) democracy. Assuming that economic difficulties and maintaining order are the two most important concerns in the region, one table is devoted for each that allows eliciting potential criticisms of democracy.

Table 6 – Democracies aren't good at maintaining order (V162)

	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Strongly Agree	6.1%	9.2%	2.3%
Agree	34.9%	37.0%	15.0%
Disagree	40.6%	39.2%	46.2%
Strongly Disagree	8.9%	6.0%	17.9%
DK	9.6%	8.6%	18.6%
(N)	2,008	2,000	2,002

Public opinions were more divided on whether democratic political system does a poor job in maintaining order. Table 6 shows that 46.2 percent of the people in Armenia and 41.0 percent of the people in Georgia thought that democracies are not good at maintaining order in a country. On the other hand, only 17.3 percent of the people in Azerbaijan thought in the same way. Also, 64.1 percent of the people in Azerbaijan, 49.5 percent in Georgia, and 45.2 percent in Armenia disagreed with the statement that democracies aren't good at maintaining order.

Table 7 – In democracy, the economic system runs badly (V160)

	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Strongly Agree	5.2%	11.2%	1.1%
Agree	22.7%	27.0%	12.5%
Disagree	50.6%	44.8%	64.3%
Strongly Disagree	12.0%	7.6%	5.9%
DK	9.5%	9.4%	16.1%
(N)	2,008	2,000	2,002

Moreover, according to Table 7, 70.2 percent of the people in Azerbaijan, 62.6 percent in Georgia, and 52.4 percent in Armenia disagreed that democracies are not good at economic management. However, 38.2 percent of the people in Armenia and 27.9 percent in Georgia thought that a democratic system is incapable of managing the economy. Only 13.6 percent in Azerbaijan thought that democratic regime is not good at managing the economy. These responses are not surprising in view of the fact that the three nations' experience with democracy has been unfavorable because of the fact that, in the former Soviet Union, the emergence of democratic government was accompanied by economic collapse (Inglehart, 2003). The above tables may also clinch an argument that many people in the South Caucasus (especially in Armenia and Georgia), where the weakened states have often failed to provide their citizens with the preconditions and opportunities for a peaceful and prosperous life, «associate their grim living conditions not only with the policies of certain politicians and government officials but also with the general democratic principles that are formally declared by the state authorities» (Koryakov and Sisk, 2003, p. 36).

Interest in politics and political participation

People's interest in politics and political participation are also important in understanding the democratic orientations of the people in these countries since democracy's one of the most important component is to provide appropriate channels for the ordinary citizens to raise their voices and participate in politics. For that reason, Table 8, 9, and 10 are designed to demonstrate the degree to which the people in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia are interested in and participate into politics.

Table 8 – Interest in politics (V117)

	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Very interested	10.1%	14.0%	8.5%
Somewhat interested	39.4%	37.0%	33.3%
Not very interested	29.0%	34.9%	31.9%
Not at all interested	21.2%	12.6%	24.2%
DK	0.2%	1.6%	2.1%
(N)	2,008	2,000	2,002

Although the tables previously discussed show that the Azerbaijanis have more positive attitudes toward democracy, according to Table 8 the Azerbaijanis are also less interested in politics when compared to the people in Georgia and Armenia. The table demonstrates that 41.8 percent in Azerbaijan, 51 percent in Armenia and 49.5 percent in Georgia claimed an interest in politics. On the other hand, 56.1 percent in Azerbaijan, 50.2 percent in Georgia and 47.5 percent in Armenia said they were not interested in politics.

Table 9 and 10 show whether the people in the countries under examination took some sort of political action (signing petition or attending lawful demonstration) or they were willing to do so in the future. Thus, these tables want to understand to what extent the people in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan participate into politics.

Table 9 – Signing a petition (V118)

	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Have done	13.5%	17.3%	9.4%
Might do	14.2%	38.0%	14.9%
Would never do	69.5%	41.8%	69.4%
DK	2.7%	2.9%	6.2%
(N)	2,008	2,000	2,002

Table 10 – Attending lawful demonstrations (V120)

	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Have done	18.9%	27.5%	19.5%
Might do	14.5%	27.4%	21.1%
Would never do	64.7%	42.4%	54.6%
DK	1.8%	2.8%	4.8%
(N)	2,008	2,000	2,002

According to Table 9, 55.3 percent in Armenia, 27.7 percent in Georgia and only 24.3 percent in Azerbaijan stated that they signed or might sign a petition. Table 10 reveals similar results: When people were asked whether they attended lawful demonstrations or might attend in the future, 54.9 percent in Armenia claimed that they did or might do in the future. The same proportion was 33.4 in Georgia and 40.6 percent in Azerbaijan. Interestingly, affirming Table 8, both Table 9 and Table 10 exhibit that the people in Azerbaijan and, to a lesser degree, in Georgia, when compared to those in Armenia,

were less politically active despite their more positive attitudes toward democracy. One should take into account not only public disappointment in the political institutions and processes but also cultural influences on the way people think about democracy. Some cultures may have a tradition of citizen participation, whereas in others people may be more respectful to appointed or elected authorities (Koryakov and Sisk, 2003, p. 37). On the other hand, the people in Armenia, despite the fact that their attitudes towards democracy were more negatory, seemed to be more politically active than those in Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the WVS survey results presented here carry a positive claim and suggest that the majority of the public in all three nations surveyed have a favorable attitude towards democracy and democratic form of government. The large majorities of the public in Azerbaijan and Georgia support the Churchillian position that, for all its flaws, democracy is better than other forms of government. Meanwhile, the majority of the public in Armenia also endorse this position. This does not mean that there is no ‘democracy deficit’ (Grigore, 2014) or ‘democratic immaturity of the electorate’ (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2001) in the South Caucasus. What it means is that, although popular understanding of the meaning of democracy may vary across the region, democratic aspirations seem to be a shared desire in all of these nations. The evidence here may also imply that the mass political culture which favors democracy over authoritarian forms of government is important in providing a context for further democratization in the region. It is fair to say that the political culture does not seem to be an obstacle to democratization in the South Caucasus. Likewise, the results raise questions about an argument which blames the lack of democratic political culture for the democratic deficit in the South Caucasian nations as several analysts have previously claimed.

This paper was also designed to show how the peoples in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan were different from one another in their democratic orientations in the mid-1990s. Hence, the most important and very interesting finding of this study is that Azerbaijan was clearly apart in terms of its peoples’ more positive attitudes toward democracy. In other words, the people in Azerbaijan were more likely than those in Georgia and Armenia to prefer democracy and elections over the alternatives and

think that using violence in politics was not justified. The Azerbaijanis, who are religiously Islamic as mentioned earlier in this study, were also more likely to think that democracy doesn't necessarily mean bad economic management or disorder. However, what is more striking is that some scholars view democratic values as incompatible with the basic values of Islamic publics, arguing that religion would set major limits to further democratization (Huntington, 1993). Yet the findings of this study runs counter to this argument and may actually be in line with those of Rose, who showed that «religion and ethnicity make less difference to political values than do more 'modern' influences such as education and economic well-being» (Rose, 2002; Inglehart, 2003). As mentioned earlier in this study, although the people in Azerbaijan were not significantly better off economically than those in Georgia and Armenia at the time, they were nevertheless optimistic about their economic futures. In addition, Azerbaijan's military defeat against Armenia may be taken into consideration when thinking about why the Azeri people are less likely to support the army rule.

Yet, despite the positive attitudes displayed by the Azeri people, this paper also showed that the people in Azerbaijan were also the least politically active in comparison to those in Georgia and Armenia. They were less interested in politics and also less likely to participate into such political activities as signing petition or involving in lawful protests. In other words, the people in Azerbaijan

compared to those in Georgia and Armenia, perhaps wanted to stay away from politics, although they believed that democracy is the best form of government. Therefore, this study concludes that the Azerbaijanis passively supported democracy despite their more positive attitudes toward it, while the Georgians and the Armenians were more involved in politics despite their less positive view of democracy, at least from the perspective of the ordinary citizens that responded to the survey.

However, these conclusions should be taken cautiously and may even be viewed as a provocation for further discussion and research. Keeping this in mind, a future study may attempt to measure the democratic orientations of the people in these countries for a more recent time. The findings displayed in this paper are useful since they may serve as a comparative basis. Such a study will help us to understand the general trend in these countries. Thus, this study can be perceived as a first attempt toward understanding this trend. Secondly, this study may also enhance our understanding of the recent 'democratic' revolution attempts in the region if country-specific qualitative and quantitative studies attempt to probe the issues further. Finally, a future study may put the South Caucasus region into broader comparative perspective by comparing the nations in the region with the other Soviet successor states, the established Western democracies, and other regional contexts. This will help us to gain a better understanding of democratization process itself.

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