

# PERCEPTIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIC ACTIVISM IN AZERBAIJAN

AN ANALYSIS BY ZULFIYYA ABDURAHIMOVA-CARBERRY,  
IN COLLABORATION WITH RIWI



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2021, RIWI, a global trend tracking and prediction technology firm, conducted a web-based perceptions survey in Azerbaijan. In 18 days, the survey collected 1,575 completed responses. The survey asked various questions about human rights and civic engagement in Azerbaijan as well as two demographic questions: age and gender.

### Main findings

- **Post-war optimism**  
When asked whether the country is heading in the right or wrong direction, 79% of the respondents said the right direction, while only 21% believed the country was heading in the wrong direction.
- **Positive perception of human rights protections**  
Seventy-four percent of the respondents believed that there are laws that adequately protect human rights in Azerbaijan while 78% of respondents said that their human rights are protected.
- **The most important rights to the respondents**  
In the question “Which of the following human rights is important to you?”, the top three choices were “freedom of speech” (24%), “freedom of thought (religion)” (18%) and “fair trial” (15%).
- **The most unpopular human right to the respondents**  
Only 7% of the respondents chose “protest” as the most important right.
- **The rights of women, young people, and the LGBT+ community are violated most often**  
When asked “Which groups’ have their human rights violated the most?”, the highest-ranked groups were women (19%), young people (15%), and the LGBT (11%) community.
- **Overwhelming support for equal rights for women**  
Eighty percent of all participants (agree and strongly agree) believe that women and men should have equal rights in the workplace.
- **Favorable attitude towards the use of violence by Police**  
Most respondents agree it is acceptable for police/army officers to use force against suspected criminals (57%), terrorists (66%), protestors (46%), and prisoners of war (PoWs) (47%).
- **Mistrust towards conventional justice institutions**  
Only 19% of respondents trust lawyers and 16% trust the courts.
- **Access to alternative information**  
Fifty percent of respondents obtain their information from social media

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2002, Azerbaijan's democracy score has steadily deteriorated.<sup>1</sup> In 2020, *The Economist's* democracy rating ranked Azerbaijan 146<sup>th</sup> among 167 nations, just between the United Arab Emirates and Sudan.<sup>2</sup> *Freedom House* classified Azerbaijan as an authoritarian regime or not free,<sup>3</sup> and *The Economist* classified it as a dictatorship.<sup>4</sup> Irrespective of the indicators used to measure the regime's performance, Azerbaijan is unambiguously a consolidated authoritarian regime. The power is heavily centralized in the hands of President Ilham Aliyev and his close circle, while political rights and civil liberties are strictly limited.

Freedom of association is restricted through various means. Opposition politicians, bloggers, journalists, and activists are subject to arbitrary detention, violence, and intimidation. There are nearly no mechanisms for women and minority groups to organize and advocate for their respective interests. Beginning in Spring 2019, the government stopped permitting rallies in central Baku, making sanctioned protests nearly impossible. Any unsanctioned rally is subject to a violent crackdown by the police.<sup>5</sup>

Freedom of expression and access to alternative information is restricted mainly by monitoring citizens online, making internet access expensive, and blocking websites which the authorities consider damaging to their interests. Law enforcement bodies surveil private and public communication of politicians, foreign nationals, and opposition figures including journalists, activists, and bloggers. For instance, the pro-government Real TV played audio recordings of a private phone conversation between a US diplomat and an Azerbaijani activist, and a conversation in a restaurant between the same activist and a European Union official.<sup>6</sup>

The judiciary is corrupt and not independent, as countless court cases of activists, journalists, and opposition figures have shown. Legally, women and men enjoy the same rights,<sup>7</sup> however, domestic violence is still a prevalent problem with no adequate legal protection.<sup>8</sup> Much of the country has access to the internet (78.8%),<sup>9</sup> however, younger and wealthier people in cities are more likely to be internet users. Facebook and YouTube are popular platforms to express dissent and disseminate alternative information, although online dissent can lead to prosecution or harassment. The pressure authorities exerted to censure social media posts was a notable pattern in 2020.<sup>10</sup> Facebook users were reportedly asked to delete politically sensitive posts. For instance, Amina Mammadova, a reporter for online news website *Toplum TV*, was questioned about her Facebook post about the COVID-19 situation in the country and was instructed to delete the post by the authorities. When Shakir Mammadov, a member of the opposition Azerbaijan Democracy and Welfare Movement, refused to take down his Facebook post criticizing the government's response to the pandemic, he was detained for 15 days.

Against the background of all these developments, tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia reignited the Nagorno Karabakh conflict in July 2020. From September 27 to November 10, 2020, the authorities

1 "Nations in Transition 2011 Azerbaijan," 83.

2 "Democracy Index 2020 In Sickness and in Health?" 13.

3 "Azerbaijan: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report."

4 "Democracy Index 2020 In Sickness and in Health?" 32.

5 "Azerbaijan: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report."

6 *Ibid*

7 Except for some restrictions in the labor code.

8 "Azerbaijan: Freedom in the World 2020 Country Report."

9 <https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/az.htm> According to index mundi internet users are defined as "the total number of individuals within a country who can access the Internet at home, via any device type (computer or mobile) and connection". See: [https://www.indexmundi.com/azerbaijan/internet\\_users.html#:~:text=percent%20of%20population%3A%2079.8%25%20\(computer%20or%20mobile\)%20and%20connection.](https://www.indexmundi.com/azerbaijan/internet_users.html#:~:text=percent%20of%20population%3A%2079.8%25%20(computer%20or%20mobile)%20and%20connection.)

10 "Azerbaijan: Freedom on the Net 2020 Country Report."

## 1. INTRODUCTION

extensively restricted internet access using national security arguments as a justification. Despite the restriction, there was a revival of civic engagement to support families of soldiers, citizens living close to the war zone, and soldiers on the front. The support ranged from providing these families with groceries and the most basic of household needs to giving soldiers clothing, blankets, and potable provisions. Similarly, civil society experienced a slight resurgence in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Activists, some public figures, businesses, and ordinary citizens helped families suffering economic hardships caused by the pandemic. Attention to needy families visibly increased, encompassing children lacking internet access and/or electronic devices for school, elderly people without family members to support them, and those with diverse illnesses, especially cancer patients needing money for treatment, or a doctor to treat them free of charge.

In the context of the war and the restricted political environment, this survey is an attempt to learn how people perceive human rights and civic engagement under such circumstances. Specifically, what people perceive as human rights and what is the most important right to them, whether they think there is a discrepancy between the existence of laws protecting human rights and the employment of such laws in practice. Furthermore, how important is civic engagement for the populace, specifically which domains of civic activity are more compelling to them?

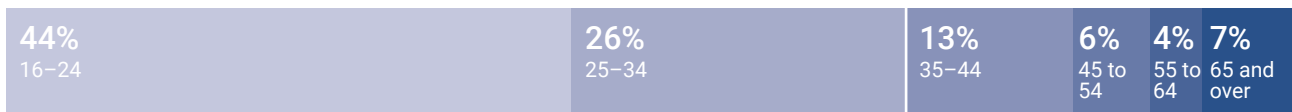
2. METHODOLOGY & LIMITATIONS

## 2. METHODOLOGY & LIMITATIONS

In January 2021, RIWI, a global trend tracking, and prediction technology firm, conducted an online-based perceptions survey in Azerbaijan. Over the course of 18 days, the survey collected 1,575 completed responses. Participation in the survey was voluntary and not tied to any type of incentive. RIWI’s patented technology guarantees full anonymity to the respondent with no personally identifying information ever being collected or stored. The survey asked various questions about human rights and civic engagement in Azerbaijan as well as two demographic questions: age and gender, to which the findings were weighted to. In future surveys on the subject, further demographic questions, such as location and education questions, will be added to enhance the analysis.

Respondents could choose to answer the survey in Azerbaijani or Russian. The questionnaire consisted exclusively of multiple-choice questions. When looking at the unweighted data, 70% of the respondents are 16-34. When weighted to the national census this age group accounts for 39%. Since this survey was conducted online, it is natural and expected that there is a higher proportion of people who make up the younger age group categories when compared to the weighted data. Additionally, RIWI applies a greater weight to the older age groups to account for their low sample. When looking at the unweighted data, 64% of the respondents are male, and 36% are female. When looking at the weighted data, male respondents are 49%, and female respondents are 51%. Eighty-two percent of the respondents completed the survey in Azerbaijani and 18% in Russian.

What is your age? (unweighted data)



70% of the respondents are 16-34

What is your gender? (unweighted data)



The questions did not inquire about any private details like religion, ethnicity, economic, or marital status. The percentiles used in the report reflect mostly weighted data and, in some cases, unweighted. Unless otherwise noted, all data used in this report is weighted.

## 3. PERCEPTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS &amp; CIVIC ACTIVISM IN THE POST-WAR CONTEXT

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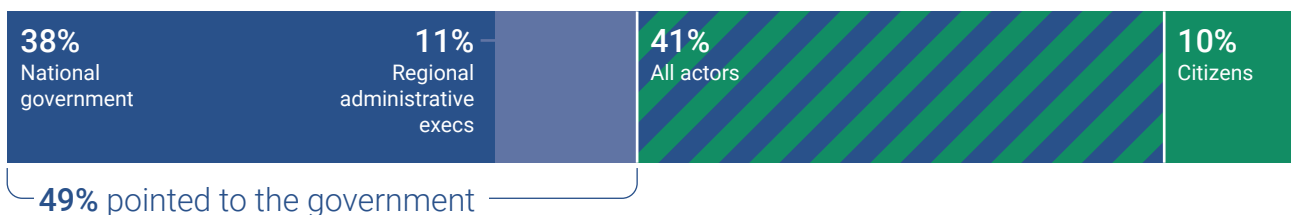
One of the main findings of the survey is the post-war optimism in Azerbaijan. When asked whether the country is heading in the right or wrong direction 79% of the respondents said the right direction, while only 21% chose the wrong direction.<sup>11</sup>

In general, would you say that our country is heading in the right direction or wrong direction?



Another question captures the post-war sentiment as to what the populace expects from the government and the fellow citizens. When asked "Who should be responsible for helping the families of those killed in action and veterans?",<sup>12</sup> 49% of the respondents pointed to the government (national government and the regional administrative executives), while 10% of the respondents indicated that citizens should be solely responsible, and 41% indicated that all these actors should share responsibility.

Who should be responsible for helping the families of those killed in action and veterans?



### Positive perception of human rights protections

The survey revealed that the perception of human rights protections is unexpectedly positive among respondents. Seventy-four percent of the respondents believed that there are laws that adequately protect human rights while 78% of respondents said that their human rights are protected.<sup>13</sup> Given the development of the human rights situation in Azerbaijan over the years and the current observable challenges, it is not easy to interpret where this optimism stems from.

11 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

"In general, would you say that our country is heading in the right direction or wrong direction?" n= 15350

12 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

"Who should be responsible for helping the families of those killed in action and veterans?" n= 1561

13 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

"Do you agree or disagree: My human rights are protected in Azerbaijan." n= 9280

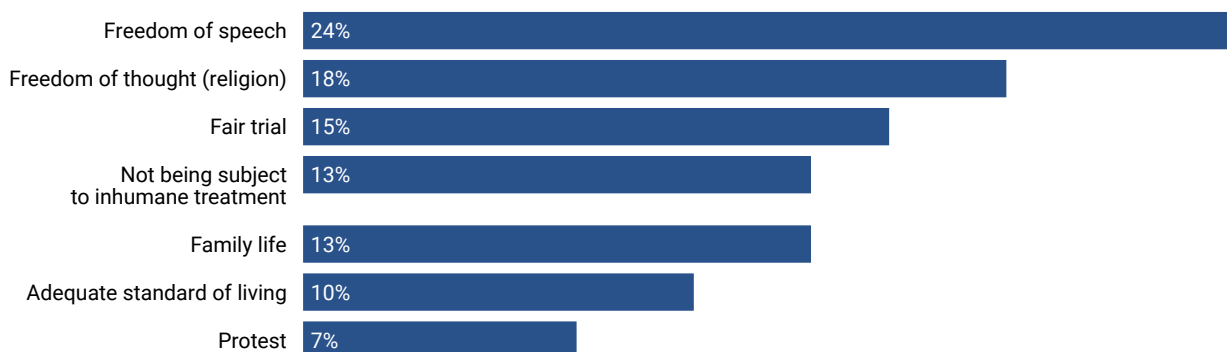


### 3. PERCEPTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS & CIVIC ACTIVISM IN THE POST-WAR CONTEXT

#### Respondents' popular choices: "freedom of speech", "freedom of thought" and "fair trial"

In the question "Which of the following human rights is important to you?",<sup>14</sup> the top three choices were "freedom of speech" (24%), "freedom of thought (religion)" (18%) and "fair trial" (15%).<sup>15</sup>

Which of the following human rights, is most important to you?



#### "Protest" – unpopular choice as a human right

While these choices are not surprising as they reflect important dimensions of human rights, the fact that only 7% of the respondents chose "protest" as the most important right stands in stark contrast to the answer option "freedom of speech". One way of interpreting such weak inclination for protest is that people prefer to have the freedom to express their discontent, but it is not important to them to protest and prefer other avenues of expressing their opinion. Another way of understanding the gap between these two choices (freedom of speech and protest) would be that since protests, be it political or apolitical, usually are broken up or cracked down on by the police, it is not an attractive option for people as a human right.

#### Soviet legacy on the respondents' preferences

A noteworthy demographic feature in the responses to this question is that of all age groups, those 65+ were more likely to select "protest" than those younger, however, it remains the 4<sup>th</sup> least popular choice amongst that age group.<sup>16</sup> One plausible way to read this outcome would be the impact of the Soviet legacy on this age group. Those who are currently 65+ were in their 30s during the *perestroika* and *glasnost*, the period when nationalities across the Soviet Union started to express their discontent publicly and the USSR began to crumble. This is the generation who organized the masses first in secret meetings and then publicly for large protests starting November 1988, ultimately leading to the transition of power from the Communists to the pro-democracy forces, namely the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF).<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the survey, several questions corroborate the results of other questions. For instance, when asked "Which of the suggested groups suffer the most human rights violations",<sup>18</sup> 26% of participants indicated that none of the suggested groups' rights is violated. The fact that about ¼ of all respondents

14 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

"Which of the following human rights is important to you?" n= 7567

15 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

"Which of the following human rights is important to you?" for answers "freedom of speech", "freedom of thought (religion)", and "fair trial." n= 6792

16 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

"Which of the following human rights is important to you?" n= 559 (age 65+)

17 For details in this period see: Altstadt, *Frustrated Democracy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*, 6–67.

18 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

"Which of the suggested groups suffer the most human rights violations?" n= 5997

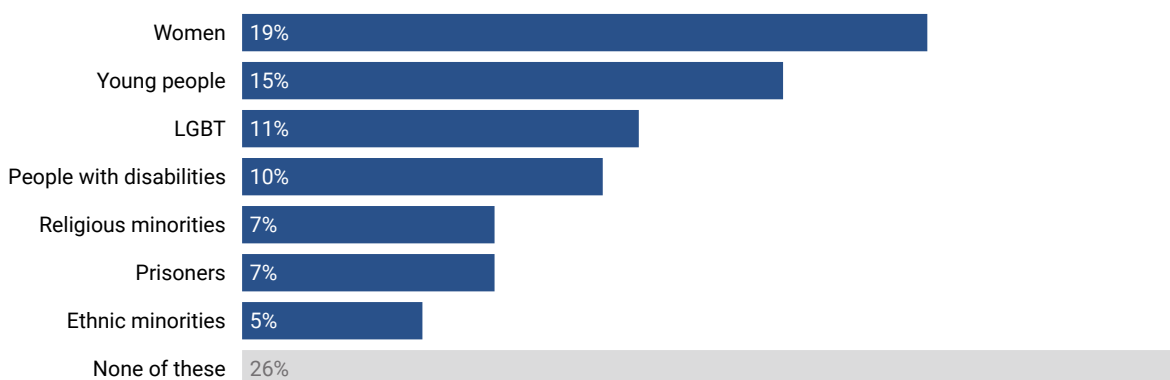
3. PERCEPTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS & CIVIC ACTIVISM IN THE POST-WAR CONTEXT

believe there are no human rights violations, confirms the positive sentiment exhibited in questions “Do you agree or disagree: There are laws that adequately protect the human rights of people in Azerbaijan” and “Do you agree or disagree: My human rights are protected in Azerbaijan.”

**The rights of women, young people, and the LGBT community are violated most often.**

When asked “Which of the suggested groups suffer the most human rights violations”, the highest-ranked groups were women (19%), young people (15%), and the LGBT (11%) community.<sup>19</sup> Sixty-five percent of the respondents who chose women as the group to suffer the most human rights violations were women. Also, 61% of the respondents who chose prisoners and 59% who chose young people were male.

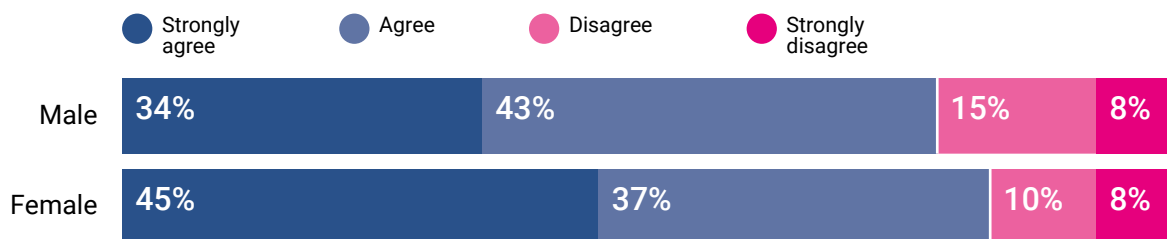
Which of the following groups suffer the most human rights violations in Azerbaijan?



**Overwhelming support for equal rights for women**

The survey asked respondents “Do you agree or disagree: Women and men should have equal rights in the workplace.”<sup>20</sup> Eighty percent of all participants (agree and strongly agree) believe that women and men should have equal rights in the workplace. Twenty-three percent of men disagree (strongly disagree and disagree) compared to 18% of women.<sup>21</sup>

Do you agree or disagree: Women and men should have equal rights in the workplace



19 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

“Which of the suggested groups suffer the most human rights violations?” n= 5997

20 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

“Do you agree or disagree: Women and men should have equal rights in the workplace.” n= 1619

21 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

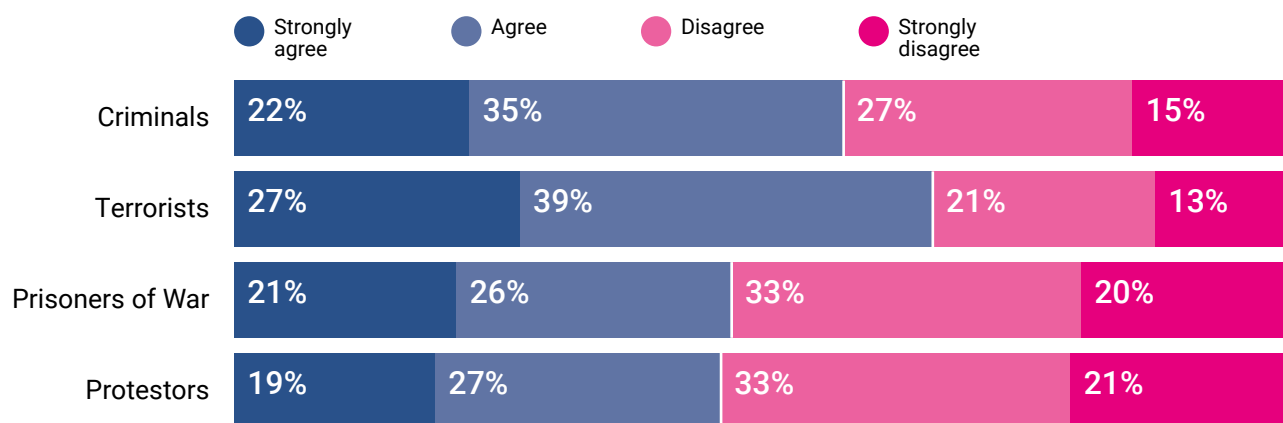
“Do you agree or disagree: Women and men should have equal rights in the workplace.” n=789 (men), n=830 (women)

3. PERCEPTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS & CIVIC ACTIVISM IN THE POST-WAR CONTEXT

**Awareness of Human Rights: Attitude towards the use of violence by Police: criminals, terrorists, protestors, and PoWs**

The majority of respondents believe it is acceptable for police to use force against suspected criminals (57%) and terrorists (66%).<sup>22</sup> Conversely, when the same question was asked regarding the use of force toward prisoners of war (PoWs), the level of support for the use of force dropped considerably (47%).<sup>23</sup>

It is acceptable for Police (or Army Officer) to use force / violence on...



The responses to the question “What is the most important human right to you?” substantiate the results of the question on whether it is acceptable for police to use force/violence on protestors. Forty-six percent of the respondents expressed their agreement (agree and strongly agree) that it is acceptable for police to use violence/force on protestors.<sup>24</sup> Such attitudes toward protestors explain why only 7% of all respondents selected “protest” as the most important human right to them in the question “Which of the following human rights is most important to you?”

Especially surprising here is the result of the question relating to PoWs (47% agree or strongly agree). It is important to note that in the broader context this percentile is relatively low. There are two reasons for this conclusion. First, given the recency of the war and the salience of the recency bias, only 47% of respondents support the use of violence toward PoWs is less than expected, especially if one considers the heated rhetoric on both sides of the conflict. Second, a comparison of the results of the question on PoWs (47%) with that of the questions on using force against suspected criminals (57%) and terrorists (66%) shows that the level of agreement among the respondents on the use of violence toward PoWs is significantly lower than the two other groups.

22 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 – February 13, 2021. “Do you agree or disagree: It is acceptable for Police to use force/violence on suspected criminals.” n= 2586, and “Do you agree or disagree: It is acceptable for Police to use force/violence on suspected terrorist to gain information.” n= 2495

23 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021. “Do you agree or disagree: It is acceptable for Police or Army Officers to use force/violence on prisoners of war.” n= 2634

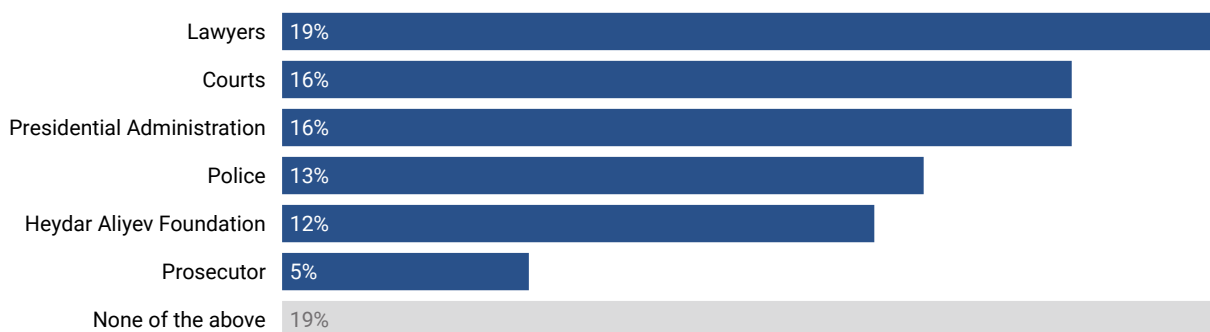
24 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021. “Do you agree or disagree: It is acceptable for Police to use force/violence on protestors.” n= 2674

3. PERCEPTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS & CIVIC ACTIVISM IN THE POST-WAR CONTEXT

**Mistrust towards conventional justice institutions**

The survey asked people who they would trust most to defend their rights, which received quite a split opinion.<sup>25</sup> Two nuances of this result are worth reviewing. First, the share of those who would trust the adequate or legally assigned institutions (lawyers and courts) is extremely low. Nineteen percent chose “none of the above”, while only 19% of respondents demonstrate that they would trust lawyers and 16% would trust the courts. This unambiguously exhibits that people do not trust the justice system. The second aspect of the finding suggests the existence of an “alternative justice service” or “parallel justice system.” Sixteen percent of respondents indicated that they would trust the Presidential Administration, 13% the police, and another 12% Heydar Aliyev Foundation.

Who would you trust most to defend your rights if they were violated?



Although this specific finding needs careful research to be able to conclude as to why this is the case, one could put two provisional propositions forward. One, the existence of government agencies or institutions to respond to citizens’ complaints in authoritarian regimes is not a new phenomenon. Authoritarian regimes often channel public discontent by responding to their complaints through government agencies or institutions.<sup>26</sup> Another assumption is, regarding the emphasis of the police, that the police are the easiest and fastest avenue for people to solve their problems as they can potentially bribe the police and solve their problems to circumvent taking the issue to the court.

The survey measured to what extent people are aware of their rights when they encounter law enforcement. We asked participants two questions relating to the hypothetical circumstance of being arrested as a suspect of a crime. The first question asked respondents if they must answer all questions immediately.<sup>27</sup> The second asked if respondents believe they have a right to a lawyer provided to them by the state.<sup>28</sup> To both questions most respondents said they do not know by 38% and 41%, respectively.

25 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

“Who would you trust most to defend your rights if they were violated?” n= 2713

26 Distelhorst and Hou, “Constituency Service under Nondemocratic Rule”; Chen, Pan, and Xu, “Sources of Authoritarian Responsiveness.”

27 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

“Imagine you were arrested as a suspect of a crime. Which of the following statements is true?” n= 1654

28 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

“Imagine you were arrested as a suspect of a crime. Which of the following statements is true?” n= 1668

### 3. PERCEPTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS & CIVIC ACTIVISM IN THE POST-WAR CONTEXT

#### Access to Alternative Information

The survey asked people what their main source of information is.<sup>29</sup> The key takeaway from this question's outcome is that social media is the primary source of information in Azerbaijan. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated that they obtain their information from social media while only 4% referred to newspapers and radio. Only a slim proportion of the survey participants (10%) watch the AzTV, a state-owned TV station/broadcaster. More traditional media, such as radio and AzTV are the most popular news source for the age group 65+, while social media is most popular among those aged 25-34.

Which of the following is your main sources of information?



The demographics of this question's outcome are particularly surprising. The most popular news source for all age groups is social media.<sup>30</sup> Of all age groups, AzTV is most popular among the age group 65+. Twenty-one percent of this age group chose AzTV as their main source of information. Social media is more popular among women than men. Of all male respondents, 45% obtain their news from social media while this number for female respondents is 53%.<sup>31</sup> The popularity of social media explains the anxiety of some politicians regarding the use of social media platforms in Azerbaijan. There have been several heated debates and attempts to control the usage of social media, especially Facebook.<sup>32</sup>

#### Freedom of Expression and Thought

The questionnaire also sought to gauge which topics the respondents would "most likely not discuss on social media platforms."<sup>33</sup> Decisions of the President (24%), the arbitrariness of authorities (19%), and disinformation in media (16%) are the three topics respondents are least likely to discuss on social media.<sup>34</sup>

Sixty-one percent of respondents feel free to join any religious, social, or political groups without fear of reprisal.<sup>35</sup> This result is strikingly similar to the outcomes of the question "Do you agree or disagree: There

29 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021. "Which of the following is your main source of information?" n= 1520

30 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021. "Which of the following is your main source of information?" n= 1575

31 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021. "Which of the following is your main source of information?" n= 736 (men), n= 784 (women).

32 See for example: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/azerbaijan-government-worried-facebook-activism>; or a recent speech by an Azerbaijani MP in Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDcf-UNZCW4>

33 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021. "Which of the following topics would you be most concerned to talk about on your social media?" n= 4664

34 Answer option: "arbitrariness of authorities", "disinformation in media", "court decisions about public figures", "decisions of ministers", "decisions of parliamentarians", "decisions of the president", "none of the above".

35 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021. "True or False: I am free to join any religious, social, or political groups without fear of reprisal." n= 2597

### 3. PERCEPTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS & CIVIC ACTIVISM IN THE POST-WAR CONTEXT

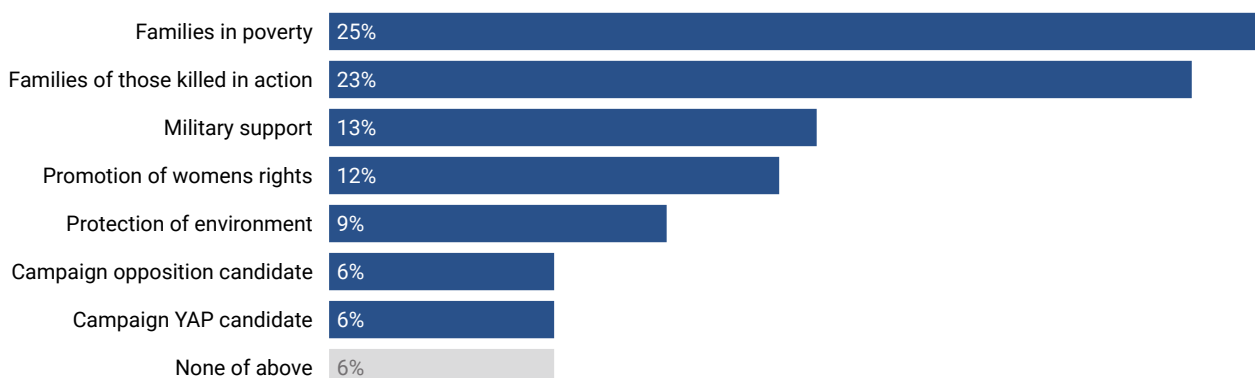
are laws that adequately protect the human rights of people in Azerbaijan” and “Do you agree or disagree: My human rights are protected in Azerbaijan.” The optimistic outcome in all these three questions can be viewed as part of the positive assessment of the overall situation in Azerbaijan at the start of the survey in the question “In general, would you say that our country is heading in the right direction or wrong direction?” Given the economic situation, the actual limits of political and civil rights in general, COVID-19 related restrictions in all spheres of life, and hardships caused by it, it is difficult to explain the source of this optimism. Thus, further studies of public opinion in the country are important to fully understand this positive sentiment.

The survey asked the respondents whether those who protest war should be prosecuted.<sup>36</sup> Fifty-five percent of the respondents believe that those who protest the war (between Armenia and Azerbaijan) should be prosecuted.<sup>37</sup> The outcome is striking and it corroborates what we have seen so far regarding protests: protesting is undesirable and most people agree that police may use force against protestors and that unlawful measures can be taken against them.

#### Civic activism

Civic activism experienced a surge during and following Nagorno Karabakh War.<sup>38</sup> When asked “Which of the following initiatives are you most likely to support?”,<sup>39</sup> most of the participants responded, “families in poverty” (25%), “families of those killed in action” (23%) while the third-highest share of the respondents chose “military support” (13%). One aspect that should be highlighted here is that families in poverty are also often families who lost the breadwinner of the family in the war or are veterans’ families in which the veteran is unable to work. Finally, and most notably, only 6% of the respondents chose the answer option that they would support a political campaign for the opposition or the YAP (ruling party) candidate. This significantly low percentile indicates mistrust towards the electoral system.

Which of the following initiatives are you most likely to support?<sup>40</sup>



36 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

*“Do you agree or disagree: Those who protest against war should be prosecuted.”* n= 3813

37 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

*“Do you agree or disagree: Those who protest against war should be prosecuted.”* n= 3402

38 From September 27 to November 10, 2020.

39 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

*“Which of the following initiatives are you most likely to support?”* n= 2263

40 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021.

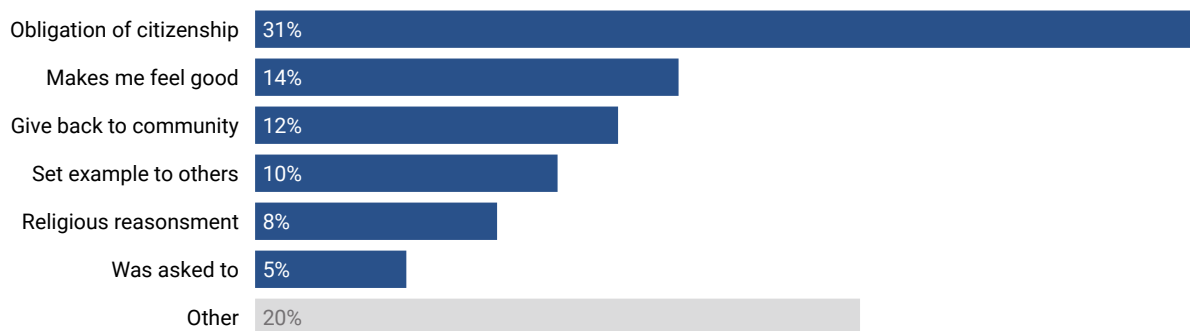
*“Which of the following initiatives are you most likely to support?”* n= 2263

### 3. PERCEPTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS & CIVIC ACTIVISM IN THE POST-WAR CONTEXT

A key demographic feature in this question is that only 12% of all respondents would support an initiative to promote women's rights while the figure rises to 17% among female respondents and lowers to 8% among males.<sup>41</sup>

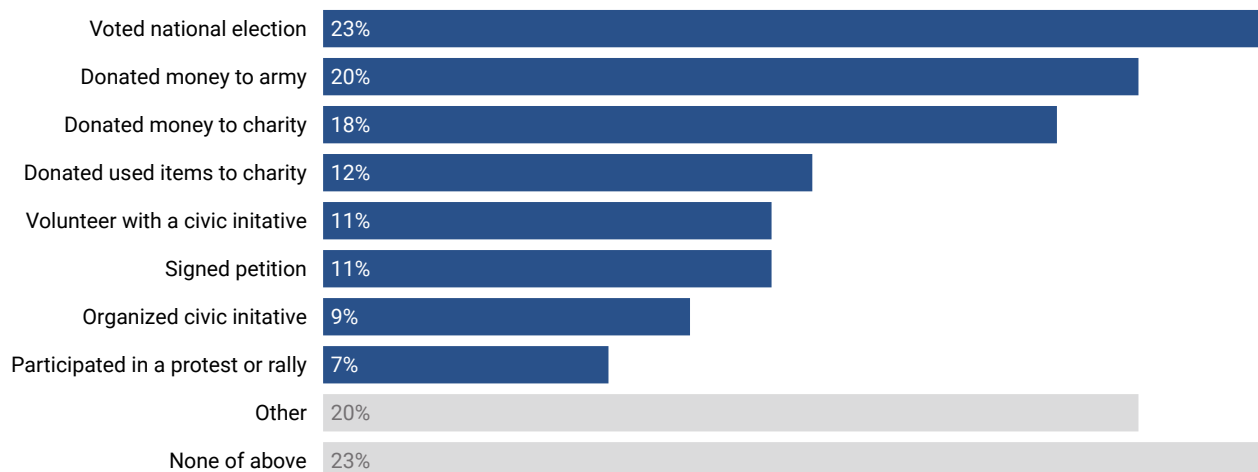
The outcome of the question of why people want to participate in civic engagements corroborates the hypothesis that civic engagement is reinvigorated in the context of the war. Thirty-one percent of the respondents, the highest share, demonstrated that they participate in civic engagements because it is an obligation of citizenship. Citizenship should be better understood in the cultural and historical context. In Azerbaijani, the word "citizenship" - "vətəndaşlıq" stems from the word "homeland", in Azerbaijani "vətən". Accordingly, the obligation of citizenship should be understood as the obligation of protecting the homeland on the one hand and the moral obligation towards those who protected the homeland on the other.

Why do you participate in these civic engagements?



The salience of the protection of the motherland is also reflected in the responses to the question asking which forms of civic engagement they were involved in within the last year. Twenty percent of the respondents indicated that they donated money to the army last year.<sup>42</sup>

Which of the following have you done at least once in the previous year?



41 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021. "Which of the following initiatives are you most likely to support?" n= 1142 (women), n= 1120 (men).

42 RIWI, Human Rights and Civic Activism in Azerbaijan Survey. January 27 - February 13, 2021. "Which of the following have you done at least once in the previous year?" n= 2061

## CONCLUSION

## CONCLUSION

The results of the survey offer some suggestions for practice and theory. To practitioners, mainly civil society actors, the findings suggest which areas of society they should focus on in the future. To scholars, the survey results in open avenues for unexplored topics in the case of Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the most important focus in the future should be the observation of the development of civil society. The emergence of a re-energized civil society might become useful to the government. The civic initiatives that focus on poverty relief and support for veterans and veterans' families relieve the state of pressure to provide for those in need.

Civil society actors could work on the following areas by mainly focusing on educational campaigns:

- The survey found that about 1/3 of the respondents were not aware of their rights regarding what should they do when encountered law enforcement. Specifically, when asked whether in case they were arrested they have a right to a state-paid lawyer, 40% of respondents said they do not know. Similarly, when asked whether in such case they have the right to not talk, 35% indicated they do not know.
- Likewise, the fact that most of the respondents favored the use of violence/force by police towards suspected criminals, protestors, and terrorists is an indication that there is a need for civic education about citizen's legal rights.
- Another field where there is a great need for work is women's rights, especially in the context of salient domestic violence. When asked which of the suggested groups suffer most human rights violations, "women" was the highest named group among the respondents. Because it is a culturally sensitive area, any foreign actor should work exclusively with and/or through local initiatives or organizations.

To best attract and communicate with constituents, the survey offered the following insights:

- Organizations may benefit from understanding the motivations behind civic engagement in Azerbaijan. Over a third of respondents reported an altruistic motivation for participating in civic engagements, with 14% indicating that participating in civic engagements made them feel good, 12% indicating they participate to give back to their community, and 10% participate to set an example for others. Civic organizations could appeal to these motivations in their outreach to recruit supports and volunteers.
- The popularity of social media is also useful for civil society to utilize, as social media is by far the most popular source of information for the populace, especially with younger age groups. Communication and outreach should be targeted in social media channels.

The survey also identified some areas for academic research.

- The findings suggest that there is an alternative justice system one might call a "parallel justice system" and/or "constituency service" with distinctive features. Sixteen percent of respondents indicated that they would trust the Presidential Administration, 13% mentioned police, and another 12% the Heydar Aliyev Foundation. To understand why these institutions serve as an alternative mitigator, how they operate, and why they differ from those of the conventional channels used by other authoritarian countries like China, one needs to conduct further in-depth research.
- Another research topic of interest is to look at the degree to which active civic engagement helps those in need given the post-war context and its impact on Azerbaijan's welfare system. Will the state collaborate with civil society to help families in need? If so, under what conditions?
- Finally, and most importantly, to what extent will this re-energized civil society have a spill-over effect? Will civil society be motivated to get involved in more areas beyond just supporting the families in need?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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