

POLITICAL CULTURE AND PROTEST POTENTIAL IN GORIS COMMUNITY

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Abstract: During the 44-day Karabakh war of 2022, Artsakh (Karabakh) and Armenia suffered serious territorial and human losses, which caused severe negative consequences. The war radically changed public sentiments in Armenia. Besides, after the war, the prices of essential goods in Armenia started to increase rapidly, gradually worsening the social condition of broad population segments. The negative consequences of the war are especially severe in the Syunik region, borders with Azerbaijan and has strategic importance for the national security of Armenia, particularly in the border community of Goris, which is the last town on the only communication road between Armenia and Artsakh. These two influential factors might initiate public protests in Goris – an area of exceptional importance for the national Security of Armenia, worsening social cohesion and destroying the social order. The article represents the evaluation of multidimensional protest potential in Goris in the context of the political culture of the community population and the situation after the war. The political culture of the Goris community is identified in the frame of the theory of S.Almond and S.Verba. The analysis is carried out on the basis of sociological survey data collected in the Goris community in April 2022. The dimensions of the protest potential include lack of loyalty to the authorities, socio-economic conditions of the population, the fact of the 44-day war, the course of the war and its consequences, and future relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan. The best-allied countries of Armenia in the Artsakh matter were revealed in population attitudes. The perception of public protest probability in Goris is estimated. A mathematical model is built to explain the interactions between protest potential and political culture components and their multidimensional impact on loyalty to the authorities.

Key words: 44-day Karabakh war, protest potential, political culture, Goris community, mathematical model.

ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆ ՄՇԱԿՈՒՅԹԸ ԵՎ ԲՈՂՈՔԻ ՆԵՐՈՒԺԸ ԳՈՐԻՍՈՒՄ

Սամվել Մանուկյան

Սոցիոլոգիական գիտությունների թեկնածու, ՀՀ վարչապետի աշխատակազմի «Հանրային կապերի և տեղեկատվության կենտրոն» ՊՈԱԿ-ի վերլուծաբան

Սոնա Բաբախանյան

«Գործընկերություն և ուսուցում» ՀԿ ծրագրերի համակարգող

Ամփոփում. 2022 թվականի 44-օրյա պատերազմում Արցախի և Հայաստանի լուրջ տարածքային և մարդկային զգալի կորուստները հանգեցրին խիստ բացասական հետևանքների: Պատերազմից հետո Հայաստանում հասարակական տրամադրությունները արմատապես փոխվեցին, նաև սրնթաց աճեցին առաջին անհրաժեշտության ապրանքների գները, ինչը էլ ավելի վատթարացրեց բնակչությանը ընդհանուր սոցիալական վիճակը: Պատերազմի բացասական հետևանքները հատկապես լուրջ էին Սյունիքի մարզում, որը սահմանակից է Ադրբեջանին և ռազմավարական նշանակություն ունի Հայաստանի ազգային անվտանգության համար, և մասնավորապես՝ սահմանամերձ Գորիսում, որը Հայաստանի և Արցախի հաղորդակցության միակ ճանապարհի վերջին քաղաքն է: Ռազմական կորուստները և բնակչության սոցիալ-տնտեսական վիճակի վատթարացումը հզոր գործոններ են, որոնք ի վիճակի են Գորիսում առաջացնել հասարակական բողոքի ցույցեր: Հողվածում ներկայացված է Գորիսում բողոքի ներուժի բազմաչափ գնահատականը բնակչության քաղաքական մշակույթի և հետպատերազմյան իրավիճակի համատեքստում: Գորիսի բնակչության քաղաքական մշակույթը բնութագրվել է Գ. Ալմոնդի և Ս. Վերբայի տեսության շրջանակներում: Վերլուծությունն իրականացվել է 2022 թվականի ապրիլին Գորիս համայնքում անցկացված սոցիոլոգիական հարցման տվյալների հիման վրա: Բողոքի ներուժը դիտարկվել է մի քանի չափողականություններում՝ ներառյալ իշխանությունների նկատմամբ չեզոքությունը, բնակչության սոցիալ-տնտեսական պայմանները, 44-օրյա պատերազմի ազդեցությունը, ինչպես նաև Ադրբեջանի և Թուրքիայի հետ ապագա հարաբերությունների մասին պաշտոնական մոտեցումների հանդեպ վերաբերմունքը: Բացահայտվել են հասարակական կարծիքում Հայաստանի լավագույն դաշնակիցները: Գնահատվել է բողոքի ներուժը զանգվածային գործողությունների վերաձևվելու հավանականությունը: Կառուցվել է մաթեմատիկական մոդել՝ բացատրելու բողոքի ներուժի և քաղաքական մշակույթի բաղադրիչների փոխազդեցությունը, ինչպես նաև դրանց բազմաչափ ազդեցությունը իշխանությունների հանդեպ չեզոքության վրա:



Բանալի բաներ. 44-օրյա պատերազմ, բողոքի ներուժ, քաղաքական վշակույթ, Գորիսի համայնք, մաթեմատիկական մոդել

ПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ КУЛЬТУРА И ПРОТЕСТНЫЙ ПОТЕНЦИАЛ В ГОРИСЕ

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Резюме: В ходе 44-дневной войны 2022 года Арцах и Армения понесли серьезные территориальные и человеческие потери, что вызвало тяжелые негативные последствия. После войны в корне изменились общественные настроения в Армении, а также стали быстро расти цены на товары первой необходимости в Армении, что еще больше ухудшило социальное положение населения. Негативные последствия войны особенно серьезны в Сюникском районе, граничащем с Азербайджаном и имеющем стратегическое значение для национальной безопасности страны, особенно в приграничном городе Горис, который является последним городом на единственном пути сообщения между Арменией и Арцахом. Военные потери и ухудшение социально-экономического состояния населения - мощные факторы, способные инициировать массовые протесты в Горисе. В статье представлена многомерная оценка протестного потенциала в Горисе в контексте политической культуры населения и послевоенной ситуации. Политическая культура идентифицирована в рамках теории Г. Алмонда и С. Вербы. Анализ проведен на основе данных социологического исследования, проведенного в Горисе в апреле 2022 года. Проведена оценка протестного потенциала, обусловленного низким уровнем лояльности в отношении политической власти, социально-экономическим состоянием населения, последствиями 44-дневной войны, а также официальным дискурсом о перспективах отношений с Турцией и Азербайджаном. Выявлена высокая вероятность реализации протестного потенциала через массовые протестные акции. Построена математическая модель, объясняющая взаимодействие компонентов протестного потенциала, политической культуры и уровня лояльности в отношении власти.

Ключевые слова: 44-дневная война, протестный потенциал, политическая культура, Горис, математическая модель.

The Problem

The stages of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are thoroughly and deeply explored (Zolyan, 1991; Markedonov, 2018; Cholakhyan, 2021). The Karabakh war of 27 September – 9 November, 2020, also called a 44-day war, has been already studied through the lenses of public opinion on Armenia's foreign policy orientations (Atanesyan, Mkrtichyan, 2021).

During and after the 44-day war, Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh (Karabakh) suffered serious losses. Not only the security zone, but also the significant parts of the Hadrut and Shushi regions of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, including the strategically important towns of Shushi and Hadrut, came under the control of Azerbaijan. The territory under control of Artsakh became smaller than the territory of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region as in 1988, when the Karabakh conflict in its modern phase started. The second Vardenis-Martakert road connecting Armenia and Artsakh, which was built in 2015, is under the control of Azerbaijan now. The length of the borders between Artsakh and Azerbaijan, as well as between Armenia and Azerbaijan, has increased significantly. Many villages of Armenia, which were located in a safe zone from a military point of view, have turned into border settlements. Armenia's role as the guarantor of Artsakh's security has greatly decreased and in fact is nominal. The security of Artsakh is provided by Russian peacekeeping forces. They also ensure the security of the only way of communication road between Artsakh and Armenia passing through Armenian community of Goris.

Syunik region, which borders with Azerbaijan, has strategic importance for the national security of Armenia, and the town Goris as well as surrounding villages control the only communication road connecting Armenia with Artsakh. Public unrest in Goris can cause severe consequences. Hence investigation of multidimensional conflict potential in Goris is of very importance. As the forms and sharpness of public unrest are conditioned also by the type of political culture of people, it is important to identify characteristics of local political culture in the Goris community.

The article represents the results and analysis of a sociological survey conducted in April 2022, in the Goris community, to identify the political culture of the local population, as well as to evaluate the multidimensional protest potential accumulated in the context of political culture and the current situation. The public protest probability perception in the Goris community is estimated. A mathematical model explaining the interconnections between the components of the protest potential, local political culture, the degree of loyalty to the authorities, and the protest probability perception is constructed.

Methodology

The analysis is based on sociological survey in Goris community. Sample type –multistage stratified clustered. Sample size – 312. The sample includes all settlements of Goris community².

The type of political culture was identified within the theory of Civic Culture (Almond and Verba, 1992). For this purpose, the following components (variables) of political culture were used: interest in politics, sense of political competence, sense of political subjectivity, the conventional and non-conventional forms of political and civic participation, trust to political leaders and government officials.

The dimensions of the protest potential include variables representing the lack of loyalty to the authorities, socio-economic conditions of the population, the fact of the 44-day war, the course of the war and its consequences, as well as future relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Principal Component Analysis of 39 variables representing political culture and protest potential is used to develop a mathematical model, which explains the dynamics of loyalty towards the political course of the country and perception of public protest probability. The 10 extracted Factors (Components) explain 67% of the initial variables' total variance. The “Oblimin” method of oblique rotation is used for Factor identification.

The mathematical model is built by logical mapping. The Structure Matrix Coefficients are used to represent the strength of links between the Factors.

The following scale is used for qualitative interpretation of the political culture and protest potential variables' level:

- 0-20% - very low level,
- 20-40% - low level,
- 40-60% - average level,
- 60-80% - high level,
- 80-100% - very high level.

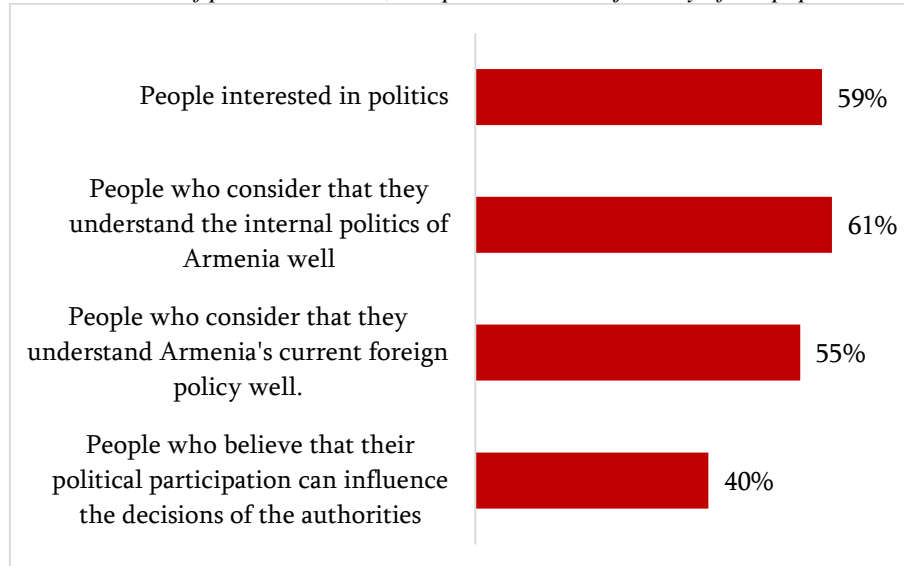
The results of the research have an orienting meaning.

The results

Components and type of political culture in Goris

Assessments of political interest, competence, and subjectivity. The interest of the population in politics, their political competence and subjectivity assessments are at an average level in Goris (Figure 1):

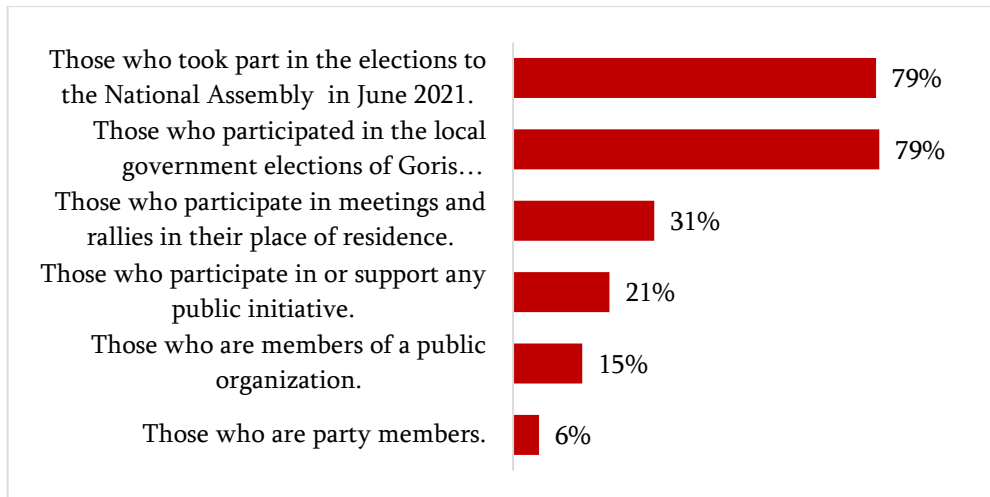
Figure 1. Characteristics of political interest, competence and subjectivity of the population of Goris, %



Conventional political participation. As for conventional (permitted by law) political participation, electoral participation is high in Goris, and the prevalence of other forms of political participation is quite low (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Characteristics of conventional political participation of Goris population, %

²Total population in Goris community at 1 January, 2022 is 29,679 including: town Goris (21,712), Akner (1,117), Dazhravan (105), Hartashen (678), Khndzoresk (1,918), Nerkin Khndzoresk (231), Karahunj. (1,342), Shurnukh (145), Verishen (2,094), Vorotan (271).

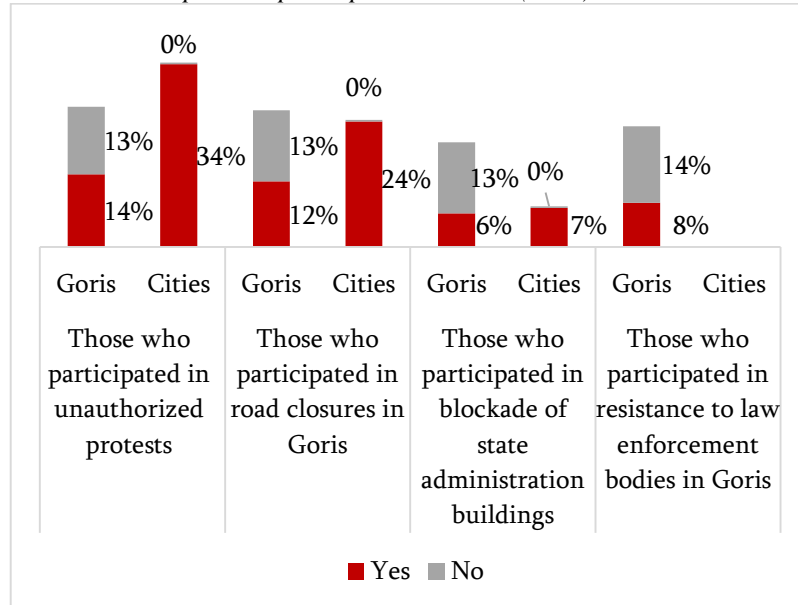


Unconventional political participation. Non-conventional forms of public protest (Milbrath, 1965) in Armenia, particularly participation in unauthorized meetings, blockade of state administration buildings, blocking of intercity roads, and resistance to police, emerged and began to develop along with the Karabakh movement since 1987. They were especially intense in 1988-1991, 1997-2003, and 2008. In those years, they had political content and were led by political parties.

Since 2010, the intensity of public movements in Armenia has increased dramatically. They had the content of protecting of nature, monuments, social interests, and rights of the population. Mass social movements took place not only in Yerevan, but also in the regions, especially in regional cities. These movements were organized by non-governmental organizations and civil activist groups. The development of NGOs and civil activist groups in Armenia started in 1996 with funding from the western foundations and state structures. Gradually, these movements began to take on a mass character and, more importantly, began to put forward political demands as well. The change of government that took place in 2018 was the result of a public movement. This change was enthusiastically received by a significant part of the population of Armenia.

The experience of non-conventional protest participation in Goris in 2021 is given in figure 3. For comparison, the same chart shows the values of the same characteristics for all cities in Armenia, except Yerevan (CRRC Caucasus Barometer, 2019).³

Figure 3. Non-conventional political participation in Goris (2021) and cities in Armenia (2019), %



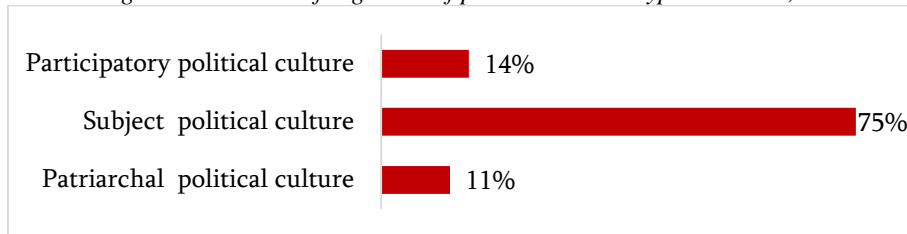
At first glance, it may seem that the participation in non-conventional protests in Goris is quite low compared to the cities of Armenia. However, 13-14% of respondents refused to answer the questions about non-conventional political participation in 2021 in Goris, and during the "Caucasus Barometer 2019" survey, only about 0.5% refused to answer those questions in the cities of Armenia. In other words, a

³ Data are calculated by Caucasus research Resource Centers "Caucasus Barometer 2019". Database is available on <https://www.crrc.am/barometer/>

significant part of people started to avoid answering such questions. Therefore, it is necessary to accept the total percentage of positive answers and those who refused to answer as adequate estimates of non-conventional political participation in Goris. In that case, as can be seen from the diagram, the levels of non-conventional participation in Goris and the cities of Armenia are comparable.

Types of political culture. Medium-intensity forms of political participation are more common among the population of Goris, particularly participation in elections of different levels. It prompts that, in the context of Almond and Verba's concept, the political culture of the Goris population is mostly a subject culture. Mathematical generalization of the political culture indicators confirmed that hypothesis (fig. 4). It turned out that 75% of the population of Goris belongs to the subject political culture.

Figure 4. Volumes of segments of political culture types in Goris, %

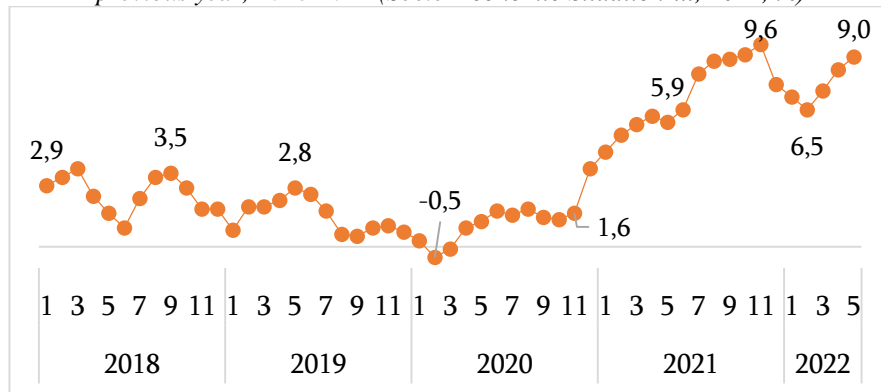


Protest potential in Goris

The protest potential in Goris due to the socio-economic situation. The statistical data of The State Statistical Committee of Armenia shows that the consumer prices in Armenia drastically arise in the period from January 2018 to May 2022 (

Figure 5).

Figure 5. The percentage changes of the consumer price index compared to the corresponding month of the previous year, 2018-2022 (Socio-Economic Situation ..., 2022, %)



Accordingly, the attitudes towards the socio-economic situation in Goris were unfavorable (fig. 6). The majority of the population assessed the economic situation in Goris as bad and it has worsened over the last year. More than half of the population is pessimistic in assessing the change in the economic situation in the coming year. Thus, we can conclude from the data in the diagram, that the protest potential due to the socio-economic situation in Goris was high.

Figure 6. Components of economic protest potential, %

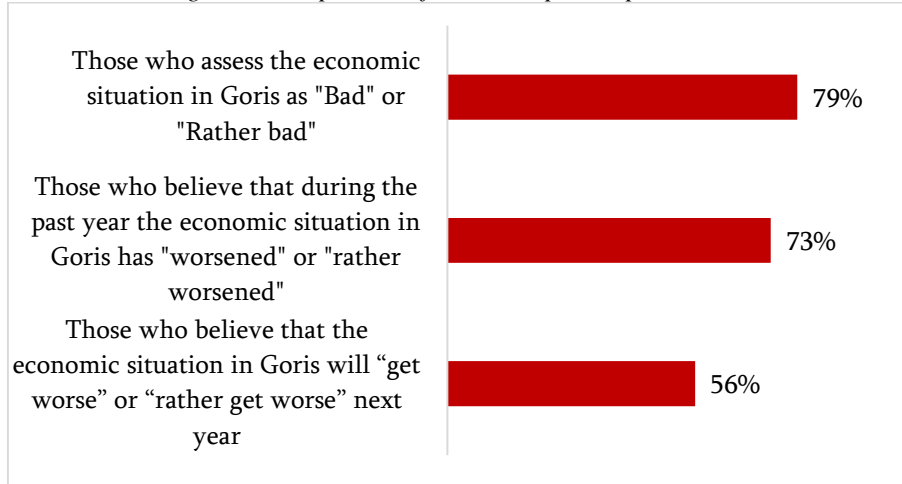
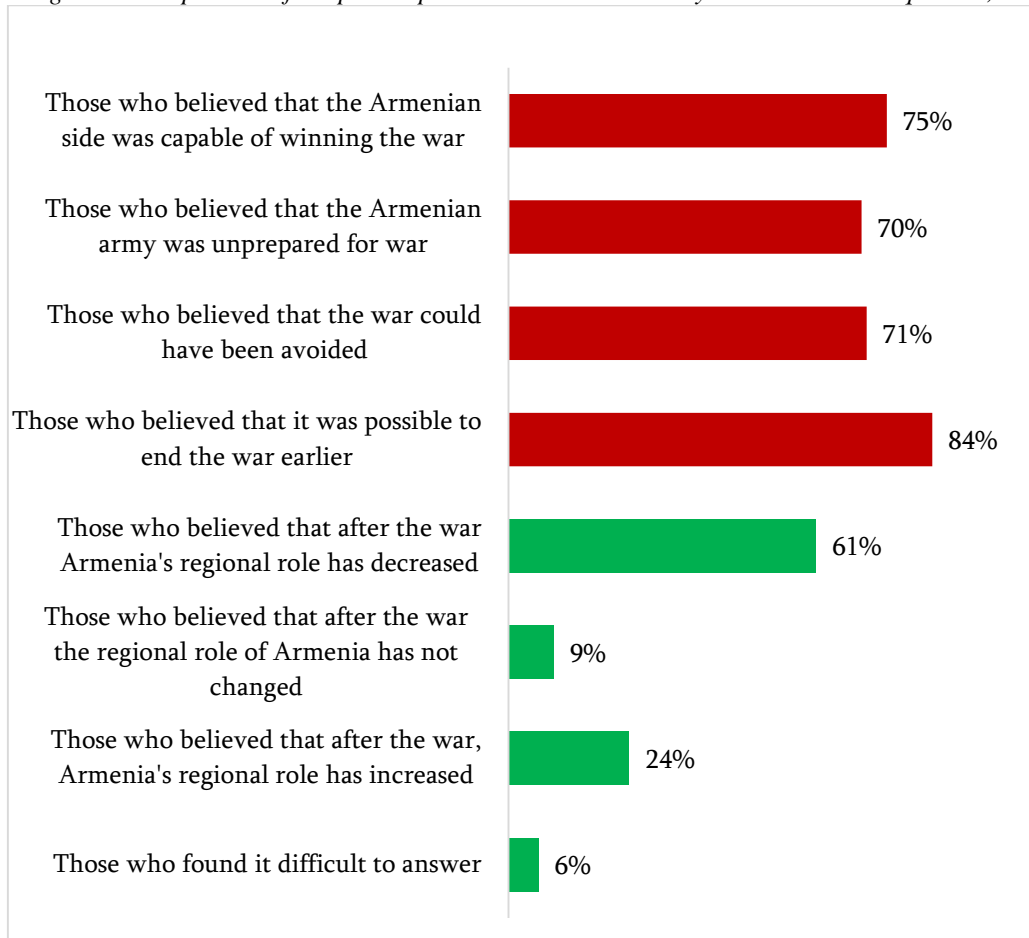
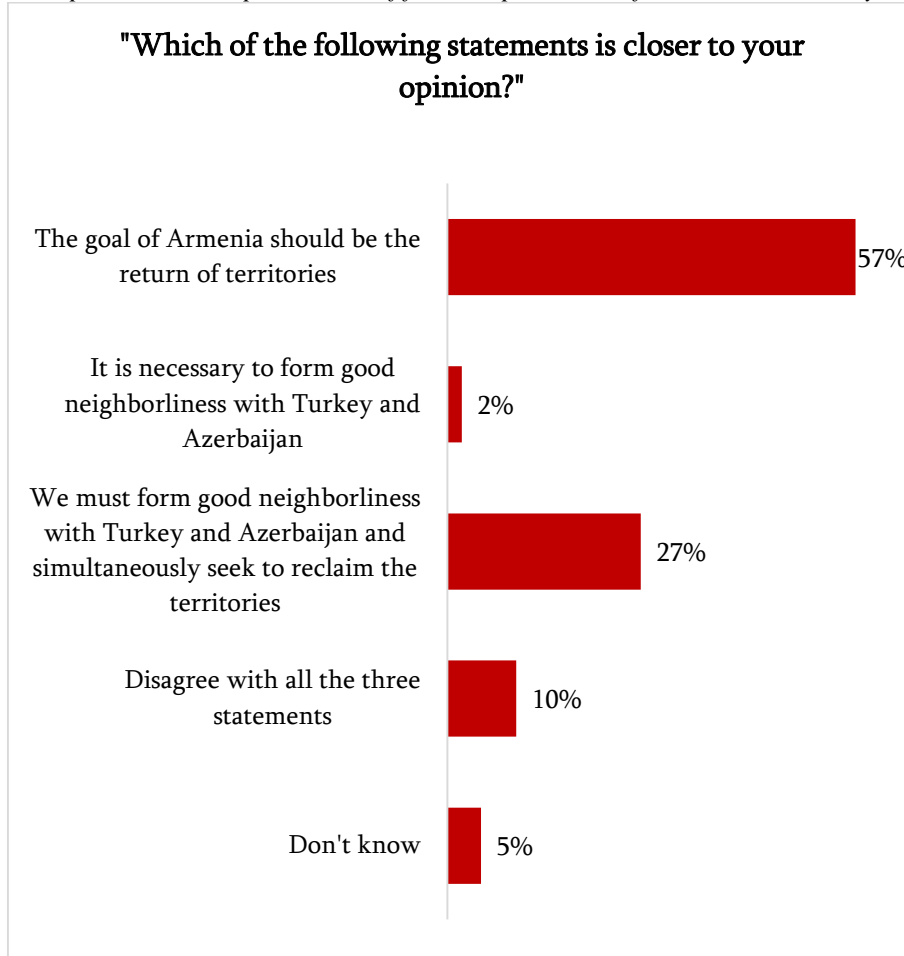


Figure 7. Components of the protest potential due to the 44-day war and its consequences, %



The protest potential due to war and its outcomes. This component of the protest potential was assessed by a set of questions about various aspects of the war, namely: ‘was it possible to avoid the war,’ ‘was it possible to win the war,’ ‘was it possible to end the war earlier,’ ‘was the Armenian army ready for war?’ The question whether the regional role of Armenia increased or decreased as a result of the war was also asked. The answers to the mentioned questions are given in the figure 7. Data shows that the questions related to the war and its results caused a high protest potential among the population of Goris.

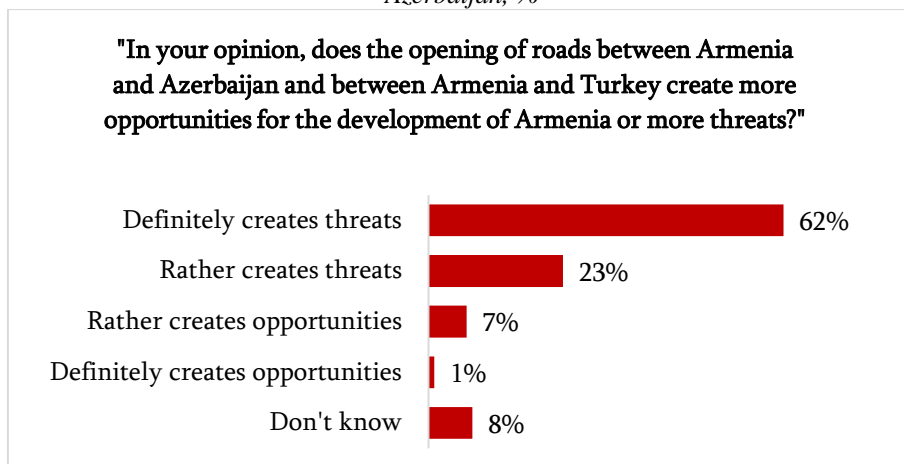
Figure 8. The protest potential due to possibilities of future improvement of relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, %



It should be noted that the analysis of the "Caucasian Barometer 2010" and "Caucasus Barometer 2012" databases show that 33.8% of the Armenian population was in favor of opening the roads between Armenia and Turkey without any preconditions in 2010. And in 2012 the value of this indicator was 40.6%.

But according to our survey, the vast majority of Goris residents (85%) believe that the reopening of roads between Armenia and Turkey and between Armenia and Azerbaijan "definitely creates threats" or "rather creates threats" for Armenia (fig. 9).

Figure 9. The protest potential due to opening of the roads between Armenia and Turkey and between Armenia and Azerbaijan, %



Generalizing the data in Figure 8 and Figure 9 brought to the conclusion that the decision to build good neighborliness with Turkey and Azerbaijan without seeking to reclaim the lost territories, and unblocking the roads with those countries creates a strong public protest potential.

Opportunities to return territories, the forms of its realization, deadlines of realization, and allies. The overwhelming majority of the Goris population (79%) considers the return of the lost territories possible (fig. 10).

In addition, 67% of the population considers it possible through the joint use of military and diplomatic means. 65% of the population think that the return of the lost territories is possible by gaining allies. About 39% of population think that Armenia is ready to return the lost territories just now or within 5 years.

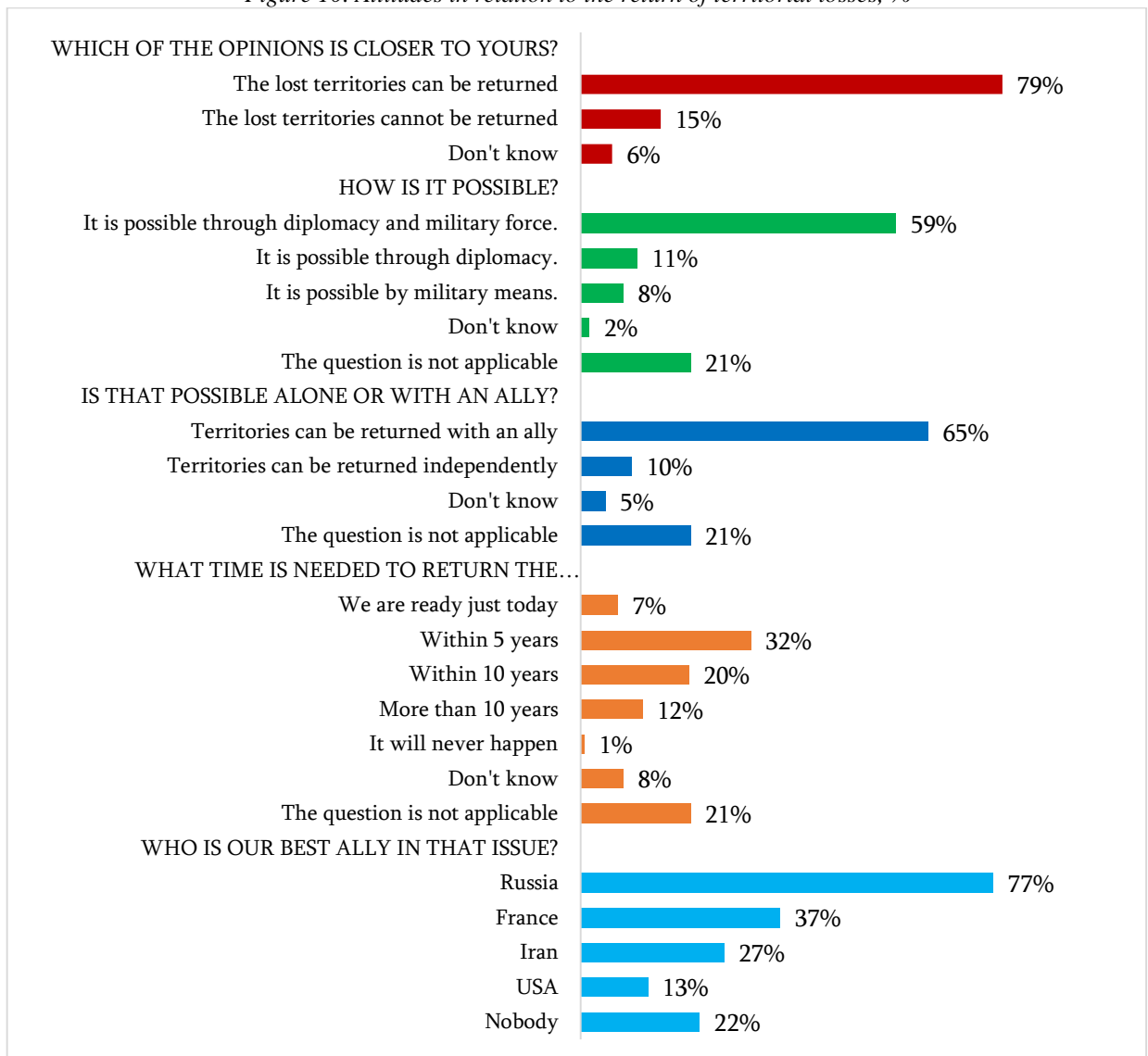
The majority of the Goris, population (77%) consider that Russia is the best ally in the issue of the return of territories. France is the best ally according to 37% of the population, and by the opinion of 27% of the population, the best ally is Iran.⁴

The peculiarity of the public sentiments is that 22% of the respondents consider that Armenia has no allies in the matter of the return of the lost territories.

Allies of Armenia in the perceptions of the population of Goris. For 35 years now, the strongest factor that polarizes the political forces in Armenia is the geopolitical orientation of Armenia.⁵ Russian orientation has traditionally been very high in Armenian society. However, since 2013, there has been a decrease in orientation towards Russia. According to the "Caucasian Barometer 2013" survey in Armenia, 84% of the population considered Russia the friendliest country for Armenia. But, according to the "Caucasus Barometer 2021" survey data, only 34% of the respondents gave the same answer. Moreover, the number of people who consider France to be the friendliest country has gradually increased significantly, from 4% in 2013 to 37% in 2021. On the other hand, the number of people who consider Armenia does not have the friendliest country increased from 5% in 2013 to 19% in 2021.

However, the picture is different in Goris (fig. 11).

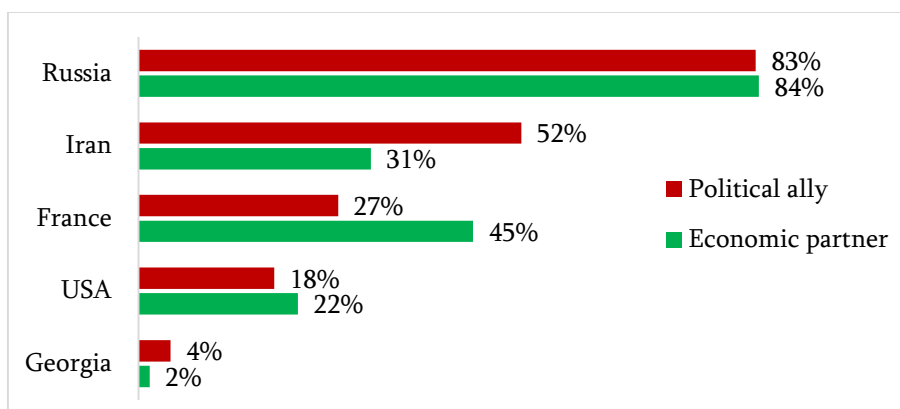
Figure 10. Attitudes in relation to the return of territorial losses, %



⁴ The sum of the percentages is greater than 100 because the two answers were allowed.

⁵ In Armenia issues related to social order were eliminated from the political agenda during the first 5 years of independence.

Figure 11. Armenia's best political allies and economic partners, %



The research revealed that 83% of the population consider Russia the best political ally of Armenia and 84% the best economic partner. From these points of view, France is significantly behind Russia. Only 27% of the Goris population consider France as the best political partner of Armenia. It is important to note that Iran is in second place as a political ally of Armenia (52%), which is also significantly higher than France. However, as an economic partner, France is in second place (45%), and Iran is in third place (31%). It should be noted that two answers were allowed to those questions.

The loyalty level to the political course of Armenia and the probability of protest actions

Predictions and expectations of political scientists of favorable development in Armenia after the change of power in April 2018 (Arzumanyan, 2019) did not come true. The loyalty to the political course of Armenia among the Goris population is low. 75% of people believe that Armenia is moving in the wrong direction (fig. 12).

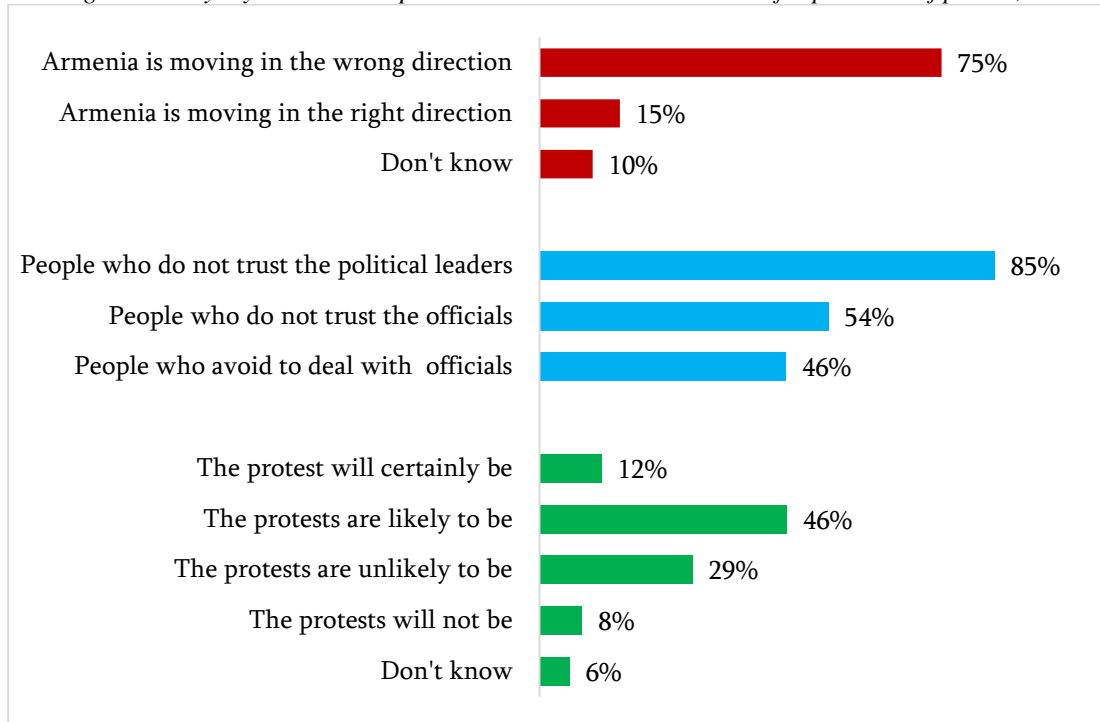
Trust towards Armenian political leaders and government officials is also low in Goris. They are not trusted by 85% and 54% of people respectively. And 46% of the population tries not to deal with government officials at all. The likelihood of protests within the next year in Goris is assessed. The number of people who consider protest actions probable and the number of those who do not consider protest actions probable is approximately the same. Based on the opinion distribution data the probability of protests in Goris during the coming year is assessed as roughly equal to 0.55.

The Model of Political Culture and Protest Potentials

A mathematical model is built which reveals and demonstrates the interrelationships between the components of political culture, the components of protest potentials, the loyalty of the population, and protest probability in Goris⁶ (Figure 13). The main purpose of the model is to show how the political loyalty of the Goris population (the dependent variable) and the protest probability (the dependent variable) are conditioned by the political culture and the protest potentials components. This goal-setting is important from the point of view of evaluating the possible scenarios of political developments in Goris, as well as from the point of view to control the developments of these scenarios.

⁶For description of the Model development see Methodology.

Figure 12. Loyalty to Armenia's political course and the likelihood of expressions of protest, %



The circles in the model represent the identified factors. The names of the factors are written on the circles. The lines connecting the vertices are the interactions between the factors. Blue lines mean that the factors are positively correlated. Red lines mean that the factors are negatively correlated. The thickness of the lines means the strength of the relation. In order not to overload the model, only the lines representing the relatively strong effects are shown in the figure.

Arrows indicate the logically based direction of connection. When building the model, it was assumed that factor F1 only bears the influence of other factors. F1 does not affect another factor. In the case of the remaining factors, it was assumed that the linked factors interact (arrows are double-headed).

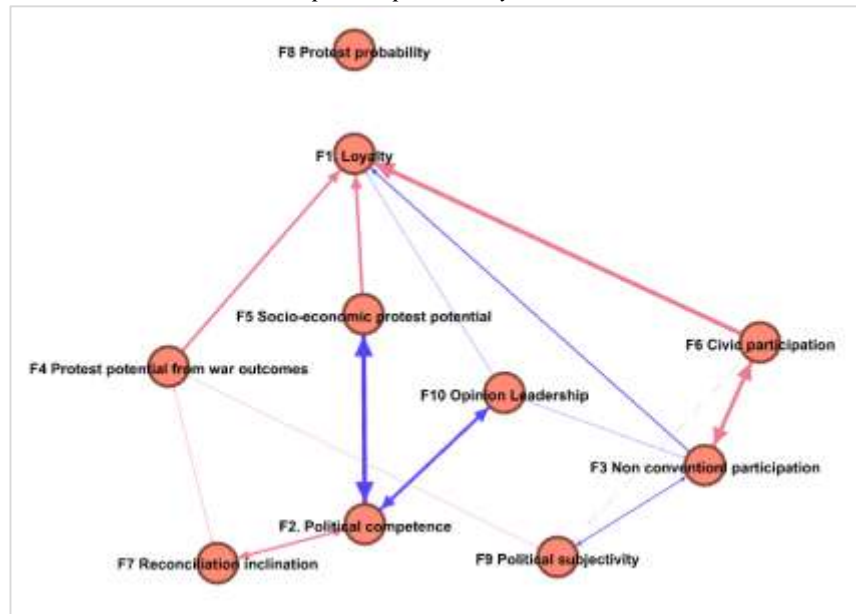
Let's look at the main provisions arising from the model. The first statement is that none of the identified factors is significantly correlated with "F8. Protest probability" factor.⁷ In other words, the political culture, its elements and the multidimensional potential of protest do not affect the assessment of the protest probability.

As expected, the model shows that "F4. Protest potential from war outcomes" and "F5. Socio-economic protest potential" components reduce the loyalty to the authorities and their policies (F1). Moreover, they are the most powerful components that reduce loyalty.

A rather unexpected and interesting result is that an increase in the "F6. Civic participation" component also decreases people's loyalty (F1). It should be noted that the factor F6 includes those persons who participate in public movements and/or are members of public organizations. In other words, it is the part of the society that most actively participated in the revolution of 2018. Nevertheless, the attitudes of that part of the society [in Goris] towards the direction of politics in Armenia changed significantly.

⁷Factor F8 is the only one composed of only one variable: "How likely is it that there will be expressions of public protest in Goris in the next one year?"

Figure 13. The model of interaction of political culture components, protest potential components, loyalty level, and protest probability in Goris



On the other hand, it should be noted that "F1. Loyalty" factor is positively correlated with "F10. Opinion Leadership" factor. This factor unites members of parties and those who, in political discussions, strive for the interlocutor to eventually accept their opinion. It should be noted that there are relatively more opinion leaders among supporters of the authorities. Loyalty to the authorities and its policies is relatively higher among people who participated in non-conventional forms of protest (F3). Let's remember that civil participation (F6) and participation in non-conventional forms of protest (F3) are different characteristics.

The model shows that individuals who are relatively more interested in politics and consider themselves more competent in both domestic and foreign affairs of Armenia (F2), are more likely to be opinion leaders (F10), have more Economic protest potential (F5) and they are a little bit more inclined to reconciliation with Azerbaijan and Turkey (F7).

By comparing the provisions of the previous two paragraphs, it can be concluded that the loyalty to the authorities is due to two strata with opposing worldviews. The first stratum consists mainly of activists of the revolution of 2018, who are currently members of the ruling party or persons associated with them. The second stratum consists mainly of politically competent persons who reject the improvement of relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey. But on the other hand, as they are opinion leaders, they tend to increase loyalty to the political course of Armenia. This is because the political leaders of Armenia declare that the development of strategic relations with Russia is a priority for Armenia in foreign policy, and the reduction of corruption and containment of oligarchs is priority in domestic policy.

Among those who have participated in non-conventional forms of protest (F3), civic participation is lower (F6), the sense of political subjectivity is higher (F9), loyalty to the authorities is higher (F1), and opinion leadership is higher (F10). The factor F3 defines the segment of population that, while not being an activist of the revolution, still participated the revolution, achieved success and, based on their own experience, believes that the success of the revolution is possible not due to civic participation, but due to non-conventional actions.

Conclusions

The main results of the research and main conclusions derived from them are given below.

1. The population of Goris mainly belongs to the subject culture, although the layer bearing the participatory culture is quite developed.
2. The protest potential in Goris is high due to the social-economic situation, the 2020 Karabakh war and its consequences.
3. The protest potential in Goris is also high as a reaction to perspectives and risks of the peace agenda including unblocking of regional roads in Armenia for Azerbaijan and Turkey.
4. Conventional forms of political participation in Goris have a high potential for consolidating the population.
5. Loyalty to Armenia's official politics is low in Goris, including the level of trust toward

Armenia's political leaders and government.

6. As a result, in the Goris local government elections held in October 2021, the main opposition party won 61.9% of the vote, and the ruling party 35.3% accordingly.

7. Protest probability in Goris in the coming year is estimated as 0.55.

8. The experience of non-conventional political participation in Goris is comparable to its average level in Armenia, which is quite high. In the case of protest potentials consolidation, it can have serious effects on the political process.

9. The idea of returning the territories lost during 2020 Karabakh war, has a great unifying potential in Goris. Russia is seen as the most important ally of Armenia in this regard.

10. In general, Russia is perceived as Armenia's most important political ally and most important economic partner. The second political ally is Iran, and the third is France. As an economic partner, France is the second and Iran is the third.

11. The policy aimed at the withdrawal of Armenia from the CSTO, or the destruction of the Armenian-Russian relations in the field of defense, might actualize the protest potential in Goris.

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