

PREREQUISITES FOR THE FORMATION OF SOCIO-POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR ARMENIA'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

This article examines the socio-political, ideological, and mental prerequisites that shaped Armenia's transition to democracy following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Adopting a qualitative political-science approach that combines the historical-institutional method with a comparative analysis of the socialist and liberal ideological platforms, the study traces how the gradual dismantling of Soviet totalitarianism—beginning with Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinization, mass housing construction, and the erosion of the “sacred” attitude toward state authority—created the social and psychological conditions for a positive reception of democratic values among Armenian citizens. The analysis further considers the pressures of economic liberalization, the ideological affinities between socialism and liberalism, and the historically rooted duality of the Armenian mentality, which combines a strong sense of individualism, creativity, and entrepreneurial drive with a conservative, collectivist orientation toward preserving national identity. The article argues that, paradoxically, many of the necessary prerequisites for Armenia's post-Soviet democratic transformation were formed during the Soviet period itself, well before the country achieved formal independence. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural foundations underlying post-Soviet democratization processes in Armenia and the South Caucasus more broadly.

Keywords: *Armenia, democratic transition, post-Soviet transformation, socio-political prerequisites, political mentality, totalitarianism, Perestroika, political culture, liberalism, South Caucasus.*

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Introduction

On the path toward forming an open civil society, many Western countries typically started from authoritarianism (Dahl 1971; Huntington 1991; Levitsky and Way 2010; Linz and Stepan 1996; O'Donnell et al. 1986) based on market relations (Przeworski 1991). Armenia, like all former republics of the USSR, started from totalitarianism and shared a common path with them until the final collapse of the Soviet system (Laycock 2009; De Waal 2003; Kilbourne Matossian 1962; Panossian 2006). The process of dismantling Soviet totalitarianism was gradual. It was during this period that many socio-political and ideological-psychological prerequisites finally began to take shape (Hough 1997; Sebestyen 2009; Zubok 2021), allowing citizens of the future independent states to positively perceive the many beneficial aspects of democratic coexistence.

The success of reforms intended to establish an open society of equal opportunities, fair social relations based on law, and an atmosphere of free creativity, initiative, and entrepreneurship was tied to the existence of these specific prerequisites. The absence of such prerequisites risked not only the emergence of social chaos and a tendency toward ochlocracy, or the imitation of democratic transformations to consolidate authoritarian political power, but also, consequently, the disillusionment of the broad masses with the ideas of democracy itself.

Despite many negative phenomena in Soviet reality, during the years of its existence, the Armenian people significantly increased their level of self-awareness, political literacy, and developed their political culture and mentality (Sunny 1993). Furthermore, the Armenian nation experienced a period of rapid industrial and scientific growth, which opened broad opportunities for a dignified presence in relevant areas of international public life. The large Armenian diaspora, particularly in Western countries (Shain 2007; Wahlang 2025), helped many citizens of Armenia directly engage with foreign standards of social life, which inevitably influenced the people's desire to achieve a more dignified existence (Rasuly-Palczek and Six-Hohenbalken 2017). In one way or another, paradoxically, many of the prerequisites for the positive perception of liberal-democratic ideas and principles by Armenian citizens were formed during the years of the USSR's existence.

Methodology

This study aims to identify key prerequisites for democratic transition in Armenia. To achieve this goal, a comprehensive approach is used, incorporating methods of political science analysis, comparative research, and qualitative source analysis.

The primary research method is qualitative political analysis, which allows for an examination of the institutional, socioeconomic, and political factors that contribute to the formation of conditions for democratic transformation. Another crucial method for studying this problem is the application of the principle of historicism. The historical-institutional method allows us to examine the formation of the preconditions for Armenian society's transition to building a democratic state as a gradually evolving socio-political process of dismantling the system, which should have led to a logical conclusion. Forced by the pressure of objective circumstances, the retreat of the

authorities of the former USSR from the seemingly "inviolable" communist dogmas prepared fertile ground for fundamental changes in the worldview of citizens. The method of in--depth analysis of this process makes it possible to identify the main prerequisite for the successful advancement of society towards democracy - the maturity of the political consciousness of the people.

The method of comparative analysis of two ideological platforms, socialism and liberalism, clearly highlights many common features between these two world ideologies. In many ways, this community contributed to the formation of a positive perception of liberal democratic values among the representatives of the Armenian nation.

Socio-political prerequisites for the democratic transit of post-soviet republics

The first signs of the dismantling of the totalitarian system occurred as early as the era of Nikita Khrushchev. The exposure of Joseph Stalin's cult of personality (Tucker 1979) brought about the partial rehabilitation of his political victims and a relaxation of repressions. While perhaps not occurring in society as a whole, it became possible for muted dissent to exist within certain segments the Party and intellectual circles breaking through in one form or another into the pages of the Party press.

Another important sign of the political emancipation of society was a kind of "grassroots politicization" in the form of the widespread circulation of political jokes about Soviet power, socialism, and Khrushchev himself (and later, other state leaders). Through this, another pillar of totalitarianism was destroyed in the mentality of the Soviet person: the sacred attitude toward authority.

While this phenomenon is well-known and fairly obvious, insufficient attention is often paid to another equally significant factor in the psychological dismantling of totalitarianism: the mass housing construction initiated by Khrushchev (Gorlov 2017). Millions of Soviet citizens who moved into private apartments were freed from the total, everyday "neighborly" surveillance that had flourished in communal apartments. Furthermore, for the first time, they gained a private life the opportunity to read and keep prohibited literature, listen to foreign radio stations (despite jamming), and converse and debate with friends within their own homes.

Even the slight opening of the "window" to the outside world (the "Thaw" and the policy of peaceful coexistence) triggered a certain "demonstration effect" related to learning about life in foreign countries, which subsequently gave rise to the phenomenon of dissidence. However, a more mass-scale manifestation of this "demonstration effect" was linked to the change in foreign policy carried out by the CPSU under Khrushchev. Finally realizing that focusing exclusively on the international communist movement offered no political (much less economic) benefits in the foreseeable future, the CPSU leadership largely reoriented itself toward a new "progressive force of the modern age" national liberation movements and, specifically, countries of so-called "socialist orientation" (Khudoley 2022). Economic and political cooperation with developing countries triggered a significant flow of Soviet specialists abroad. Ordinary Soviet citizens finally gained the opportunity to see the "other world," which substantially shook their confidence in the absolute superiority of "Soviet socialism."

During this period, a pragmatization of life was already emerging an increasing interest in material incentives and a shift in the ideology of socialism, which from that point forward was reoriented toward personal interests and the values of private life. A clear understanding of equality as equality of opportunity began to take shape; a prosperous life earned through honest means became perfectly consistent with the prevailing concept of socialism.

The increasing importance of mental and skilled physical labor, rising living standards, and other transformations were accompanied by growing public demands. These demands were further influenced by the expansion of the shadow economy, the emergence of new forms of "prosperous" living, and increased communication with developed nations. The "technology of survival" was replaced by a "technology of achieving comfort and well-being." This was the primary factor that fundamentally restructured everyday ideology. While these changes did not lead to a rejection of the idea of socialism itself, they shifted its position within the system of common perceptions. The crisis of the mid-1970s "brought about value shifts, the erosion of ideological structures, a weakening or even loss of the significance of Soviet symbols, and other consequences that rendered the system partially un-reproducible," as L. Gudkov writes (Gudkov 1997, 17).

The Brezhnev period (mid-1960s to early 1980s) intensified the "corrosion" of totalitarianism. Under the conditions of the ruling regime's overt corruption, ideological liberation manifested as a disbelief in proclaimed slogans and ideals. Consequently, this led to a growing separation and even alienation of "real" society from the "official" state (Tomson 2014).

However, while society was becoming alienated from the totalitarian state, it remained entirely within its framework. In the USSR, all social groups were integrated into a single bureaucratic socio-productive organism (Harutyunyan 2024). Regardless of the field of activity whether collective farmers, laborers, or workers in culture and sports, all acted as state employees. Even "creative unions" of writers, artists, architects, or cinematographers were nothing more than bureaucratic branches of the central Party-state apparatus. As the aforementioned authors rightly noted, "society was absorbed by the state, and the state by the 'apparatus'" (Gudkov et al. 1988, 79).

The beginning of Gorbachev's "Perestroika" (rearrangement) (1985-1987) was the "era of the USSR's awakening" within the framework of an "enlightened" authoritarian regime (Brown 2007; Brown 2023; Hardman 2012). However, the expected (and promised) economic acceleration did not materialize, followed too quickly by a political "revolution from above." This process was further accelerated by the efforts of newly emerged "radical democrats." One of Mikhail Gorbachev's fundamental mistakes was mistaking the top-level awakening of public consciousness for the readiness of the entire (or the majority of) real society for serious changes in the social order and production. He and his closest associates failed to account for the still-persistent "patriarchal consciousness" the ideology and psychology of citizens who expected the state to provide for them. The massiveness of the democratic movement was deceptive. The "masses" formed quickly due to the "fashion" for democracy and because of opportunists who had previously served totalitarianism with great flexibility

and had now rapidly rebranded themselves as democrats (unlike the economy and society itself).

In his numerous speeches, while calling upon workers to support his initiatives with a "revolution from below," Gorbachev ignored the fact that civil society was non-existent in the country. The problem lay not only in the fact that the Party-state power dominated society, but also in the fact that society itself (or at least a significant portion of it) lacked the drive for radical transformation, exhibiting a profound sense of constraint.

Nevertheless, the bureaucratic Party-state framework that framed and permeated all of society created some elements of a future civil society under Gorbachev, though this was only the very beginning of the process. That's why laws intended to activate commodity-money and market relations worked poorly. Even the few elements of civil society that emerged during this period (independent trade unions, various associations of industrialists and entrepreneurs, small and medium-sized businesses, banks, and veterans' organizations), which were meant to foster ideological pluralism, very quickly lost their significance (Boettke 2003). Meanwhile, the issues of creating legal guarantees and social-contractual relations necessary conditions for a civil society were pushed into the background, serving only as subjects of fruitless discussion in the media.

Nonetheless, "Perestroika" provided many of the prerequisites for accelerating the formation of a democratic society and ideological pluralism. "Glasnost" (publicity), limited political pluralism, the very possibility of publicly criticizing the authorities, openness to the outside world, and the significant easing of foreign travel all contributed to an atmosphere of general liberation and the broadening of horizons for a vast number of people. In short, it was an entire era of awakening for Soviet society, characterized by a sharp decline in the role of the Communist Party and an internal demarcation within the party itself between reformists and orthodox members. This marked the beginning of the party's separation from the state and public organizations.

Despite the limited and insufficient results of economic reforms, certain socio-economic prerequisites necessary for ideological discourse were established during this period. The first joint-stock companies, cooperatives, commercial banks, and small-to-medium enterprises emerged. Consequently, groups of people appeared with their own emerging specific economic interests that required protection. Economic pluralism was gradually taking hold in the USSR, which was destined sooner or later to lead to political pluralism.

In general, the Gorbachev period saw systemic and structural changes incompatible with totalitarianism, though they by no means ruled out the preservation of authoritarianism. However, it was this period that served as the prelude to the general decomposition of the world socialist system and, with it, totalitarianism in the USSR. It created the prerequisites for free-thinking and ideological pluralism in political life.

In terms of content, Gorbachev's "Perestroika", in our view, intended the implementation of the ideas of liberalism, although from the outset, it was referred to by another word: "democrats" rather than "liberals," for them, the issue was fundamentally about liberal hopes for creating a state governed by the rule of law and transitioning to a market economy (Sedaitis and Butterfield 2019). However, in parting

ways with totalitarianism, the people were unable to accept the opposing system in a short span of time.

Nevertheless, the propaganda of "Perestroika" ideas not only clearly highlighted the negative phenomena of the totalitarian era but also defined the liberal benchmarks for a future democratic society. From socio-economic and political perspectives, the ideas of "Perestroika" finally prepared the peoples of the USSR for a relatively rapid absorption of liberal values. These values were already forging a path within Soviet society and subsequently became the dominant ideology of the future independent states in the post-Soviet space.

Ideological prerequisites for the perception of democratic transformation among Armenian citizens

The intelligentsia was destined to play an enormous role in the ideological orientation of Soviet citizens. Historically, the intelligentsia almost always serves as the bearer of oppositional ideas within society. They are the first to assimilate new political ideas and facilitate their dissemination throughout society. As a result, an increasing number of people and entire social groups previously excluded from public life begin to change their attitudes. They realize that politics directly affects their private interests and that their personal fate depends on decisions made by the authorities. There emerges a more conscious striving for political participation and a search for mechanisms to influence state decision-making. Decades ago, Samuel Huntington proposed a theoretical framework for political modernization that most effectively explains the processes of establishing democratic societies (Huntington 1991), and it was the intelligentsia to whom he assigned the decisive role in this endeavor. By the time of its collapse, Soviet society possessed a vast army of politically literate, broad-minded, and critically thinking intellectuals.

By the onset of democratic transformations, Armenia like nearly all former USSR republics could no longer be classified as a traditional society in the conventional sense. During the Soviet era, it had transformed into an industrial country with a relatively high level of urbanization and education (Karakhanyan 2018; Marshall 2010). A distinct middle class had formed, the core of which consisted of the scientific and technical intelligentsia and specialists interested in the free realization of their intellectual potential.

The intellectual elite of Armenia, while maintaining many similarities with the late-Soviet elite, was notably distinguished by a national rather than a purely social orientation. Special mention should be made of the role of many party officials and rank-and-file members of the Communist Party of Armenia who, contrary to official propaganda, exposed not only the negative aspects of the party officials' dominance but also pointed toward paths for national revival and the establishment of national identity. This was discussed with increasing frequency at general meetings and conferences of primary party organizations. Many Armenian scientists, public figures, and even some republican-level officials all devoted to their motherland found themselves among the ranks of dissidents and non-conformists.

Among the significant achievements of the Armenian Soviet elite was the adoption of the Law on the Recognition of the Armenian Language as the State Language

(Musayeva 2022), alongside Russian, which was then the de facto language of the USSR. Another achievement was the unprecedented scale of publishing works by famous representatives of centuries-old Armenian science and culture. By their example, the Armenian Soviet intellectual elite fostered an atmosphere of spiritual liberation and free-thinking, which can be categorized as a prerequisite for ideological pluralism.

In the late 1980s, strictly "ideological" discussions were impossible, if only because the Soviet system still persisted. Similarly, there could be no discussions regarding specific political decisions stemming from group interests, due to the absence of clear social polarization. Therefore, the language of political discourse at the time was predominantly quasi-historical rather than ideological. Debates centered on the assessment of various historical stages, particularly Stalinism. Formally, these were disputes within historical science, but in reality, they were conducted not through the lens of facts and balanced interpretation, but through mythological symbols such as "collectivization," "terror," and the "cult of personality."

In this debate, two symbolic positions immediately emerged, from which two camps later crystallized: the democrats and the national-patriots. Political propaganda was built upon mutually exclusive historical myths antitheses to official propaganda and the struggle in the sphere of ideas was no longer conducted underground, but officially, using the language of deconstruction, demythologization, and alternative mythologization (Spillman 2014; Elgenius 2011).

Among such ideological frameworks, one can count the attitude of certain Armenian dissidents toward the fact of Armenia's incorporation into the USSR. For decades, Communist propaganda presented this historical event as the salvation of the Armenian people from the inevitable new encroachments of Kemalist Türkiye. The reality of the Bolshevik-Kemalist collusion regarding the Sovietization of Armenia was suppressed in every possible way, while the role and significance of the First Republic of Armenia in Armenian history were diminished.

These and other issues were frequently criticized by many free-thinkers. The lack of objective coverage of historical events connected to the heroic and dignified past of the Armenian people was compensated for by the process of Armenian national awakening, which ran parallel to the decay of totalitarianism. It was the national idea that formed the basis for the activities of nearly all underground organizations operating in Armenia (Koroleva and Molkin 2014). These included the "United National Party" (active since the late 1960s), the "Union for National Self-Determination," and many other circles and associations (Manukyan 2022), whose programs reflected almost all the problems concerning Armenians. Naturally, at the first opportunity for free expression and the unfolding of ideological discourse in Armenia, the national idea was destined to become the predominant force in Armenian public life.

The role of Communist propaganda should be specially noted as a prerequisite for Soviet citizens' perception of the ideological basis of democratic and national-liberation processes. The propaganda of Communist ideas was one of the most vital functions of the former Soviet state. From an early age, citizens of all republics of the former USSR were introduced to the core tenets of Communist ideology and received a

political education regardless of their position in the social structure. In this context, it is important to note the commonality of many liberal-democratic principles with the socialist theory prevalent in society. After all, the founders of Communist ideology did not fundamentally reject liberal slogans. On the contrary, they openly sought to implement many of the ideological principles conceived by liberals. Communism emerged as an antithesis to liberalism and, in many ways, mirrored it. A close genetic link exists between these two ideologies. It was precisely this commonality between the two historically established ideological systems that created the fertile ground in the minds of former Soviet citizens, making them receptive to fundamental changes in society.

Many generations of Soviet people were raised on the ideological principles of humanism and solidarity between nations, goodness and morality, popular sovereignty, and justice. Regardless of the actual policies pursued by the Communist Party, these values were preached by it and formed the ideological framework of the entire Communist ideology. Decades of socialist propaganda significantly increased the level of political literacy among Soviet citizens and created a large mass of actively thinking people. The citizens of the USSR and Soviet Armenia were familiar with such democratic concepts as the right of nations to self-determination, freedom of speech and religion, the formation of governing bodies through free elections, the accountability of elected representatives to the people, and others.

In the everyday consciousness of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, there is a latent universal value-idea: the idea of labor as the provider of well-being. The recognition of the value of labor is not necessarily linked to egalitarianism. For example, between 1989 and 1991, distributive orientations were characterized as follows: first place was held by the "opportunity to realize one's abilities," and second place by the "dependence of well-being solely on labor contribution," the results of which are in demand by society (Aganbegyan 1988). This everyday perception of the value of labor and earned prosperity closely aligns with the idea of entrepreneurship based on private property within a functioning market economy featuring diverse types of labor activity.

Another aspect involves the abstract notions of "socialist legality" and "socialist law" that had settled in the collective consciousness (Barrett 2021; Lukina 2021; Pomeranz 2021). During the years of "Perestroika", these were overlaid with equally abstract liberal interpretations of law and legality. The result of this superposition was the rejection of the Communist power hierarchy as illegal viewed as a force that had usurped the rights of the majority and secretly redistributed the country's wealth in its own interests. Thus, the slogan of fighting the "privileges of the party nomenclature" became one of the most popular under M.S. Gorbachev. Originally a slogan intended to "purify" socialism and bring it in line with its original ideals, it was gradually turned against the system itself (McNair 2006). By eliminating social division and instilling universal principles of law and legality in the mass consciousness albeit in a truncated Soviet-socialist interpretation the socialist state prepared its own downfall by placing itself outside the scope of those very principles.

In essence, Soviet citizens were ideologically capable of initiating national and liberal-democratic transformations in their republics and seeing them through to their

logical conclusion. It was Soviet citizens who carried out a real revolution in Armenia in 1988, directing the Armenian people to a national liberation struggle for freedom and independence. They were undoubtedly aided by the "political tempering" and "political savvy" formed during the Soviet era. These qualities helped the citizens of Soviet Armenia apply civilized, democratic forms of struggle for power, demonstrate political restraint and awareness in organizing unprecedented mass movements, and utilize all existing political institutions of the socialist state to achieve their goals.

In short, Soviet citizens, being ideologically prepared, were distinguished by a deep understanding of political processes and the essence of the current political situation. Moreover, this same trait was inherent in many political leaders of the upper and middle tiers, which, combined with the mood of the masses, ultimately made it possible to avoid riots, deep social upheavals, and other cataclysms in the country.

Thus, socialist ideology, with its own understanding of democratic principles, prepared the citizens of the former Soviet republics to understand the Western interpretation of a democratic political regime. Meanwhile, the actual policies carried out by the Communist Party which largely ran contrary to the preached principles only hastened the end of the Soviet system. The sense of liberation and free-thinking that struggled so hard to emerge was, one way or another, primarily directed toward the dismantling of the old System and the construction of a new one (Palacios Cuéllar 2024).

Mental characteristics of the Armenian nation in the process of democratic construction

At present, Armenian society like many countries undergoing a transition to democracy is increasingly faced with the problem of defining the ideological vector of its social development (Avdaliani 2022). Directing this vital factor toward the establishment of constructivism, social consolidation, and the strengthening of statehood can be considered one of the priority tasks facing Armenia today.

In this regard, the prevailing mentality in Armenian society acquires particular relevance. It becomes an important prerequisite for the positive perception of democratic transformations in Armenia. Mentality, as a collective-personal construct, represents that layer of social and individual consciousness that exhibits resistance to spiritual values, deep-seated axiological attitudes, skills, latent habits, and long-term stereotypes that form the basis of behavior, lifestyle, and the conscious perception of reality (Hermanto and Zuroff 2016; Tulenkov et al. 2021). Mentality lies at the foundation of rationally constructed and logically interpreted concepts, theories, and ideological systems. Examining the mental characteristics of a social group allows one to penetrate the "hidden" layer of public consciousness that more objectively reproduces the spirit of an era (Bieńkowska and Sikorski 2024). It reveals a slice of reality images, representations, perceptions hidden behind ideology, which in most cases remains unchanged even when one dominant ideology is replaced by another (Travers 1995).

In the political sphere, mentality is linked to experience and daily life. It includes perceptions of political reality, value-based political orientations (both conscious and unconscious), political attitudes, and spontaneous predispositions to react in a specific

way to political situations, processes, and the functioning of political institutions (Schmitt 1996).

The Armenian mentality possesses traits inherent to socialist, liberal, and conservative value systems alike. Take, for instance, the traits of Armenian national psychology recognized by many other nationalities: initiative, resourcefulness, entrepreneurship, the desire to change one's immediate environment in accordance with one's aspirations, and the ability to adapt to the existing environment. According to the Armenian sociologist G. Poghosyan, this complex of characteristics constitutes the content of so-called "Armenian resilience" (Poghosyan 2003). On one hand, there is a pronounced individualism and a personal interpretation of current events; on the other, there is devotion to family and friends, a sense of responsibility for one's social group, and a desire to subordinate private interests to common group interests. This circumstance is largely explained by the fact that individualism has historically taken root in the political consciousness of Armenians, helping many of them survive under the conditions of exploitation by foreign invaders.

Naturally, these traits bring the Armenian mentality closer to the liberal value system. However, this cannot be termed the germ of liberal individualism in its classical sense. Rather, it is a "collective individualism" centered on the primary unit of society the family and the extended kin group associated with it. Ultimately, all efforts of family members were directed toward creating sustainable living conditions for this unit. Manifestations of individualism were linked, first and foremost, to the resilience of a small collective: the family and the kin. The institution of blood-kinship ties acquired great significance in organizing the internal life of the Armenian people due to the geographical fragmentation of the territory, the lack of a unified economic and political space, and the small ethnic population size.

To this, one may add that for centuries, the primary form of Armenian life was the peasant commune. It represented a typical Eastern commune, similar in many ways to the Russian "obshchina". However, while the Russian village featured a dual social structure of "family--commune" where the commune's authority outweighed that of the family, the Armenian structure differed. According to S. Lurye, for Armenians, the authority of the family was more significant than for Russians, and a blood-kinship group ("azg" in Armenian) stood between the family and the commune. This drew the Armenian commune closer to those of other peoples of the Near and Middle East (Lurye 1997). Throughout a long historical period under foreign rule, all Armenian efforts were directed toward preserving the family and the ancestral lineage as a whole. Generally speaking, the cult of the family remains a priority in the Armenian mentality. The years of Soviet power not only failed to eliminate this psychological makeup but reinforced the family ideal, recognizing its role in the development of society.

Modern development is impossible without the image of a free citizen one capable of becoming an actor in the political process and reasonably balancing freedom with responsibility (Doğan 2022). The "will without responsibility" a characteristic trait historically noted in Armenia is receding into the past, giving way to legal consciousness. An active, creative personality is a necessary condition for political development: an individual for whom the striving for freedom and liberation is accompanied by an increase in the efficiency and accountability of political power.

Ultimately, this allows for the creation of a state capable of providing people the freedom to develop their abilities and potential (Harutyunyan 2017).

In Armenia, interpretations of liberalism differ from the standard approaches found in the West. Discussing the liberal orientations of citizens, some political scientists argue that these orientations are based not on "objective" economic factors, but on spiritual and cultural ones; they suggest that the prospect of establishing a liberal-democratic order in Armenia cannot be linked solely to the development of a property-owning class. Nevertheless, many researchers believe that "socio-liberal" and "economically-liberal" trends have become a reality in mass political consciousness and play a definite political role.

Sociological research on the problems of liberal values in the mass political consciousness of Armenians indicates that a significant portion of the population holds a strongly positive attitude toward many of them. These include commitment to the principles of religious, ideological, and political tolerance, the intrinsic value of human life, the obligatory fulfillment of laws, the inviolability of property, defining the strength of the state through the welfare of its citizens, respect for human rights and freedoms, protection of personal honor and dignity, and the need for freedom (Ghulyan 2021). Sometimes, Armenian citizens perceive the primary tasks facing society to be precisely the problems of creating a competitive economy, ensuring individual freedom and equality, separating the functions of the branches of power, and many other issues related to the socio-economic and political development of Armenia.

It should also be noted that liberal values are interpreted quite differently by various groups of Armenian society. There has been and remains a consensus in society regarding liberal ideas, but there is no unity in their interpretation. The real divide occurs not in relation to different understandings of freedom and human rights, but in relation to the practical activities of various political forces when they are in power. People are concerned not with the type of state, but with the character of its relationship with society and the individual. The modern citizen of Armenia wants to live in a country where the state is sufficiently strong and authoritative due to the prosperity of its citizens, rather than in spite of it.

The historical past of Armenians is rich with attempts to radically change the fate of the people. Therefore, the radicalism that occasionally "slips" into the Armenian mentality brings it closer to the essentially revolutionary value systems of liberalism and socialism (Iskandaryan 2018). However, one must also consider the fact that practically all attempts to solve the problem of creating one's own state by force failed for hundreds of years (Melkonyan 1993). In the national mentality of Armenians, a desire to ease one's fate within the existing frameworks of foreign rule and not to go head-on against the superior forces of the enemy which threatened to result in even greater hardships for the people began to prevail.

The need for the radical implementation of democratic and liberal values in Armenian society manifested at the turn of the 1980s--1990s specifically as a result of the "Perestroika" policy conducted in the USSR. During this period, democracy was viewed by Armenian citizens primarily as a means for the implementation of one of its fundamental principles the right of nations to self-determination (Rindlisbacher 2024).

Subsequently, the popular wave raised by the Armenian National Movement (ANM) was directed at breaking the old Soviet management mechanism (Astourian 2000–2001). During this time, the formation and subsequent institutionalization of a number of democratic values took place. These are, first and foremost, those elements of democracy that did not exist before and which developed in post-Soviet Armenia: the real electability of state power bodies, freedom of speech and the press, freedom of movement (including freedom to travel abroad), freedom of entrepreneurship, and others.

At the same time, a significant portion of Armenian citizens across various age groups is, to one degree or another, a supporter of a "strong hand" regime. This attitude toward power structures was developed over years during the Soviet era (Martyniuk et al. 2025) and can be categorized as an element "introduced" into the political mentality of the Armenian people from the outside (Ohanyan 2021). Although, on the other hand, history is replete with instances of "kind" and "sensitive" treatment by many foreign rulers toward the needs of the Armenian people, which instilled in their consciousness a belief in the existence of an enlightened authority. Therefore, by the aforementioned regime, Armenians do not mean an authoritarian regime in the sense generally accepted in political science, but rather the authoritarian regulation of social relations and the protection of the individual from tyranny and lawlessness while maintaining political freedoms. At the same time, the potential support by a significant portion of citizens for a "strong hand regime" is a very dangerous symptom, which could be followed by real support for a political movement or a political party directly oriented toward the establishment of such a strict regime.

There is a certain image of state power present in the Armenian political mentality. The people do not so much entrust the authorities with the performance of specific functions as they hand over their destiny to them. On this basis, paternalism has established itself as a value and a basic orientation in the Armenian political mentality. However, this is a paternalism with a national-patriotic component, aimed at unifying the entire nation around a state that is devoted to it and cares for it. State guardianship is viewed as a "blessing" and an obligation of the authorities to society (the people). At the same time, by engendering dependency mindsets in society and accustoming it to passive waiting, paternalism weakens the independent energy of private individuals. As an ideal of state power, the Armenian political mentality sanctions, first and foremost, a power that is individual (accountable) and fair (moral). This "image" of power is oriented toward a moderate authoritarian ideal, which is always combined with a collective democratism of an ochlocratic nature (Paturyan 2021).

Because of this, a dual attitude toward authority has formed in the political mentality. On one hand, there is a belief in authority, often endowed with charismatic traits, and a corresponding expectation of a "miracle" from it, accompanied by a constant readiness to submit to authority. On the other hand, there is the conviction that authority itself must serve the "common cause" and the national-state idea. Today, the prevailing idea is the establishment of equality and social justice within Armenian society. Hence the striving of the political mentality to ensure control over the activities of power by constantly correlating it with the "common cause."

Connected to this is another characteristic trait of the Armenian political mentality the identification of the state with a large family. From this essentially Confucian idea stems an understanding of national unity as spiritual kinship, as well as a desire to replace soulless legal norms with moral values and ethical standards. From this perspective, the nature of the relationship between the state and the individual in Armenia unlike, for instance, in Western societies is determined not so much by an agreement between subjects and state power to comply with laws, but by a silent "collusion" regarding impunity when they are violated (Sarvazyan 2023).

A characteristic of the Armenian political mentality is a distrust of "alien" state structures, whose words very often diverged from their deeds. Moreover, this distrust also manifested toward representatives of their own ethnos who had "merged" with this foreign state and, together with it, became an unbearable burden for Armenians. In the eyes of the common population, representatives of this stratum of the Armenian community very often appeared as "traitors" and "bloodsuckers" for whom power was a means to oppress their own people. This explains the ambiguous attitude of citizens in modern Armenia not only toward the bureaucratic-official apparatus as a whole but also toward certain representatives of state power.

In general, on one hand, the mentality of the Armenian people is fundamentally oriented toward liberal values. The qualities corresponding to them helped the Armenian people to coexist successfully in situations tragic for their statehood. On the other hand, the problem of preserving national identity was solved mainly through the preservation of centuries-old traditions, way of life, and moral-ethical values passed from generation to generation, which brought the Armenian mentality closer to a conservative value system. What we see is a historically unique and distinctive synthesis at the level of national mentality of the principles of two competing ideological systems, conservatism and liberalism where a balanced and progressive development of the life of the Armenian people becomes possible. Therefore, in practical politics and ideological-political activity, success will accompany those forces that manage to harmoniously combine liberal and conservative principles in furthering the processes of democratization of Armenian society.

Conclusion and discussion

Thus, the socio-political and ideological-mental prerequisites for the positive perception of the liberal-democratic value system by Armenian citizens originated within the depths of the former Soviet society. This process unfolded in parallel with the Soviet leadership's gradual abandonment of totalitarian-dictatorial methods of exercising power and the search for effective economic management. Such a pursuit inevitably led to the necessity of observing elementary economic laws, which entered into serious contradiction with the dogmas of the dominant ideology. Consequently, an inconspicuous dismantling of the existing economic order took place.

Conditions were gradually created for the manifestation of creative and entrepreneurial activity and individual freedom, albeit in a highly truncated form. However, alongside the fairly high level of political consciousness and literacy among citizens, these circumstances created the necessary prerequisites for democratic transformations. Among the socio-political prerequisites, one should note the

emergence of a limited opportunity for Soviet citizens to have a private life, and their drive to earn the means for a prosperous life and to achieve the standard of living of industrially developed countries.

Through the extensive ideological and propaganda work carried out by Party bodies in the USSR and considering the genetic similarity between socialist and liberal approaches to social progress the consciousness of Soviet citizens received significant nourishment for the conceptual perception of the principles of coexistence in a democratic society. This explains the inspiration with which former citizens of the unified state, following its collapse, began to build the national states of their dreams with enthusiasm and knowledge of the fundamental principles of democratic functioning.

Many representatives of political science consider the existence of a certain level of development in a nation's mentality to be one of the main prerequisites for a successful democratic transit. Due to specific historical circumstances over the centuries, the Armenian people have been oriented toward the manifestation of individualism, creativity, initiative, and entrepreneurship in order to secure the necessary and sufficient conditions for their survival. The manifestation of individualism among representatives of the Armenian nation was only further strengthened within Soviet society. However, it must be remembered that conservative traits are also inherent to the Armenian mentality. It is precisely through these traits that the Armenian nation succeeded in preserving its uniqueness, spirituality, and identity under the dominance of other cultures. This combination of seemingly contradictory components (individualism and collectivism) forms the uniqueness of the Armenian mentality, which organically unites them in the aspiration to create a developed and strong democratic national state.

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Ethics Statement

The authors affirm that this research was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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