

THE IMPO(R)TENCE OF PUBLIC OPINION: AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC SURVEYS IN ARMENIA

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Abstract: *When discussing public opinion surveys there are several questions which need to be addressed and—if possible—answered. Some of these questions are: Does public opinion matter? And if so in what context or under what form of government do they matter? Do public opinion surveys represent the “real” opinion of the public or do they influence them? How are the survey questions framed and in what order have they been presented? How can the surveys measure the public’s knowledge of facts and information in a context where facts and opinions are indistinguishable?*

The aim of this paper is to try to answer some of those questions within Armenian context by examining several surveys done over the past 8 years on various issues ranging from domestic to foreign policy focusing more on the issue of Armenian Turkish relations and the issue of the border opening between the two countries.

JEL Classification: C42, D72, D73, D79

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What is the Border Issue?

Since its independence, Armenia's historical experiences and domestic politics played an important role in determining the Republic's relations with its western neighbor, Turkey. During the initial independent phase, the new Armenian leadership under President Levon Ter-Petrossian was very keen on establishing diplomatic relations with Turkey to counterbalance the Russian influence as well as to obtain an outlet towards the West for the infant Republic. However, despite the initiatives of the Armenian government to normalize relations with Turkey, several factors rendered their attempts futile.

The factors influencing the Armenian-Turkish relations are multifaceted. The reasons most commonly cited from either side include the following: Armenian demands and Turkish refusal for the recognition of the Armenians Genocide of 1915 by the Young Turks;¹ the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh and Turkish solidarity with Azerbaijan; pressures from nationalists in both countries demanding a tougher policy against their neighbor; and potential economic dependence of Armenia on Turkey, which among many Armenians is tantamount to political dependence. This section will examine the causes for the unimproved Armenian-Turkish relations by focusing on the development in the bilateral relations between the two, specifically within the context of the border opening.

The politics of nationalists

In 1991, Turkey, along with other countries, recognized Armenian independence and showed clear signs that it was willing to cooperate with the new Republic.² However, Ankara put forward a set of preconditions to normalize its relations with Yerevan and to establish diplomatic ties. The most important of these preconditions was that Armenia not only forgoes Genocide recognition demands from Turkey, but also pressures the Armenian diasporic communities to refrain from doing so.³

For his part, President Ter-Petrossian realized that land-locked Armenia required an outlet and that it needed to establish good relations with Turkey. He claimed that Turkey was not the same country as it was 70 years ago and that establishing good relations with Ankara would benefit Armenia not only economically but politically as well.⁴ A former senior advisor to Ter-Petrossian later wrote:

What if having normal diplomatic and economic relations with Turkey is in the interest of Armenia as well as of Karabakh? Would not improved Armeno-Turkish relations

¹ The recognition of the Genocide is closely associated with the territorial demands and reparations that Armenia might claim from Turkey if the latter recognizes its responsibility in the Genocide.

² When the Turkish ambassador to Moscow paid a visit to Armenia in 1991, he expressed optimism for the development of normal relations between his country and Armenia. See "Turkish Official Says Relations with Armenia 'Relatively Positive'," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB) (ME/1057/A)*, April 27, 1991.

³ See Gerard J. Libaridian, *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 268.

⁴ See Shireen Hunter, *Transcaucasia in Transition: Nation Building or a New Empire?* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994), 30.

weaken the Azerbaijani negotiating position, the rigidity of which is based on a policy of strangling the Armenian economy? Should the answer to these questions be positive... then the normalization of relations with Turkey would facilitate Armenia's role as a transit route of Caspian Sea hydrocarbon resources."⁵

This policy of establishing good relations with Turkey came under attack from many Armenian circles. The arguments that these groups, such as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), underscored was that Turkey remains a genocidal power, which if left unchecked would overrun Armenia and commit atrocities against the Armenian population.⁶ These fears were aggravated when the Turkish President Turgut Özal, while on a visit to Baku, threatened Armenia with a blockade if a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were not achieved.⁷ A year later, Ankara announced that it would stop the delivery of wheat or any other aid through its territory until the Armenian government complied with Ankara's demands.⁸ This signaled the closing of the border between the two countries, which remains in effect to this day.

During the 1990s, the entities opposing the opening of the border between Armenia and Turkey included large segments of the Armenian Diaspora, nationalist groups in both Armenia and Turkey, and, most importantly, Azerbaijan. While some of these groups have merely voiced their concerns about the border's opening, others have actively lobbied to prevent such an act by the Turkish government.

On the Armenian side the major groups opposing the opening of the border are the Diaspora and several political parties in Armenia.⁹ For their part, foreign policy makers and formulators in Armenia view Turkey as a regional power and a neighbor with which Armenia must establish diplomatic relations and engage in political and economic activities. In this formula, the burden of history is not forgotten, but is put on the backburner, or at least used as a card to exert pressure on Turkey. However, the main dilemma facing Armenia's foreign policy makers is how to balance Realpolitik with the wishes and demands of the Diaspora and those of the nationalists in Armenia, which contributes in no small degree to the various economic and social development plans and projects in the Republic.

The Realpolitik of opening the border

Similar to those who oppose the border opening, the "camp" supporting the opening includes a wide range of individuals and institutions in both Turkey and Armenia. From the Armenian side, supporters of opening the border cite two main reasons for their

⁵ Gerard J. Libaridian, *The Challenge of Statehood. Armenian Political Thinking Since Independence* (Blue Crane Books, 1999), 116.

⁶ Richard G. Hovannisian, "Historical Memory and Foreign Relations: The Armenian Perspective" in *The Legacy of History in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1994): 237-276.

⁷ See "Turkish President Calls Armenian Government 'Criminal'," *The Associated Press*, April 14, 1993.

⁸ See "Turkish Wheat Deliveries to Armenia Stopped," *BBC SWB (SU/1660/C1)*, April 12, 1993.

⁹ The Armenian Revolutionary Federation is the most visible and outspoken opponent to the border opening. Another party is the Democratic Party of Armenia, which on occasion has announced its concurrence with the views of the ARF on this issue.

conviction. The first is that such an act could help fuel Armenia's economy by lowering transport costs and creating new markets, although like the opposition, these groups also fail to provide a viable economic study on this issue. Secondly, Armenian politicians realize that the opening of the border with Turkey is a political victory not only for Armenia but also for the current Armenian leadership. Some of the more vocal supporters in Armenia for the border opening include both government representatives (such as Prime Minister Andranik Markarian and Defense Minister Serge Sargsian)¹⁰ and the opposition (among them the former Prime Minister and presidential candidate Vazgen Manukian).¹¹

The arguments for and against the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border vary from nationalist-based rejection to a more pragmatic acceptance. As mentioned above, since there has not been any full-range economic research conducted on this topic, assessing the economic benefits or losses of opening the border remain ambiguous at best. From a political perspective, however, the biggest loser of the border's opening would undoubtedly be Azerbaijan since its attempts to isolate Armenia and bring it to "submission" through blockade would fail. Moreover, the Azerbaijani side would face tremendous pressure to deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, while Armenia would be able to transcend the economic embargo. The completion of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline could also deprive Azerbaijan of its leverage against Turkey, and the lobbying by pro-Azerbaijani groups in Ankara would significantly lose power.

From the Armenian perspective, opening the border could be translated as a great diplomatic success and victory against Azerbaijan, one that could be applied on the domestic front. The political gains that the Armenian government will receive include propaganda that the policy of blockade has failed and that Armenia was victorious, consequently boosting President Kocharian's struggle with the Armenian opposition, which has accused him of maintaining a policy of isolation. Kocharian will prove his ability to end the country's isolation without concessions in such principled issues as Nagorno-Karabakh.

The border's opening could also have an impact on the process of Genocide recognition by Turkey. If the border between the two countries were opened, interaction between Armenians and Turks on the societal level would increase. In turn, this interaction could allow a rapprochement between the two nations once they start regarding each other as neighbors. Negative views that Turks have towards Armenians and vice-versa could diminish over a period of time and that could eventually prepare the ground for social pressure on the Turkish government from within the country to come to terms with its past and recognize the Genocide. Although the idea that the Turkish government might yield under pressure from social currents from within could be considered far-fetched, Turkish attempts to join the European Union could provide a fertile ground for society-government dynamics that shifts the situation in favor of society. The impact of Genocide recognition on Turkish national identity is an issue that is underestimated and is one of the reasons why Turkey is unwilling to take the

¹⁰ See for instance "Armenian Prime Minister: Opening of Armenian-Turkish Border Mutually Beneficial," *Economic News*, July 31, 2002, and "Armenian Defense Minister Gives Wide-Ranging Newspaper Interview," *Golos Armenii*, September 9, 2003.

¹¹ "Veteran Armenian Politician Supports Opening of Borders with Turkey," *ArmenPress*, August 4, 2003.

first step that could result in reexamining its own national and state identity. Repeated interaction between Armenia and Turkey—even in the border area—could help create a ripple effect, and Turkish society could eventually come to terms with its past and negotiate its identity not only vis-à-vis Armenia and Armenians but also by paving the way for the advancement of a liberal society in Turkey.

Geopolitically, the border opening could lessen Armenia's dependence on Russia and Georgia. The idea that relations with Turkey might be normal could eventually diminish the view that Armenia should rely on Russia to "protect" it from Turkey.¹² Similarly, the direct contact between Armenia and Turkey could make Georgia's role as a transit country less important and hence put the relations between Tbilisi and Yerevan on an equal footing. The détente between Turkey and Armenia could also result in Russia seeking to reassess its own relations with Armenia. Whereas currently Moscow feels that its control over Yerevan is almost unchallenged, once relations between Armenia and Turkey are normalized, the role of Russia as a protector of Armenia could diminish or at least decrease exponentially. This, in turn, could provide Armenia with more choices to conduct its foreign policy and allow a more European (but not necessarily a US) orientation of Yerevan using Turkey as a conduit.

However, if the border between Armenia and Turkey remains closed, Turkey might come under heavy pressure from the EU as well as international organizations to lift the blockade. These pressures could go hand in hand with international demands for Turkey to recognize the Genocide, as it might force the Turkish government to engage in negotiations with Armenia, a move which could be interpreted as a sign of weakness and consequently undermine Turkey's image as a reliable partner not only for Azerbaijan, but also for Ankara's Middle Eastern neighbors.

Similarly, in the absence of normal relations between Turkey and Armenia, compounded by the closed border, Armenia could have a tougher negotiation position on the international stage vis-à-vis Turkey. The continued border blockade is nothing but ammunition for Armenian diplomacy to keep the pressure high on Turkey and use the blockade as leverage against Turkey's integration into Europe. In the event that Armenia keeps calling for the opening of the border without any preconditions—as it does now—the diplomatic ball remains in Turkey's court, and all of Ankara's actions and statements remain under the spotlight.

Finally, the closed border could reflect badly on Turkey's European policy since Ankara's integration into the EU comes with a dowry, which is Europe's expansion into the Middle East and South Caucasus. Surrounded by cordial but not friendly neighbors, Turkey is in desperate need to promote itself as Europe's reliable partner in the region. Over the past several decades, the EU has been vigorously breaking down borders and barriers, and having a country such as Turkey—which creates, rather than transcends barriers—among its folds, seriously undermines Europe's ideology as a collection of states and nations operating beyond borders.

¹² It is worth mentioning here that the idea of reliance on the third force mentioned at the beginning of this paper has been re-emerging in Armenia. According to a survey done by a research center in Yerevan, researchers are finding the "law to exclude third force" a more feasible alternative than relying on Russia or the West. See "Armenia's National and International Security in the Next Decade," *Presentation of Expert and Public Poll Results*, Armenian Center for National and International Studies, Yerevan, Armenia, August 2004.

Understanding Public Opinion

When discussing public opinion, one of the first questions one needs to ask is whether public opinion is a force of enlightenment—indeed a necessary if not sufficient condition for sound foreign policy—as celebrated by the Wilsonians and other liberals? Or alternatively, are Hans Morgenthau and other of the realist school correct in describing public opinion as a barrier to thoughtful and coherent diplomacy, hindering efforts to promote national interests that transcend the moods and passions of the moment?¹³

The unhappy truth is that the prevailing public opinion has been destructively wrong at the critical junctures. The people have impressed a critical veto upon the judgments of informed and responsible officials. They have compelled the government, which usually knew what would have been wiser, or was necessary, or what was more expedient, to be too late with too little, or too long with too much, too pacifist in peace and too bellicose in war, too neutralist or appeasing in negotiations or too intransigent. Mass opinion has acquired mounting power in this [United States] country. It has shown itself to be a dangerous master of decision when the stakes are life and death.¹⁴

The reason behind this argument is that most citizens simply do not possess preformed attitudes at the level of specificity demanded in surveys. Rather they carry around in their heads a mix of only partially consistent ideas and considerations. When questioned, they call to mind a sample of ideas, including an over-sample of ideas made salient by the questionnaire and other recent events, and use them to choose among the options offered. But their choices do not, in most cases, reflect anything that can be described as true attitudes; rather, they reflect the thoughts that are most accessible in memory at the moment of response.¹⁵

One of the other issues when talking about public surveys to measure public opinion is the difference between close and open ended questions. The debate over close ended and open ended questions has long been settled with the close ended questions emerging as the overwhelming choice of survey researchers. A major reason for this decision was that fixed-format questions were easier to ask, code, and analyze than their free-format counterparts. Such pragmatic concerns are important, but the crucial issue should be whether open-ended questions provide important insights about public opinion.¹⁶ Proponents of open-ended questions have long claimed that this format taps concerns that are important to respondents' political calculations. Thus open-ended

¹³ For instance Hans Morgenthau argued that "The rational requirements of good foreign policy cannot from the outset count upon the support of a public opinion whose preferences are emotional rather than rational." See Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 558.

¹⁴ Walter Lippmann, *Essays in the Public Philosophy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1955), 20.

¹⁵ See John Zaller and Stanley Feldman, "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences," *American Journal of Political Science* 36, no. 3 (August 1992): 1-2.

¹⁶ John G. Geer, "Do Open-Ended Questions Measure 'Salient' Issues?" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 360-361.

questions allow respondents to “define [their] own issue space by naming issues that were salient (important) to [them].”¹⁷

The Case of Surveys in Armenia

To understand the importance of the issue of Armenian-Turkish relations and the border opening between the two countries, the examination of several surveys were conducted. These surveys include:

- “World Values Survey” conducted in 1997
- Armenian Sociological Association surveys (sponsored by USAID) conducted in 1999-2003.
- Armenian Center for National and International Studies (ACNIS) surveys conducted in 2004-2005.
- “Armenia National Voter Study” survey organized by International Republican Institute, Baltic Surveys Ltd. / The Gallup Organization, and Armenian Sociological Association conducted in 2006.

The examination of the above-mentioned surveys focused on several issues which are discussed in detail below.

Knowledge of “facts”

Within any context, a fact is something difficult to identify and as such the task of a surveyor becomes more difficult to measure the responses by the respondents since the surveyor has to know the background and the sources of information that a respondent uses. One respondent’s fact may not be the same as another one’s. This brings us to the question of what constitutes a “fact”? It is a fact that I have a teaching position at Florida State University since there are legal documents towards that end. However is it a fact that I teach there? Many students would concur that but others would disagree and say what I do there does not constitute teaching. To dig even further, is it a fact that I am a competent teacher? Probably not, for some students I might be but for others I might be on their “worst teacher” list. Hence it is safe to argue that fact are, by definition, correct, their truth is not open to interpretation. We know what they mean, and know they are true. We could also distinguish a fact from a consensus. If every student whom I have taught says that I was a mediocre teacher would that make it a fact? For an investigator to come to the same conclusion they have to interpret the evaluation forms and even there those forms are open to interpretation.

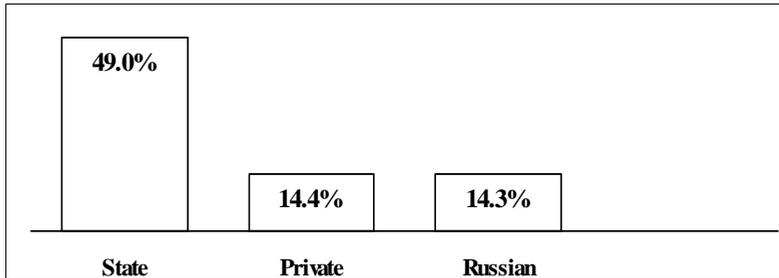
On a societal level and in functioning democracies, the democratic citizen is expected to be “well informed about political affairs. He is supposed to know what the issues are, ... what the relevant facts are, what alternatives are proposed, [and] what the likely consequences are.”¹⁸ However the scholar who made this assertion has himself rejected this standard as unrealistic. He argued that a vast amount of citizen ignorance is consistent with, and even required for, a well-functioning political system. If most citizens were well informed and highly involved in politics, the resulting conflict could cause serious instability.

¹⁷ David E. RePass, “Issue Salience and Party Choice,” *The American Political Science Review* 65, no. 2 (June 1971): 391.

¹⁸ Bernard Berelson et al, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 208.

From this perspective in the case of Armenia the separation of fact from fiction and propaganda is a daunting task. Thus according to one survey over 90 percent of those surveyed relied on Television as a source of information and to gather “facts” and of those almost half (49%) relied on state television (see chart 1).¹⁹ Arguably in any country the state sponsored or controlled media is never a reliable source of information and facts. Hence the first challenge of Armenia’s public—if they are interested—is to find alternative sources of information and rely more on private, independent news sources.

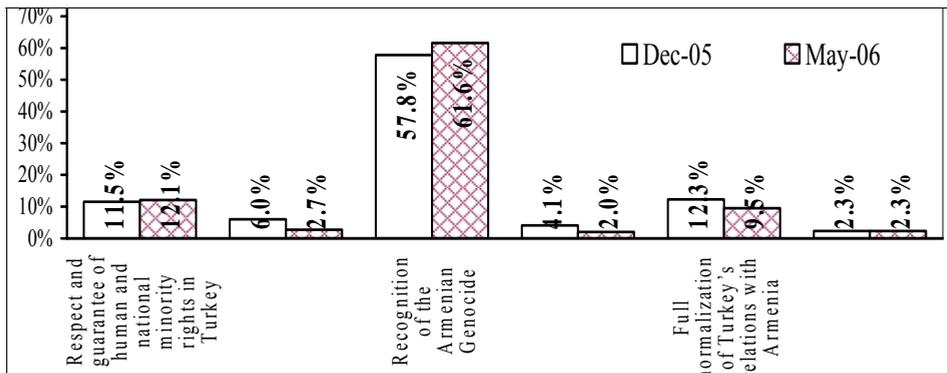
Chart 1. What TV Sources do you use?



Source: “Citizen Participation Survey” conducted by ASA in 2001.

Another indicator for the lack of factual based responses might be the discrepancy (sometimes as much as 50%) that respondents have given for the same questions over a short period of time. This is something that many social scientists have discussed.²⁰ It is also an issue that appears in SOME of the questions asked in the surveys conducted in Armenia (see chart 2).

Chart 2. What Requirements should be set for Turkey to Join the EU



Sources: “Public Opinion and Urgent Issues on Armenian Political Agenda,” conducted by ACNIS, December 2004; and “The Armenian Genocide: 90 Years and Waiting,” conducted by ACNIS, April 2005.

¹⁹ “Citizen Participation Survey” conducted by Armenian Sociological Association (ASA) in 2001.

²⁰ For instance one source argues that “If the same people are asked the same question in repeated interviews, only about half give the same answer.” See Zaller and Feldman, “A Simple Theory of the Survey Response”, 4.

Along the same lines, it is important though to make a distinction in the types of questions asked. Thus the above case is an example of an issue and the change of opinion about it. There are instances when people are asked about their support for one political party or another and depending on the activities of the parties, support has increased or decreased. Clearly this cannot be compared to the type of question given in the example above since political parties are more active and dynamic and their support varies based on the statements or actions that they make and which are evaluated by the public as “good” or “bad”. One—but not definitive—conclusion that can be made about the discrepancies is that respondents are not well informed or have not made up a concrete opinion about.

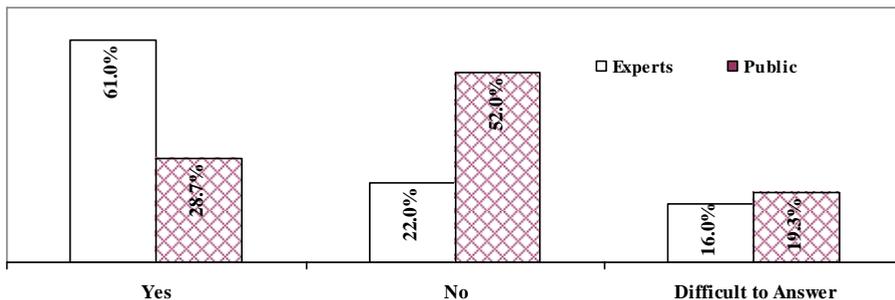
The gap between the public and the “elite”

One of the other issues that becomes apparent when examining the public surveys conducted in Armenia is the apparent gap that exists between the public and the experts in the country. During the research for this paper only one group (ACNIS) has actually made the distinction between the opinion of the public and those of experts. The category of “expert” used in these surveys include academics in various fields, people in the NGO sector, professionals in think-tanks, etc. As the three examples below show there is a considerable gap between what the public and what the experts thought about issues. While one explanation could be that the experts had more time to think about those issues yet another could be the sources that professionals use to develop an opinion on issues. Regardless, one thesis that can be brought forward is that.

large portions of an electorate simply do not have meaningful beliefs, even on issues that have formed the basis for intense political controversy among elites for substantial periods of time.²¹

The three examples below illustrate this point.

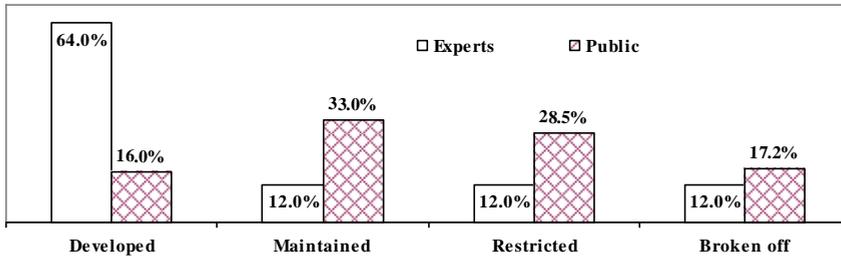
Chart 3. Are you in Favor of Turkey's Accession to the EU?



Source: “Armenia’s National and International Security in the Next Decade,” conducted by ACNIS, August 2004.

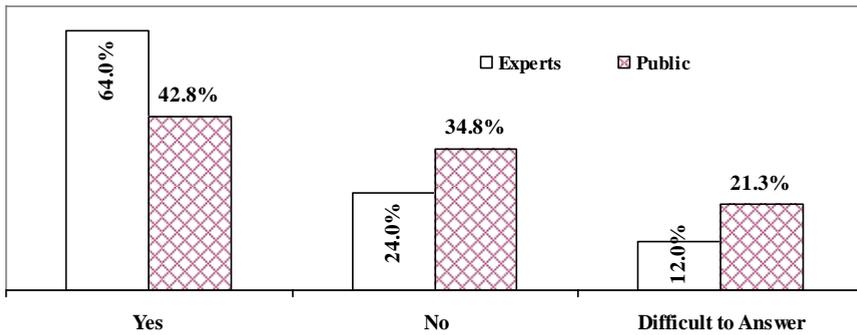
²¹ Phillip Converse, “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics,” in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter, (London, New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 245.

Chart 4. From the Viewpoint of Security, Armenia's Relations with Turkey Should be...(% of total)



Source: "Armenia's National and International Security in the Next Decade," conducted by ACNIS, August 2004.

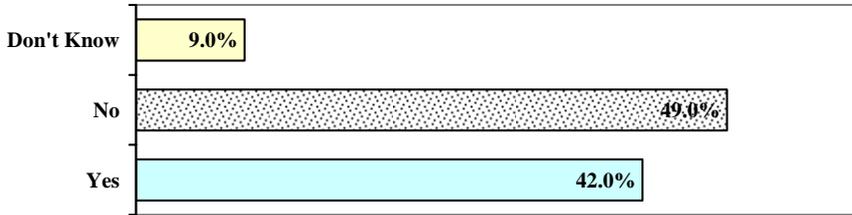
Chart 5. Is it Necessary Today to Open the Armenian-Turkish Border?



Source: "Armenia's National and International Security in the Next Decade," conducted by ACNIS, August 2004.

In the specific issue of relations with Turkey the gap between the experts and the public is quite wide. Thus 64% of the experts thought that relations with Turkey should develop vis-à-vis 16% of the public while the ratio of restricting relations was 12% for the experts and 28.5% for the public. Similarly when asked about the border opening almost two thirds of the experts thought that the border should be opened while almost 43% of the public thought that it should. Compared to the most recent survey on this issue conducted in 2006, the number of respondents wanting the border to open has remained more or less stable while those opposing it has increased by almost 50% (see chart 6).

Chart 6. Should the Government of Armenia agree to Open the Border for Trade, etc. with Turkey-Even if the Turkish Government does not Recognize the Genocide?



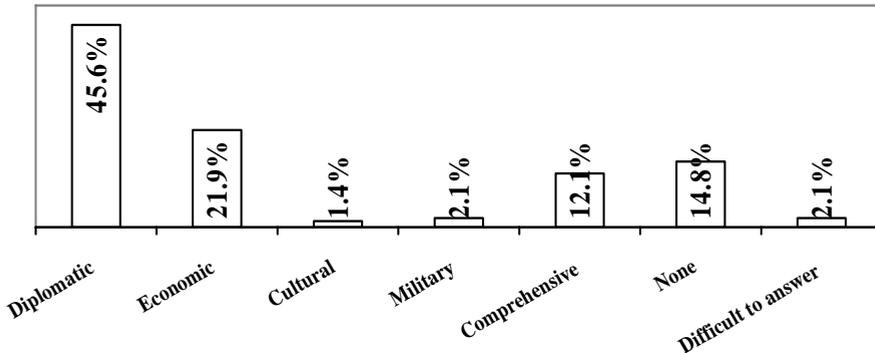
Source: "Armenia National Voter Study," conducted by International Republican Institute, Baltic Surveys Ltd./The Gallup Organization, and Armenian Sociological Association, May 2006.

Measuring or shaping opinion?

The literature on response effects makes it clear that survey questions do not simply *measure* public opinion. They also shape and channel it by the manner in which they frame issues, order the alternatives, and otherwise set the context of the questions. This has led researchers to a conclusion that seems indisputable but that is fundamentally at odds with the assumptions of most political scientist about the nature of political attitudes: namely, people do not merely *reveal* preexisting attitudes on surveys; to some considerable extent, people are using the questionnaire to decide what their attitudes are.²² For instance in the IRI survey above the way the question was phrased might have influenced the respondents. Thus the question asked was: Should the Government of Armenia agree to open the border for trade, *etc.* with Turkey – *even if the Turkish Government does not recognize the Genocide?* (*emphasis added*)

First of all one of major issues in this question is the definition of "etc." In previous surveys, when the respondents were asked about relations with Turkey they were given a wide range of options of the type of relations that respondents would have wanted to develop with Turkey. These options included: diplomatic, economic, cultural and military ties (see chart 7).

Chart 7. What Kind of Relations Should Armenia Establish with Turkey?

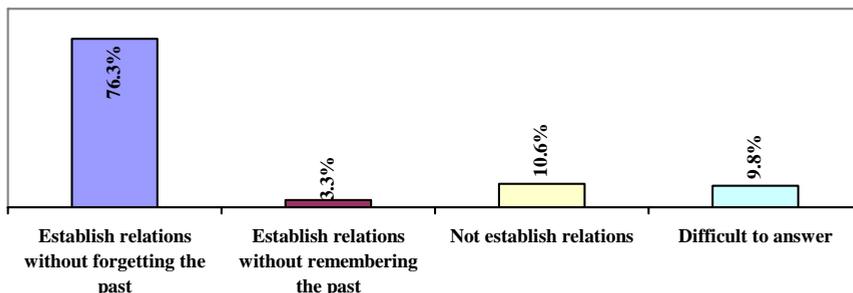


Source: "The Armenian Genocide: 90 Years and Waiting," conducted by ACNIS, April 2005.

²² See Bishop et al, "What Must My Interest in Politics Be If I Just Told You 'I Don't Know'?" *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 510-519.

Yet another issue with the IRI survey was the connection that the question made between the border opening and Genocide recognition by emphasizing the issue of Genocide recognition with the usage of “even if” (the second part of the sentence reads “*even if the Turkish Government does not recognize the Genocide?*”). Again this question is juxtaposed with another one asked in a previous survey where the questions was more detailed in terms of asking the conditions that Armenia should put forward have to establish relations with Turkey. (chart 8).

Chart 8. What Position should the Armenian Side Assume in Establishing Relations with Turkey?

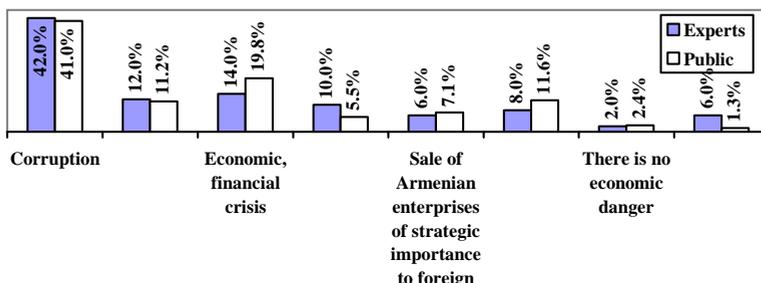


Source: “The Armenian Genocide: 90 Years and Waiting,” conducted by ACNIS, April 2005.

Dangers within and without

In any society the public is usually more informed and concerned with domestic issues than it is with foreign ones. Moreover domestic socio-economic concerns are usually higher on the interest agenda of people than regional or international “high” politics. In the case of Armenia one of the interesting trends appearing in at least one survey is the extent to which respondents view Armenia’s economic problems to be domestic rather than regional. Thus according to one survey on the issue of Armenia’s foreseeable economic problems in the next 5 years, over 40% of the respondents regarded corruption as the main impediment to develop the economy while outside threats (mainly from Turkey) was very low for the public’s perception—it ranked 10% for expert opinion. (see chart 9)

Chart 9. What is the Major Economic Danger that will Threaten Armenia in the next 5 years?



Source: “Armenia’s National and International Security in the Next Decade,” conducted by ACNIS, August 2004.

Center vs. periphery

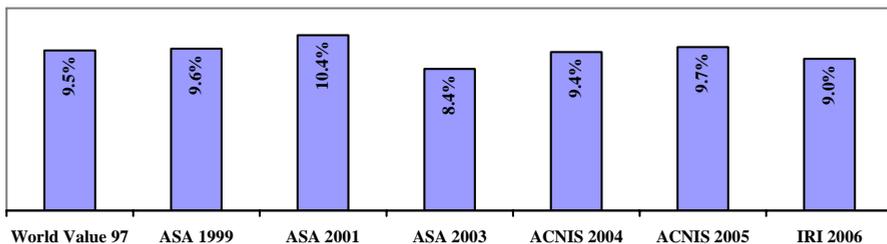
The Armenian-Turkish border issues has almost exclusively been addressed from the points of view of Ankara and Yerevan, with little or no regard as to the opinions of the population at either side of the border about the normalization of bilateral relations and the opening of the border. This creates tensions between cores and peripheries in Armenia and Turkey, resulting in dichotomies on how the local population in the center and the periphery perceive their counterparts across the border.

Studies on core-periphery relations focus on the uneven economic as well as spatial development in various regions. Thus, cores are generally more influenced by investments and hence develop more robust economic structures, while having a better transportation links to the outside world and by extension easier access to world markets. Consequently, Yerevan—which could easily be considered Armenia’s socio-political and geographical core—is more productive, more competitive and consequently more successful than its periphery regions, such as the northeast city of Gyumri, neighboring Turkey.

In order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the border issue, more attention should be given to this issue in the periphery—Gyumri and Shirak region—since that is the first line of contact with Turkey if and when the border opens.

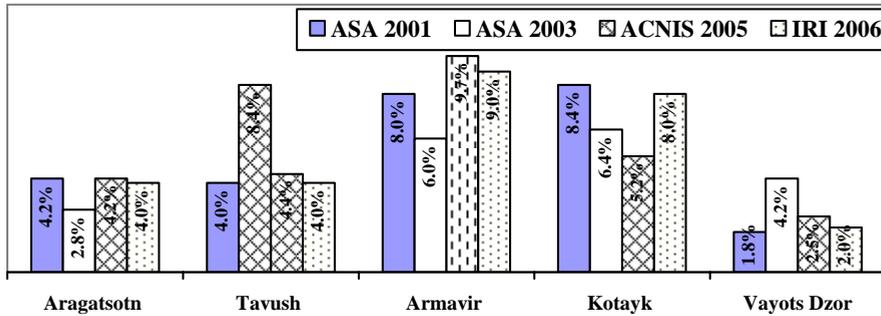
In almost all of the surveys conducted, respondents from the Shirak region constituted 8.4%-10.4% of the total respondents (see chart 10). While this percentage might correspond to the population census conducted in Armenia, it is diluted in the larger response pool. The problem with this is that people living in regions further from the border with Turkey, tend to have more negative views about the border opening and relations with Turkey.

Chart 10. Percentage of Respondents from Shirak Marz



Within the context of regional distribution, chart 11 shows an overall figure of the respondents based on their local affiliation. While the margin of difference is on average not more than 2%, there are cases where the difference sometimes gets as high as 4%.

Chart 11. Regional Distribution of Respondents

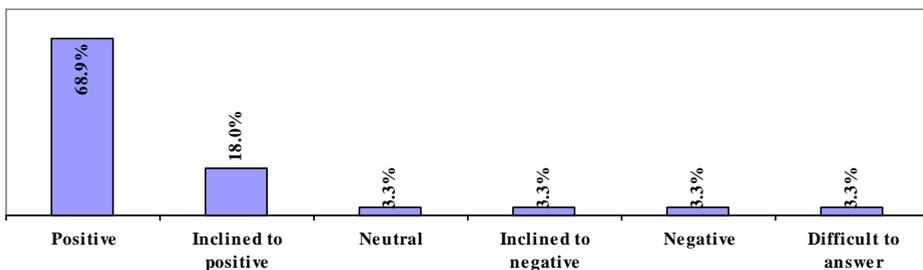


Views from the periphery

When the issue of border opening is viewed from one of the peripheries—specifically from Gyumri—huge difference can be observed between the views of that region and the overall national reaction to results. The only survey available for this research which looked at the Armenian-Turkish relations and the border issue from solely the Gyumri perspective was the one conducted by the AIRPG and titled “Rivals or Neighbors? The Future of the Armenian-Turkish Relations,” and was carried out in March-April 2006.

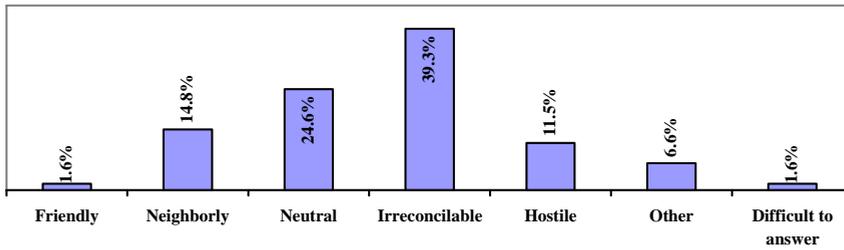
Some of the most interesting findings in this survey are the extent to which respondents in Gyumri feel more at ease with the border opening issue and do not feel threatened by Turkey. Thus almost 87% of respondents view the opening of Armenian-Turkish border positively (chart 12), even though the regional average of assessing the current relations between the two countries is not as positive—over 39% think that the current relations today are irreconcilable and a further 11.5% view it hostile. (chart 13)

Chart 12. What is your Attitude to Border Opening between Armenia and Turkey?



Source: “Rivals or Neighbors? The Future of the Armenian-Turkish Relations,” conducted by AIRPG, March-April 2006.

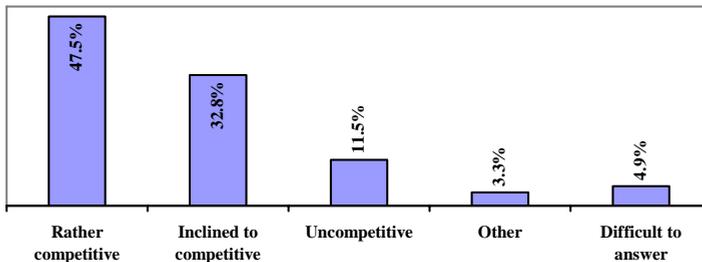
Chart 13. How Would you Describe Armenian-Turkish Relationships Today?



Source: “Rivals or Neighbors? The Future of the Armenian-Turkish Relations,” conducted by AIRPG, March-April 2006.

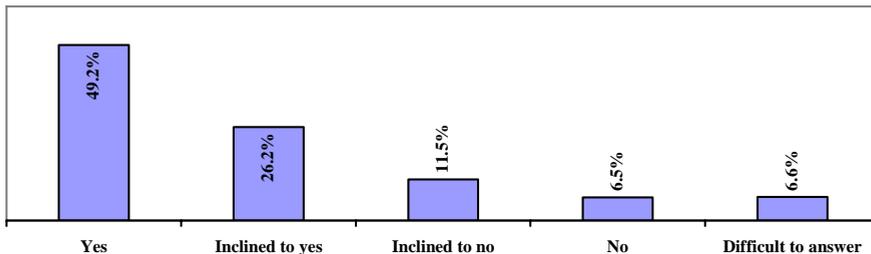
One explanation to the positive mood prevailing in Gyumri is that the respondents feel that in the event of the border opening, Armenian products—mostly agricultural—would be competitive vis-à-vis Turkish ones (chart 14) and that there would be increased volume of export from Armenia to Turkey (chart 15). Furthermore only a minute percentage (2%) of respondents considered that there will not be any cooperation between Gyumri and Kars in the event of border opening (see chart 16).

Chart 14. How Competitive are Agricultural Products of Armenian Producers to those of Turkish Producers?



Source: “Rivals or Neighbors? The Future of the Armenian-Turkish Relations,” conducted by AIRPG, March-April 2006.

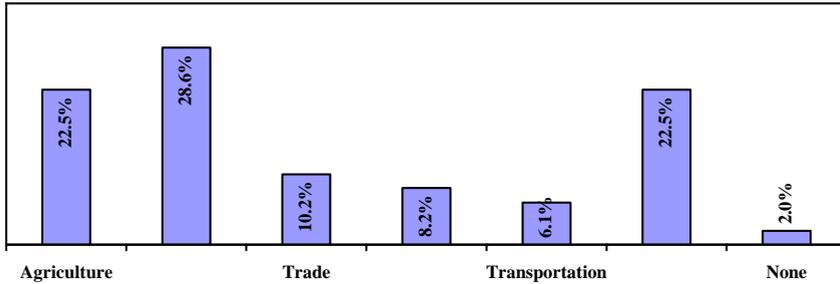
Chart 15. In Case of Border Opening, will the Export of Armenian Goods into Turkey Increase?



Source: “Rivals or Neighbors? The Future of the Armenian-Turkish Relations,” conducted by AIRPG, March-April 2006.

In the view of over a quarter of respondents, the major sphere of cooperation between Gyumri and Kars would be in tourism, while about another quarter view agricultural cooperation as the main sphere of interaction (chart 16).

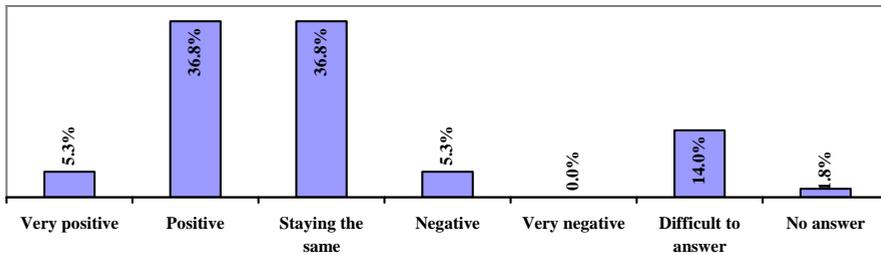
Chart 16. What are the Sectors of Potential Cooperation between Gyumri and Kars Regions?



Source: “Rivals or Neighbors? The Future of the Armenian-Turkish Relations,” conducted by AIRPG, March-April 2006.

Finally in terms of future outlook of the Armenian-Turkish relations while about 42% of the respondents viewed it with optimism, only 5% regarded those relations to develop negatively chart 17).

Chart 17. How do you See Armenian-Turkish Relationships in Future?



Source: “Rivals or Neighbors? The Future of the Armenian-Turkish Relations,” conducted by AIRPG, March-April 2006.