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CONSERVATIVE VALUES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS IN THE POPULATION OF KVEMO KARTLI

2021

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In the fall of 2020, shortly before the start of the Second Karabakh War, the Liberal Academy Tbilisi (LAT) commenced to study the identity, conservative values, and political views of the ethnic Georgian and ethnic Azerbaijani populations of Kvemo Kartli through a comprehensive study, which includes both quantitative and qualitative components. The former component was implemented in partnership with the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC Georgia). Subsequent events, especially the Karabakh war and the emergence of confrontation hotspots here and there in Kvemo Kartli,¹ which were crowned with the events of Dmanisi in May 2021,² confirmed the urgency and timeliness of this study. The study identified links between various events and processes, including those previously unknown to the public, as well as factors that have had a significant impact on process dynamics and help us predict their course in the future.

Kvemo Kartli was chosen to study these issues because it is one of the most diverse regions in terms of ethnic composition. According to the 2014 census, there are 423,986 people living in Kvemo Kartli.³ 51.3% of them are Georgians and 41.8% are Azerbaijanis.⁴ Accordingly, the share of Orthodox Christians is 51.3%, while that of Muslims is 43.0%.⁵ Because of this, the region provides an opportunity to explore the importance of ethnic and religious affiliation in terms of attitudes, political views, and foreign orientation between ethnic groups.

Methodology

Research data were collected and analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methodology. A face-to-face survey was conducted in Georgian and Azerbaijani languages with 972 people in Kvemo Kartli on October 8-28, 2020. 542 of them were ethnically Azerbaijani and 430 were Georgian. The data are representative of Kvemo Kartli in general, as well as the region's adult Azerbaijani and Georgian populations.

Statistical and analytical data processing was performed based on the obtained results. In parallel with the quantitative data analysis, focus group sessions and in-depth interviews were conducted with local activists and other influential people in the community. A total of 14 focus group sessions were held with the population of Kvemo Kartli, including eight

¹ Referred below to as the "Kvemo Kartli Region" or simply the "Region".

² On May 16-17, 2021, a confrontation that started in one of the grocery stores in Dmanisi turned into a mass riot. Due to the fact that the opposing parties belonged to different ethnic groups, this gave the color of ethnic confrontation and caused great unrest in both - Georgian and Azerbaijani - ethnic communities. These events will be discussed in more detail below. See also <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/420142>.

³ Geostat, Results of the 2014 Census (2020).

⁴ Here and below in "Azerbaijani" and "Georgian", unless otherwise indicated, we mean a citizen of Georgia, an ethnic Azerbaijani and an ethnic Georgian, respectively.

⁵ State Agency for Religious Affairs, Distribution of Population by Regions and Religious Belief, 2021. See: <https://religion.gov.ge/statmaps/#>.

sessions with ethnic Azerbaijanis and six sessions with Georgians. Sessions were held in Marneuli, Gardabani, Bolnisi and Dmanisi. Eight to ten individuals participated in each of them. In addition, 17 interviews were conducted with local civil society representatives and journalists.

Conservative values

When studying values, it is important to keep in mind that people often find it difficult to formulate their own views explicitly, although it is possible to better understand human attitudes based on situational questions related to different values. In a survey to measure the prevalence of conservative values in the population, Kvemo Kartli residents answered questions about parenting and parent-child relationships. Asking questions in the context of upbringing is one of the best ways to study human values, because it is in the process of upbringing that the value system is transmitted most consciously and purposefully.⁶ The survey questions were related to the distribution of heirdom among the sons/daughters, as well as the parent's participation in the son's/daughter's decisions and the stance regarding the perception of the shortcomings of the respondents' ethnicity.

Although the views of the Azerbaijani and Georgian populations of Kvemo Kartli differed on many issues, we find the most consistent differences in terms of values. For example, when it comes to distributing property among children, 75% of Georgians surveyed agree that heirdom should be divided equally between boys and girls, while only 48% of Azerbaijanis share the same view. Exactly the same number, 48%, think that sons should inherit a large part of the family property. Only 25% of Georgians think so. The views of the Azerbaijani population on this issue are in line with conservative values, since traditionally the property was mainly left to the sons. This is evidenced by official statistics, according to which most of the real estate owners in Georgia are men.⁷ This view is incompatible with the Georgian legislation, according to which both boys and girls have equal rights to inherit family property.

One of the most important components of conservative values is respect for the "authority" and its role in decision-making. The questions asked in the poll showed that the opinions of the interviewed Azerbaijanis tend to be conservative here as well. It is true that the majority of both Georgians (81%) and Azerbaijanis (56%) agree that the decisive word in choosing a profession belongs to the son/daughter, even if the parent thinks he/she is wrong, but Azerbaijanis are more likely (40%) than Georgians (17%) to say that the decisive

⁶ Tam, Kim-Pong, Sau-Lai Lee, Young-Hoon Kim, Yanmei Li, and Melody Manchi Chao. *Intersubjective Model of Value Transmission*. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 38, no. 8 (2012): 1041–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167212443896>.

⁷ Geostat, a pilot study on the collection of gender-differentiated data on asset ownership and entrepreneurship (2018) 54.

word in choosing a profession belongs to the parent because he/she knows better what will benefit his/her child in life.

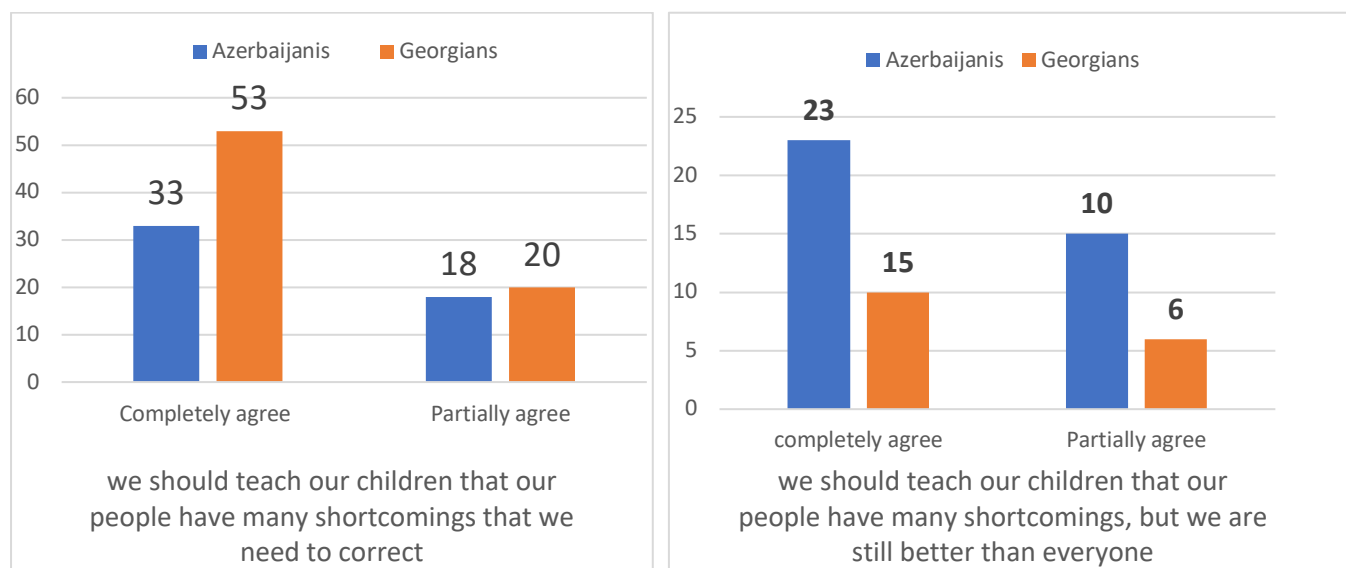
The same tendency is also indicated by the question of acceptance towards members of different religious groups. 61% of Azerbaijanis and 48% of Georgians say they do not want their child to marry someone of a different religion, even if he/she is a good person. Only 33% of Azerbaijanis and 49% of Georgians agree that it does not matter to them if their son/daughter marries a good person of a different religious. It should be noted that both Georgian and Azerbaijani women are more conservative in this regard, although this gender gap is greater among Azerbaijanis. At the same time, in the case of Georgians, young people, compared to people aged 54 or older, are slightly more likely to say that it does not matter to them whether their real or hypothetical sons/daughters marry someone of another religion, while in the case of Azerbaijanis, older people say more often than youth that it does not matter to them.

The Azerbaijani population still expresses more conservative views when it comes to issues related to divorce. 57% of them and only 22% of Georgians agree with the opinion that their son/daughter should stay together with his/her spouse, even if he/she does not feel happy, while the majority of Georgians (69%) think that in such cases divorce is a better option. Only 27% of Azerbaijanis agree with this view. Consequently, it is evident that Azerbaijanis are more likely to put social norms ahead of personal freedom and happiness. Like marriage to a person of a different religion, here also we encounter slight gender and age differences. Azerbaijani women are slightly more likely than men to say that they prefer their sons/daughters to keep a family. In Georgians there is no difference in this regard. However, in the case of age, both young Georgians and Azerbaijanis are more inclined to prefer divorce rather than elderly people.

The persistence of the same conservative values is indicated by the attitudes of the population towards the recognition and correction of the existing shortcomings. Although the majority of both Georgians and Azerbaijanis agree that we should teach our children that our people have many shortcomings that we need to correct, but Azerbaijanis more often say we should teach our children that our people have many shortcomings, but we are still better than everyone (see Figure 1). Interestingly, even in this case, only among Azerbaijanis, women, more often (43%) say that we should teach our children that we are still the best than men (21%). Also, only with Azerbaijanis do we find significant differences between age groups. Young Azerbaijanis aged 18-34 are more likely than people over the age of 54 to say that we must teach our children that it is necessary to correct our shortcomings.

Figure 1

Please tell us, which of these two opinions do you agree with? (%)



It should be noted that the opinion of the Georgian population of Kvemo Kartli on the described issues coincides with the results of other representative surveys of the Georgian population in other regions of the country and is less conservative than the Azerbaijani population of Kvemo Kartli.⁸ Of particular interest is the tendency that Azerbaijani women are considerably more conservative than Azerbaijani men. There may be many explanations for this, related to religion, cultural norms regarding the role of women in the family, or even the different sensitivities of Azerbaijani women and men in giving socially desirable answers during interviews.⁹ This makes it difficult to judge whether Azerbaijani women are really more conservative or there exists a cultural norm that expects such conservatism from women.

Conservatism Index

Since the questions described express the values of the population and capture differences between different groups, it is possible to calculate the Conservative Values Index. For this we selected five questions in which the respondents made a choice between two opposing

⁸ For example <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nj2018ge/INHEQUAL/>

⁹ One explanation for this may be related to the fact that women watch Turkish TV series more intensively, including historical TV series that propagate the fighting spirit of the Turks. In general, Turkish TV series, as the focus group sessions have shown, play a very big role in the life of the local population, especially women. However, these are only the subjective opinions of the study authors and require a separate focused study.

opinions. One of these two views is an expression of conservative values, while the other indicates to liberalism. When calculating the index, the person who gave the answer corresponding to the conservative value got 1 point, and in case of any other answer - 0 point (see Table 1). In the next step, the answers to these five questions were summed up in a single indicator, the value of which varies from 0 to 5, where 0 is the pole of liberal views and 5 is the conservative pole (that is, all 5 questions are answered in a conservative manner).

Table 1

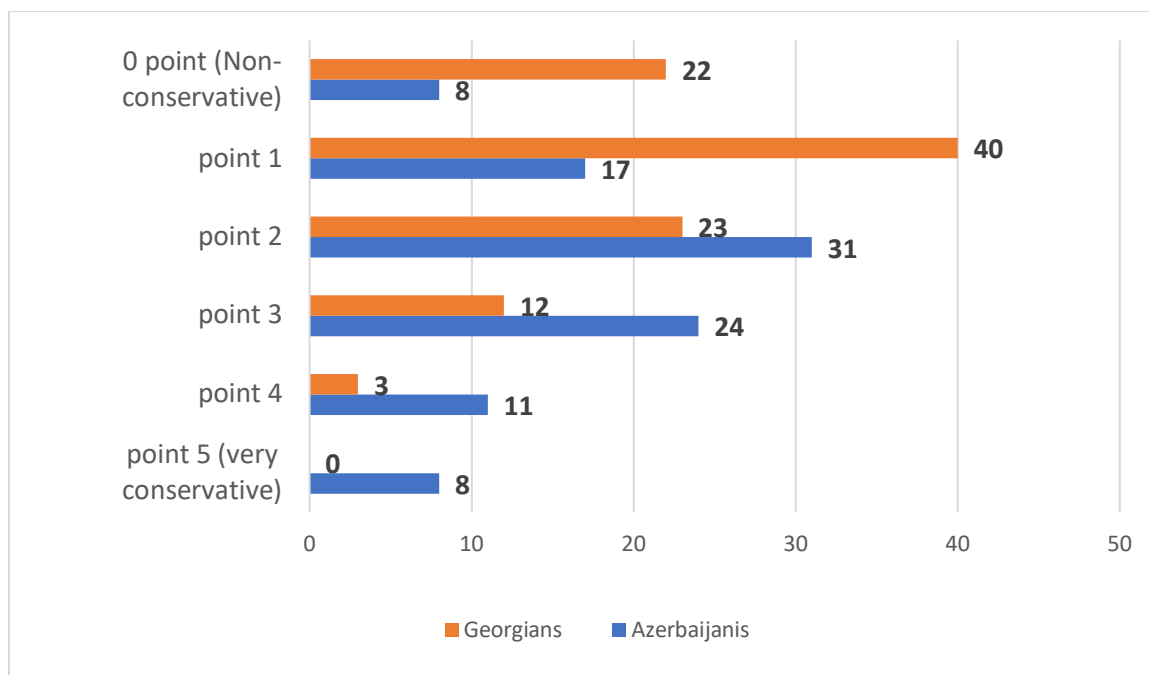
Question	Response	point
<p>Please tell us, which of these two opinions do you agree with?</p> <p>Opinion 1. We should teach our children that our people have many shortcomings, but we are still better than everyone.</p> <p>Opinion 2. We should teach our children that our people have many shortcomings that we need to correct.</p>	I fully agree with the first opinion / I partially agree with the first opinion	1
	I fully agree with the second opinion / I partially agree with the second opinion / I do not agree with either / I do not know / Refuse to answer	0
<p>Please tell us, which of these two opinions do you agree with?</p> <p>Opinion 1: Decisive word in choosing a profession belongs to the parent because he/she knows better what will benefit his/her child in life</p> <p>Opinion 2: Decisive word in choosing a profession belongs to the son/daughter, even if the parent thinks he/she is wrong.</p>	I fully agree with the first opinion / I partially agree with the first opinion	1
	I fully agree with the second opinion / I partially agree with the second opinion / I do not agree with either / I do not know / Refuse to answer	0
<p>Please tell us, which of these two opinions do you agree with?</p> <p>Opinion 1. I do not want my son/daughter to marry someone of a different religion, even if he/she is a good person.</p> <p>Opinion 2. It does not matter to me if my son/daughter marries a good person of a different religious.</p>	I fully agree with the first opinion / I partially agree with the first opinion	1
	I fully agree with the second opinion / I partially agree with the second opinion / I do not agree with either / I do not know / Refuse to answer	0

<p>Please tell us, which of these two opinions do you agree with?</p>	<p>I fully agree with the first opinion / I partially agree with the first opinion</p>	<p>1</p>
<p>Opinion 1: When distributing heirdom among children, a large part of property it should be left to the son.</p> <p>Opinion 2: When distributing heirdom among children, property should be divided equally between son and daughter.</p>	<p>I fully agree with the second opinion / I partially agree with the second opinion / I do not agree with either / I do not know / Refuse to answer</p>	<p>0</p>
<p>Please tell us, which of these two opinions do you agree with?</p>	<p>I fully agree with the first opinion / I partially agree with the first opinion</p>	<p>1</p>
<p>Opinion 1: I prefer my son/daughter to stay together with his/her spouse, even if he/she does not feel happy.</p> <p>Opinion 2: If my son/daughter does not feel happy in his/her own family, it is better to divorce.</p>	<p>I fully agree with the second opinion / I partially agree with the second opinion / I do not agree with either / I do not know / Refuse to answer</p>	<p>0</p>

The Conservative Values Index clearly shows that the Azerbaijani population is more conservative than the Georgian population (see Figure 2). The regression analysis reveals that the conservative values of the population in Kvemo Kartli, in addition to ethnicity, are related to gender, age, religion and economic status. In particular, women, the elderly, and people with better economic status are more conservative than men, young people, and relatively low-income people. Conservatism, however, is not related to the type of settlement (i.e. urban or rural), education level, or language skills.

Figure 2

Distribution of Conservative Value Index Frequencies (%)



Further analysis revealed that in the case of the Azerbaijani and Georgian populations, different factors are important in terms of conservative values. In particular, in the case of Azerbaijanis, women are more conservative than men, elderly people are slightly more conservative than young people, and the better the economic situation of a person, the higher the level of conservatism, but the type of settlement, level of education and knowledge of Georgian language do not matter in this regard. In the case of Georgians, only religion and education are important factors. In particular, Christians are more conservative than Georgians who follow Islam, and with increasing levels of education, conservative attitudes are declining slightly. The only factor that is related to conservative values both in the case of Azerbaijanis and Georgians is age.

2.3 Attitudes towards different ethnic groups, nativism

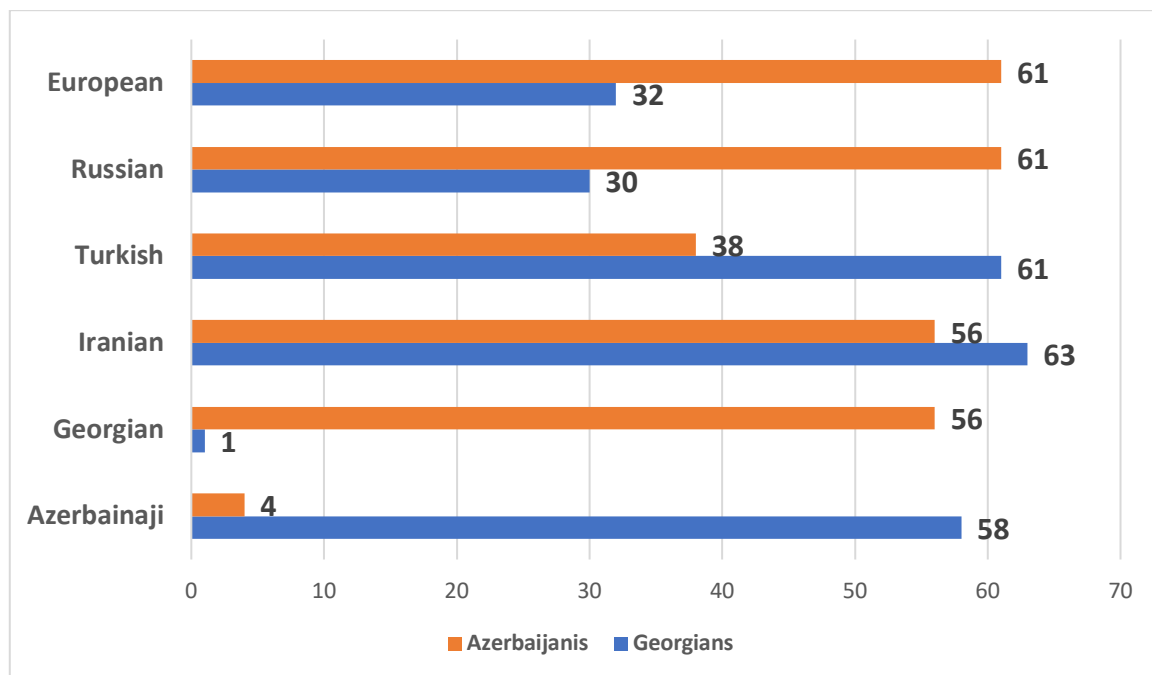
Discussing the views of the people of Kvemo Kartli on marrying a person of different nationality shows once again that religious and ethnic affiliation is of great importance for both Georgians and Azerbaijanis. As part of the research, we asked questions about marrying a person of different nationality and also about the right of foreigners to buy real estate in Georgia. The views expressed by the population on these issues helped us to identify the acceptance of different groups and persistence of nativist perceptions.

First of all, it should be noted that as in the case on issues related to the upbringing of the child and the dynamics of the parent-child relationship, in the attitudes about marriage with a person of different ethnic group, the Azerbaijanis and Georgians of Kvemo Kartli also differ significantly. The majority of Azerbaijanis say they will try to change their

son's/daughter's decision if he/she wants to marry a European (61%), a Russian (61%), an Iranian (56%) or a Georgian (56%). Young people, more often than the elderly, express such opinions, although the picture changes when talking about marrying a Turk. In such a case, only 38% of Azerbaijanis say they will try to change their son's/daughter's decision, while 57% say they will not do so (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Suppose you have a son/daughter who wants to marry a European / Russian / Turkish / Iranian / Georgian / Azerbaijani. Will you try to change his/her decision? "I will try to change his/her decision" (%)



The responses of Azerbaijanis to this question indicate that religion is important to them, although the ethnic factor is more salient. In particular, it is equally unacceptable for them marriage of their sons/daughters to a Muslim Iranian and a Christian Georgian (56% in both cases), but they are more loyal to the Turks. It turned out that Azerbaijanis who know Turkish say twice as often that they would not try to change their sons/daughters decisions if he/she decides to marry a Turk than those who do not speak Turkish. It should also be noted that the opinions of Azerbaijani women and men differ only in this as women are less likely (31%) to say that they will try to change their sons'/daughters' decision than men (47%). This underscores the importance of language and religion issues for Azerbaijani women.

As for the Georgians, religion seems to be the decisive factor here, because the most respondents are loyal towards the Russians, who are followed by a slight margin by the

Europeans. Azerbaijanis are almost as unacceptable to them as Turks and Iranians. In the case of Georgians, the level of knowledge of the Russian language is not related their attitude towards marrying a Russian by their sons/daughters.

We see a slightly different picture when we compare the responses of Georgians and Azerbaijanis to the questions related to the purchase of real estate in Georgia by aliens. The vast majority of Georgians, about 90%, say that Turks, Russians, Iranians and Europeans who want to live in Georgia should not be allowed to buy real estate here. This firm position of the Georgian population can be seen in other polls, but in this case we see that neither ethnicity nor religion matters to Georgians when it comes to buying real estate. It is equally unacceptable for them if the land is alienated to Europeans, Russians, Turks or Iranians.

In the surveyed Azerbaijani population we see drastically different picture. Share of those who oppose the alienation of land is about 40%, i.e. two times less than in Georgians. In addition, as with other similar issues, we find gender differences only in Azerbaijanis. In particular, women say almost twice as often that foreigners should have the right to buy real estate in Georgia. As the survey showed, ethnicity and religion are important factors for both communities when it comes to marriage of their sons/daughters to persons of another nationality, albeit to varying degrees. Ethnic factor is more important for Azerbaijanis and religious factor is more important in Georgians. The difference between the two communities is even more noticeable when it comes to alienating land. This is categorically unacceptable for Georgians, regardless of the ethnicity or religion of foreigner. The picture is radically different in Azerbaijanis, who view the issue of land sales much more loyally.

Perception of rights protection & threats

We see a slightly different picture when we talk about the protection of the rights of ethnic and religious minorities. In the survey, respondents assessed the extent to which the rights of representatives of different groups are protected in Georgia. It should be noted that the majority of Georgians and Azerbaijanis surveyed (70-80%) indicate that the rights of women, men, children, the elderly, people with disabilities and religious and ethnic minorities are partially or fully protected in Georgia. According to majority of respondents the only group whose rights are less protected is sexual minorities. 42% of Georgians and only 21% of Azerbaijanis say that their rights are partially or fully protected. At the same time, more than half of Azerbaijani respondents indicate that they do not know whether the rights of sexual minorities are protected in the country.

Table 2. To what extent are the rights of the following groups protected or not protected in Georgia? (%)

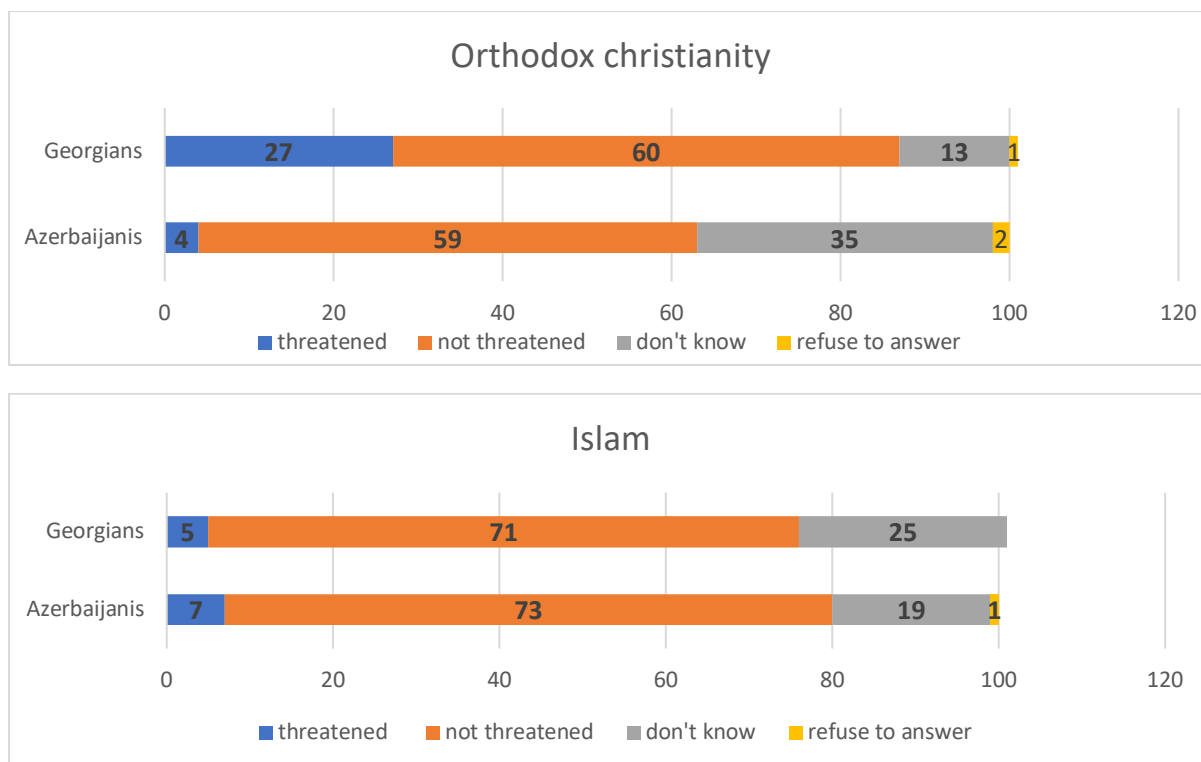
		Fully protected	Partially protected	Partially not protected	Not protected at all	Don't know	Refuse to answer
Women	Azer.	51	33	3	4	8	1
	Geo.	13	63	16	7	1	
Minors	Azer.	56	30	4	3	6	0
	Geo.	18	60	14	6	2	
Men	Azer.	52	31	3	6	8	1
	Geo.	20	58	14	6	2	
Elderly	Azer.	60	26	4	4	6	0
	Geo.	8	65	16	7	4	
Persons with disabilities	Azer.	55	25	5	5	10	0
	Geo.	9	64	16	7	4	
Relig. minorities	Azer.	38	32	8	8	12	1
	Geo.	18	56	9	5	11	
Ethnic minorities	Azer.	42	32	8	6	10	2
	Geo.	22	57	6	5	11	
Sexual minorities	Azer.	11	9	8	6	56	9
	Geo.	10	32	19	19	20	1

Most Georgians and Azerbaijanis in Kvemo Kartli say that Islam and Orthodoxy are not currently threatened in Georgia. However, in the case of Orthodoxy, Georgians are more likely to point to this threat, and a significant proportion of Azerbaijanis do not know whether Orthodoxy is in danger, although they strongly believe that Islam is not in danger (see Figure 4).

At the same time, about a third (30%) of the respondents think that minority rights were more protected during the Soviet era, while another third (33%) think that ethnic minority rights are now more protected. However, 23% do not know whether their rights were more protected now or in the Soviet times. Interestingly, in the case of both Georgians and Azerbaijanis, people over the age of 54 are more likely than young people to say that the rights of ethnic minorities in the USSR were more protected at the time.

Figure 4.

In your opinion, is Orthodoxy / Islam currently threatened in Georgia? (%)



The responses to other questions show that Georgians and Azerbaijanis understand the rights of religious minorities differently (although they nevertheless agree that rights are more protected than not protected). In particular, 92% of Azerbaijanis surveyed agree that Muslims in Georgia should have the opportunity to have mosques and participate in religious rituals, while only 62% of Georgians share the same view. Meanwhile, 29% of Georgians think that building mosques and performing Muslim religious rituals hamper consent and union among peoples in Georgia. This clearly indicates that a significant part of the Georgian population sees a threat in the exercise of certain rights by religious minorities. This attitude was even more evident in the focus groups. The fears of Georgians, on the one hand, are related to the demographics of Azerbaijanis, and on the other hand, as mentioned above, the perception that their economic situation is better than that of Georgians and this gap is widening.

Conclusion

The Kvemo Kartli Representative Survey showed that the Azerbaijani population of Kvemo Kartli is more likely to express conservative views on child-rearing and child-related issues.

The views of the Azerbaijani population are more often focused on restricting individual freedom and adhering to traditional social norms. In the case of Azerbaijanis, women, older and well-off people are more conservative than men, young people and those with poor economic situation. In the case of Georgians, people with basic, secondary or vocation education are more conservative than those with higher education.

The only issue in which Georgians are more conservative is the right of a alien to purchase real estate in Georgia. However, more openness on this issue among Azerbaijanis indicates a lack of identification with Georgian state rather than prevalence of liberal values.

It is noteworthy that the degree of conservatism is much higher in Azerbaijani women than in Azerbaijani men. Different indicators point to different degrees of this difference - in some cases it is relatively small, in others it can be said to be radical - but it is always consistent and statistically reliable. For example, the opinion "we should teach our children that our people have many shortcomings, but we are still better than everyone else" is agreed by twice as many Azerbaijani women (42%) than men (21%). This circumstance, on the one hand, necessitates a purposeful, focused study of the issue, and on the other hand, is a clear signal of action for the civil sector, relevant state bodies and international donor organizations.