EXPLORING SOCIAL PROTEST POTENTIAL IN MODERN ARMENIAN SOCIETY: INSTITUTIONAL TRUST AND SOCIAL-DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This study investigates the potential of protests in contemporary Armenian society. Considering the global rise of social protests evolving into significant social movements worldwide and the ongoing movements in Armenia, it is crucial to investigate the protest potential within modern Armenian society. The article is based on secondary data analyses gathered using representative sampling for Armenia and implementing face-to-face interviews conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center Armenia (CRRC). The article aims to understand the potential of protests and the factors influencing individuals' inclination toward protest activities. One of the article's main findings is that more than half of the respondents show a propensity for engaging in protest actions. Additionally, several key variables emerge as significant factors influencing this inclination. Sex, education, and marital status are critical factors influencing individuals' decisions to participate in anti-government protests. Furthermore, place of residence appears to be a determinant, with urban dwellers exhibiting a greater predisposition toward participation in anti-government protests compared to their rural counterparts. There are several reasons why rural inhabitants tend to participate less in protests. Geographical distance, and cultural peculiarities, such as differing social values and community dynamics, may lead to less participation. Additionally, distrust toward main state institutions contributes to the perception that individuals should participate in anti-government protests. Moreover, the study demonstrates that citizens' perceptions of state unfairness and institutional disregard are more significant drivers of potential protest activity than economic conditions.

Key words: *Armenia, social protest, social movement, social conflict, secondary analysis*

Introduction

In the last two decades, the world witnessed an explosion of various mass protests that often began as responses to specific grievances within particular groups, catalyzed by various factors such as political repression, economic inequality, or social injustice. Some of these protests, emerging as typical, calm street demonstration quickly evolved into powerful movements involving violence and clashes with authorities with a broader societal upheaval. According to Carnegie's Global Protest Tracker (Carnegie's Endowment for International Peace, 2024), last year 83 countries, from China and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Iraq and North Macedonia, faced major social protests growing into

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powerful social movements. A notable example of a single protest developing into a robust social movement is the Black Lives Matter movement which started as a protest action against the killing of George Floyd, a Black man, by a police officer in Minneapolis, in 2020. The protests rapidly grew and spread across the country transforming into a broader movement against systemic racism, police brutality, and social injustice. In the wake of these protests, several US cities proposed changes to police funding and practices, and the movement influenced a global conversation about race and justice. Another such case emerged in Georgia. The protests were sparked by a controversial draft law on "foreign agents" in 2023. This law was perceived as a direct threat to media freedom and civil society, drawing significant protest among a wide range of Georgians. The protests began as peaceful demonstrations outside the Parliament in Tbilisi, with citizens expressing their discontent over government actions. The protests grew and turned into larger gatherings, with thousands of people participating. Demonstrators called for the government to withdraw the proposed law, still, the government defended the law, leading to clashes between protesters and police. Following sustained pressure and international condemnation, the Georgian government eventually withdrew the proposed legislation.

Theoretical studies in sociology suggest that these singular protest demonstrations can and usually do progress into powerful social movements when individuals unite around the general goal of seeking a meaningful social change, shared values, beliefs, and identity. Social movements emerge as a type of collective action that arises in response to state policies of inequality and oppression due to unsatisfied social, political, economic, and cultural demands (Horn, 2013: 19). The existence of social movements is characteristic of democratic states and is a mechanism for ensuring civil participation. For ordinary citizens, joining social movements is the most attractive mode of political and social participation, one of the reasons for which is distrust of formal institutions (Azatyan, 2022: 107). Meanwhile, protests might be defined as a short-term collective action directed to the expression of certain demands without any further development. According to Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, social protest is a form of collective action in which a group of people publicly expresses its disagreement with policies or conditions (Tilly, Tarrow, 2015).

In contemporary Armenian society, public protests and movements are relatively new social phenomena but not unique; demonstrating mainly the same characteristics as the rest of the movements all over the world, they reflect collective sentiments in the society toward state power and the social-political changes it brings.

Over the last two decades, Armenian society has experienced a variety of protests and social movements addressing issues such as human rights, environmental concerns, and urban development. Some of these protest demonstrations successfully mobilized the public. They evolved into significant social movements that achieved their goals. In contrast, others couldn't mobilize a wide range of the public, remaining isolated as single protest actions on the streets, demonstrating their grievances and dissolving after a short period. The reasons behind the failure of the establishment of the movements are different in each case. Still, the main reason for the failure of social movements often lies in their inability to address their core objectives effectively. Social movements typically arise in response to societal changes that do not meet the needs of the community which happens

because of unrealized functions of the systems, mainly state structures, leading to the emergence of social causes. Thus, the main function of social movements is the compensation function that addresses gaps in the functioning of the state structures. In other words, social movements have a compensation function that is resolving issues raised because of inadequate functioning of state structures. However, if the public does not perceive a necessity for the realization of certain functions, protests may not evolve into a full-fledged movement because they couldn't mobilize enough of the public and pressure decision-makers to see the desired change. Instead, they may remain as temporary demonstrations that quickly dissolve. The mentioned movements were sparked by various issues, including rising electricity prices, pension reforms, mismanaged environmental concerns, and the neglect of the city's cultural heritage. Consequently, the primary grievances were directed at the governmental officials, who were perceived as the main ones responsible for the existing problematic situation. The condition was worsened by the fact that the officials were mainly seen as corrupt (Andreasyan, Derlugyan, 2015). The emergence of social movements in Armenia is informed by and articulates much broader concerns around corruption, the absence of rule of law, the lack of democracy, the rise of oligarchic capitalism, and the failure of formal political elites to address the concerns of ordinary Armenian citizens (Ishkanian, 2015). So, demonstrating insufficient efforts in solving public issues state officials take on themselves the whole burden of social grievances. From this point of view this varied experience of movements in modern Armenian society points to the relevance of the study and understanding the public's attitude and readiness to participate in anti-government protest actions. For several reasons, studying anti-government protests is essential for acknowledging a society's potential to engage in collective action. Firstly, studying the participants in protests - demographics, motivations, and organizational affiliations - provides insights into who is most likely to engage in collective action. Secondly, recognizing the factors that lead to mobilization can help identify the real triggers for society. Finally, examining anti-government protests is essential for diagnosing the "health" of society and its potential to influence policy and shape the future political landscape.

This is especially important in the current political situation in Armenia, where a decline of public sentiment towards the current authorities is present. Recently, the general picture of the political processes in Armenia is the low loyalty of the Armenian society to the country's political developments and the low level of trust in the party system (Manukyan, 2023: 7). Meanwhile, a new movement called the "Sacred Movement" led by Archbishop Bagrat Srbazan is starting to gain weight in the political landscape of Armenia and demand the resignation of the prime minister to foster a safer and fairer society[1]. This conflict situation can be described as a decline of trust toward state power and state institutions and the emergence of a new movement that has already gained enough power to collapse traffic in the capital city for several days due to organized demonstrations and rallies, urges to investigate the potential of social protest in modern Armenian society because the protest actions are evolving into structured

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[1] See Hetq, "The Prime Ministerial candidate should not be a member of a party or group", https://hetq.am/hy/article/166461 accessed 08.12.2024.

social movements illustrating disagreement with the state decision-makers and willingness to change the set agenda.

To sum up, this paper seeks to understand how various social, demographic, and institutional factors shape citizens' inclination towards antigovernment protest activities. To achieve this aim, the following objectives have been set:

1.   To examine the relationship between institutional trust and protest potential, focusing on citizens' trust in key state institutions.

2.   To analyze how socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education, etc., influence individuals' approval to participate in anti-government protests.

3.   To investigate the relationship between social attitudes toward one's own life and the state and the antigovernment protest potential.

The choice of variables from the Caucasus Barometer vast database was primarily driven by theoretical background and empirical insights gained from previous research. Institutional trust frequently serves as an important factor in facilitating antigovernment protest behavior. Social-demographic variables represent various social positions and interests that may impact protest participation. Meanwhile, attitudinal variables reflect perceptions that could provoke protest actions.

Methodology

The Caucasus Barometer surveys are an important source of data that examine various social, political, and economic issues in Armenia. Conducted by CRRC Armenia, the surveys provide insight into public opinion, trust, and perceptions of key societal processes. The most recent Caucasus Barometer survey was conducted between 2021 and 2022, with earlier datasets from 2015-2016 and 2019-2020 also used in this research due to the lack of available data from other sources for those years (CRRC Caucasus Barometer, 2022). The study focuses on various topics, including trust, social processes, and political views, making it a critical tool for understanding public sentiment and trends in Armenia.

The rigorous survey methodology ensures that the data collected is representative and accurate. It targets the adult population (18+) of Armenia, utilizing multi-level, cluster sampling to ensure diverse coverage across different demographics. The 2021-2022 survey sample size was 1,648 people, with representation across Yerevan (the capital), other urban settlements, and rural areas. This design helps to capture a broad spectrum of views from different regions of the country.

The data collection process is conducted through face-to-face interviews, a method that helps ensure more accurate responses, especially in regions where access to digital tools or telephone-based surveys may be limited. The margin of error for the survey is ±2.4%, which is typical for large-scale national surveys and ensures the reliability of the results. The consistent methodology across surveys makes it possible to compare trends over time and track changes in public opinion and perceptions on key issues.

Overall, the Caucasus Barometer surveys serve as an essential resource for understanding the social and political landscape of Armenia, providing valuable insights into public attitudes and the dynamics that shape the country's development.

The data were analyzed using the licensed version of SPSS 21. During analysis, in some cases, some variables (age, marital status, life satisfaction) were recoded and some (approval to participate in antigovernment protest) were presented as dummy variables to simplify the analysis. Additionally, some variables were analyzed through the Caucasus Barometer online data analysis (ODA) tool, which provided further insights into the data.

Exploring the potential of social protest: demographics

Before diving into the specifics of the data, it's important to examine the demographics, as they are pivotal in this research. Among the surveyed population, 45% were male and 55% were female. The largest age group among respondents was 50 and older (41%), followed by those aged 18 - 34 years old (32%), and 35 to 49 years (27%). Regarding education, 43% had secondary or lower education, almost one-third of respondents (28%) had secondary technical education and another one-third (29%) had higher than secondary education. The majority of the respondents self-evaluated their wealth as fair (72%), with smaller numbers rating themselves as "good," (16%), "poor," (7%), very poor (3%), and "very good" (2%). See Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics

Criteria	Percentage
Gender	
Male	45
Female	55
Age	
18-34	32
35-49	27
50+	41
Education	
Secondary or lower	43
Secondary technical	28
Higher than secondary	29
Economic status	
Very poor	3
Poor	7
Fair	72
Good	16
Very good	2

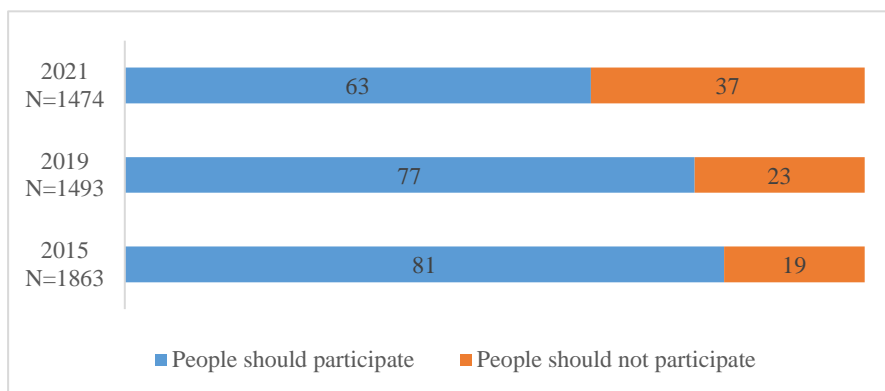*The potential of anti-government protests in Armenian society*

The purpose of this analysis is to understand how people in Armenia relate to participating in antigovernment demonstrations and what factors are associated with that decision, with the hypothesis testing that people tend to participate in antigovernment protest actions due to low trust toward state structures and institutions.

According to the research results, the data reflects a declining protest potential from 2015 to 2021, with a significant decrease in the percentage of individuals supporting

protests over time[2]. See Figure 1. The quantitative finding may have several explanations. Firstly, the devastating consequences of the war with Azerbaijan in 2020 resulted in psychological fatigue and trauma leading to resignation among the population, making them less likely to engage in protests. Besides, fear of instability in the country may also inhibit collective action. Secondly, the new powerful protests emerging right after Armenia's capitulation don't have any positive results. So, if people feel that protests are unlikely to lead to meaningful change, they may be less inclined to participate. Still, even in this case, more than half (63%) of respondents mention that people should join in antigovernment protest actions[3].

Figure 1

Should people participate in anti-government protests or not? %[4]

Research analysis indicates that there is a significant statistical association between the decision to participate or not in antigovernment action in 2021 and the gender of the respondents. Specifically, males are more likely to express readiness to participate in antigovernment actions than females. This phenomenon is noted by various researchers. Despite the increasing participation of women in various fields of social and political life, they remain less politically engaged than men in certain aspects (Dalton, 2008).

Table 2

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[2] The analysis doesn't include "don't know" and "refuse to answer" options. Also, those who disagreed with both answers were excluded by grouping them into the "Don't know" option for datasets 2021, 2019, and 2015.

[3] To be quite precise, the initial questions were formulated by The Caucasus Barometer in the following way: which of the following statements do you agree with? Statement 1: people should participate in protest actions against the government, as this shows the government that the people are in charge. Statement 2: people should not participate in protest actions against the government, as it threatens stability in our country. *Note:* The question was recoded as follows: 1. Participation in protests - Strongly agree 2. Participation in protests - Agree 3. Non-participation in protests - Agree 4. Non-participation in protests - Strongly agree 5. Agree with neither. Options 1 and 2 were grouped to "People should participate" 3 and 4 to "People should not participate", and 5 to DK. So, we follow the logic of the recoded version.

[4] The chart was created using the CRRC Caucasus Barometer ODA tool. See The Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2021, CB regional dataset, retrieved via ODA - http://www.caucasusbarometer.org/ on 01.09.2024.

Attitudes towards participating in anti-government protests disaggregated by gender, %, N=1474

Criteria	Should participate %	Should not participate %	Significance test
Male	66	34	X^2 **P<0.05, df=1**
Female	61	39	

Similarly, there is a significant association between whether to participate or not in antigovernment actions and respondents' educational level. Namely, those respondents who have a higher level of education are more likely to participate in the protests against the government than those without it.

Table 3

Attitudes towards participating in anti-government protests disaggregated by education level, %, N=1474

	Should participate %	Should not participate %	Significance test
Secondary or lower	60	40	
Secondary technical	62	38	X^2 **P<0.05, df=2**
Higher than secondary	69	31	

According to the analysis, the age of respondents weakly correlates with the decision-making to participate or not in the antigovernment protest (r=0.057, sig= 0.000). Taking into account the weakness of correlation and the crucial necessity to explore this further in future studies, still, some trends may be seen that younger respondents are more inclined to participate in antigovernment demonstrations than older respondents. This phenomenon, when young people show higher participation in political processes, is specific to Western societies. One explanation for the latter is that young people are more closely related to their peers, share the same identity, and are more willing to participate in collective action than adults or senior citizens who do not share the same level of identification with their peers (Trachtman et al., 2023: 1). This is especially relevant because modern definitions of social movements consider shared identity as a key characteristic. For example, such definitions can be seen in the works of famous sociologists Donatella Della Porte and Mario Diani. According to them, social movements involve conflict relations, where opponents are clearly defined, they operate through dense informal networks and share a particular identity (Della Porta, Diani, 2006: 20). Alberto Melucci also emphasizes the factor of identity, because the individual, being included in collective actions, "connects" to the various resources of the movement, through which at the same time he participates in the construction of both his own identity and that of the general (Melucci, 1988). This fact seems to reaffirm the importance of the identity factor in the study of social movements and public protest.

Interestingly, according to the quantitative data, there is no significant association between the decision to participate or not in the antigovernment protest actions and the economic situation of the household or respondent's employment status. The absence of an association between economic status and readiness to participate in non-governmental

protests might be explained due to various reasons. Firstly, the broader political and social context can significantly influence the readiness to participate in anti-government protests. In times of general political instability individuals from all economic backgrounds may feel compelled to participate due to the beliefs and values they share, for example, about environmental or urban causes. Secondly, protest participation is often influenced by peer influence. Individuals might be encouraged to join protests through friends and family, irrespective of their economic status. Finally, the type of social protest matters. Some protests are targeted at specific economic reforms for certain groups, for instance, the reduction of benefits for pregnant women, as it happened in Armenia in 2014, but due to public pressure, it was resolved in favor of pregnant women. This kind of movement generally attracts individuals from certain economic statuses. However, protests for other causes, such as environmental or urban heritage protection or human rights might involve diverse participation across different economic classes, making it a less influential factor in participation. So, this quantitative finding suggests that factors beyond economic position, such as political beliefs, social networks, personal values, or the broader context of antigovernment protest movements, play a more significant role in determining protest participation.

It is also interesting to observe the distribution of this question depending on the respondents' place of residence. Analysis indicated that there is a significant association between settlement type and agreement to participate in antigovernment protests (X2, P<0.05, df=2). According to test results, respondents living in the capital are more likely to agree with the statement to protest against the government than those of other urban and rural settlements. See Figure 2.
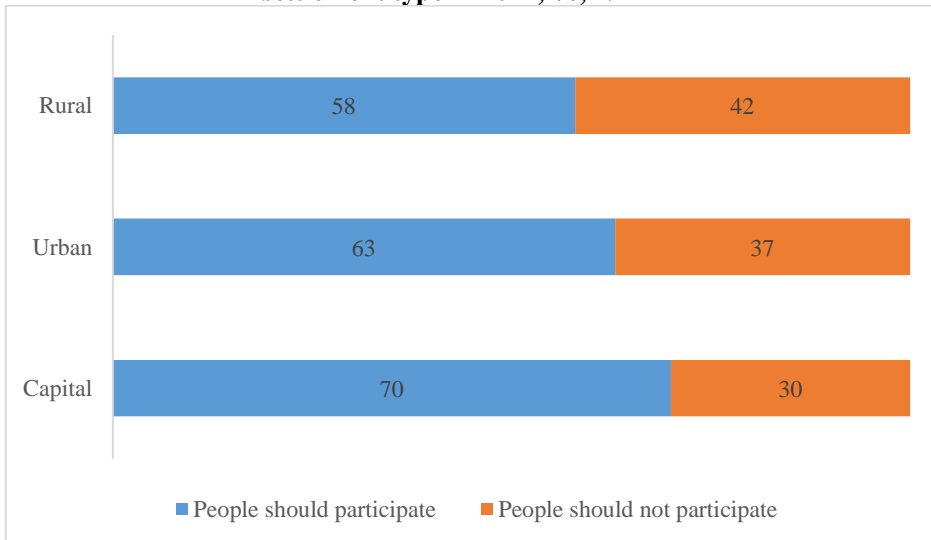
Taking common sense into account, it can be assumed that depending on the respondent's place of residence - the capital, a city, or a village - the person's attitude towards participating in antigovernment protests depends. It is interesting that if we look at the social movements that arose in Armenia in the last twenty years, then all of them arose in the capital itself, even if the zone of influence was in other regions of Armenia. One of the explanations for this phenomenon is that, first of all, the size of the population in the capital and the presence of various heterogeneous groups contain the greatest risks of dissatisfaction. Compared to other cities of the country, the capital city, being a place of accumulation of relatively advanced professionals, forms a larger mass of people with a critical mindset, from which the core of the protesters is formed and evolved to a movement. For the same reason, the capital also has more resources, thanks to which it is possible to form a social movement and maintain its existence than in regional cities or villages. Therefore, the conflicts that arise between the representatives of the state authority and the citizens in the capital have a greater chance of being manifested than, for example, in the regional cities. Besides, in rural areas, people often live farther from protest sites, and long travel times and limited transportation options can discourage individuals from raising their voices. Additionally, the physical distance may contribute to a sense of isolation from the broader social context, leading to less engagement overall.

However, an important question is why movements do not arise in other cities, which will aim not to prevent the planned changes, but to contribute to the desired social changes. One of the obstacles to the formation of a social movement in small towns is civic apathy, or, in other words, the lack of an active civic mass, as a result of which

citizens dissatisfied with a problem do not want to take any action due to mistrust, fear or simply indifference, preferring to show conformist behavior or look for alternative solutions to the problem. With a lack of active citizens and scarce resources in small towns, it is easier to suppress any civic initiative than in a large city. In small towns, relationships are personalized, the in-law-acquaintance-friend principle has a more significant impact on solving problems, because in community-type cities, individuals are much more dependent on each other than residents of large cities, where relationships between individuals are not personalized. Therefore, the mechanisms for solving social problems in small towns are different; they often involve the use of informal mechanisms. In this way, any civil uprising can be suppressed, because the uprising will be directed against an "acquaintance", which is impermissible from the point of view of community morality, or it will be solved by the same "acquaintance". Thus, in both cases, social protest and especially social movements become an ineffective solution to social problems for small community-type cities.

Figure 2

Attitudes towards participating in anti-government protests disaggregated by settlement type in 2021, %, N=1474
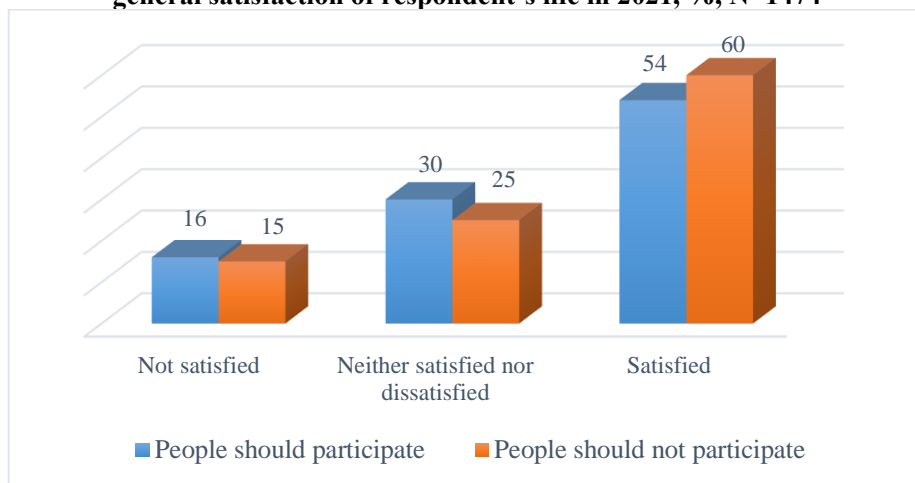

Interestingly, there is an association revealed between respondents' marital status and acceptance of participation in the anti-government protests. Namely, those respondents who are married are more likely to participate in the anti-government demonstrations than those who are single (have never been married, widowed, divorced or separated) **(X2, P<0.05, df=4).** The idea that married people might be more inclined to antigovernment protests compared to singles can be understood through several socio-psychological factors. Firstly, marriage is often associated with longer-term planning. Concerns about child care, housing policies, health insurance, safety and retirement policies may motivate married individuals to protest for policy changes that are not aligned with their long-term goals. Besides, married people tend to prioritize the quality of public services such as education and healthcare, and the overall economic climate that affects the stability of their households.

It is also interesting that the respondents' attitude towards participating in protests against the government is associated with their general dissatisfaction with life (X2, P<0.05, df=1). Namely, those respondents who are generally satisfied with their lives are less likely to participate in the antigovernment protests than dissatisfied respondents. In other words, it can be assumed that people who are generally dissatisfied with their lives associate their dissatisfaction with the state and the government, expressing it by participating in anti-government protests. This finding can also be explained within the framework of the theory. Thomas's theorem claims, "If people define a situation as real, it means that it will also be real in its consequences." In other words, if the citizens believe that the authorities are the cause of their general dissatisfaction with life, for objective or subjective reasons, they will still act based on that belief and take measures directed against the authorities.

Figure 3

Attitudes towards participating in anti-government protests disaggregated by general satisfaction of respondent's life in 2021, %, N=1474

According to data, there is a significant association between readiness to leave Armenia for a short period and their readiness to participate in anti-government protests. Those respondents who are ready to leave the country are more likely to participate in the protest actions than those who are not. This quantitative finding brings ideas about coping mechanisms. Individuals who have grievances with the government may see both protest and emigration as coping mechanisms.If they perceive that protesting while staying in the country will not lead to positive change, they may consider leaving the country as a form of silent protest which is a very common situation. When people feel that election outcomes or the changes in the policy of the state don't align with their values anymore, they may choose to leave the country as a form of silent protest without direct confrontation. As an example, the escalation of the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine led many, especially young Russian families, to relocate to countries like Armenia, Georgia, and others. This emigration reflected their opposition to the Russian government's foreign policy and the war itself.

Table 4

Attitudes towards participating in anti-government protests disaggregated by readiness to leave the country for a short period

	Should participate %	Should not participate %	Significance test
No, I am not ready to leave the country for a short period	58	42	X2 P<0.05, df=2
Yes, I am ready to leave the country for a short period	65	35	

The study indicates that there is a significant association between respondents' attitude to participate in antigovernment actions and the dispositions that "Public officials don't care much what people like me think" and "People like yourself are not treated fairly by the government". These quantitative findings suggest that individuals are more likely to protest when they feel neglected or marginalized by their state. Such sentiments often drive civic engagement, as individuals seek to voice their frustrations and demand change when they perceive that their concerns are not being acknowledged by authorities.

Table 5

Public perceptions and attitudes toward anti-government protest participation, %, N=1474

Criteria	Should participate %	Should not participate %	Significance test
Public officials don't care much what people like me think	65	35	X^2 P<0.05, df=1
People like yourself are not treated fairly by the government	71	29	X^2 P<0.05, df=1

It should be noted that trust toward various state bodies is also quite low among the respondents (scale of 1-5, where 5 means "fully trust"), which, according to the hypothesis, should condition the formation of protests and contribute to creating fertile ground for social movements. Namely, those respondents who perceive the government's attitude as not fair toward people like them are twice as likely to participate in the antigovernment protests and actions as those who don't have such beliefs.

The research findings show that the highest level of trust toward institutions is shown to the Army, Ombudsmen and the religious institutions, but taking into account that Armenian society is mainly a monoethnic society, we can assume that this is trust toward the Armenian Apostolic Church. This is especially important in the context of a developing "Sacred Movement", which began its journey by employing the rhetoric of the Armenian Apostolic Church and resonating with its imagery, such as incorporating the violet color in its distinguishing symbols—archbishop and bishops traditionally wear this color as a sign of honor. In this context, it will be interesting to observe how this movement transforms. See Table 6.

Table 6

Level of trust toward state bodies, N=1474

Variables	Average	St. deviation
Army	4	1
Ombudsmen	4	1.1
Religious institution	3	1.3
Educational system	2.9	1.4
Health system	2.9	1.4
Political parties	2.9	1
NGO's	2.6	1.2
Banks	2.6	3
President	2.5	1.1
Local Government bodies	2.3	1.1
Court system	2.1	1.2
Police	2.1	1.3
Parliament	1.8	1.1
Prime Minister and ministers	1.8	1.1
Media	1.8	1

According to statistical tests, there is a significant association between low trust in the mentioned structures and people's willingness to participate in demonstrations against the government. Namely, those respondents who rated their trust as "fully distrust" are more likely to participate in the antigovernment actions. Thus, the research findings support the first hypothesis, which claims that the decision to participate in anti-government protests is indeed associated with distrust toward state institutions. In addition to the aforementioned quantitative findings, the table shows a lack of significant association between trust in health systems, banks, and local government bodies and the approval to participate in anti-government protests. This could imply that trust toward these institutions doesn't relate to protest behavior and there may be other factors. See table 7.

Table 7

Level of trust toward state institutions and approval to participate in anti-government actions

Institutions	Fully distrust	Rather distrust	Neither trust nor distrust	Rather trust	Fully trust	Significance test
Army	5	6	9	27	54	X2 P<0.05, df=4
President	48	14	14	17	7	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Political parties	28	14	18	28	11	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Police	54	11	17	12	5	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Ombudsmen	8	4	6	23	60	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Educational system	26	15	16	32	11	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Health system	29	12	17	30	13	X2 P>0.05, df=4
Court system	45	17	20	16	3	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Parliament	60	15	13	10	2	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Prime Minister and ministers	60	15	13	10	2	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Banks	32	13	18	29	9	X2 P>0.05, df=4

Media	56	17	19	8	1	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Religious institution	35	14	19	22	10	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Local govern- ment bodies	33	19	29	17	2	X2 P>0.05, df=4

The theoretical approaches confirm this quantitative finding. According to different research, social movements are one of the signs of a decline in political trust in democratic countries (Grande, Gonzatti, 2024: 2). Moreover, trust is an essential factor in shaping social movements (Weipert-Fenner, Rossi, Sika, Wolff, 2024). According to Luhmann's concept, modern societies generally need trust to reduce social complexities and enable cooperation (Luhmann, 2017). In the current situation in contemporary Armenian society, when there is a low level of trust toward state institutions, people often become more willing to participate in protests for several reasons:

➢ **Perceived/real ineffectiveness of formal institutions**: When members of the society believe that their concerns and needs are not being addressed through formal political institutions, they may turn to protests as a more direct way to make their voices heard.

➢ **Increased Frustration**: Low trust in institutions can lead to heightened frustration. When members of the society feel that the system is failing to meet their needs or is corrupted and unsafe, they may be more motivated to take action through protests as a way to express their dissatisfaction.

➢ **Lack of Representation**: When marginalized groups realize that their needs and opinions are not being represented by elected officials or institutions, they may see protests as a way to fill this gap.

Conclusion

Social protests are a form of political participation that seeks to bring different levels of change in society. The most influential social protests develop into long-lasting social movements that, built on a shared identity and common objectives, compel decision-makers to achieve the desired outcomes. From this point, investigating the potential for antigovernment protests provides valuable insights into the emergence and dynamics of social movements in contemporary Armenian society.

Secondary data research indicates that people in contemporary Armenian society mostly believe that it is necessary to participate in anti-government protest actions. This decision is associated with different factors such as sex, age, marital status, and place of residence.

The research indicates an association between a low level of trust toward state institutions and approval to participate in antigovernment protest actions. Thus, the main hypothesis of the paper that the low level of trust in state institutions is associated with people's desire to participate in demonstrations, is confirmed.

The quantitative findings also reveal that, while the protest potential in contemporary Armenian society shares many similarities with other societies, it also exhibits distinct characteristics that set it apart. It's interesting to note that collective perceptions about the state's inner image, such as the belief that the state does not treat ordinary people fairly or that public officials disregard the opinions of individuals like them, are more strongly linked to the desire to participate in antigovernment protests than economic conditions. This highlights the importance of the social-psychological aspect of motivation, which plays a more significant role than economic factors in Armenian modern society.

In summary, the association between low institutional trust and protest approval, coupled with the significance of perceived fairness and state responsiveness, suggests that addressing protest potential requires a comprehensive approach focused on rebuilding trust and improving state-citizen interactions. This insight challenges traditional approaches that prioritize economic conditions and suggests the need for more nuanced strategies in addressing protest potential concerns in transitional societies.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.