

# Monday, October 20, 2008

## Comparing Civic Participation: Caucasus Data 2007

What's the level of engagement in the three countries of the South Caucasus? Are people involved? Are they staying abreast of what goes on? Again, our Data Initiative provides insight, since we asked people whether they had engaged in various activities over the last six months.

We seem to be seeing different patterns in the three countries. Print media, for example, is read a lot less in Azerbaijan than in the neighboring countries.

Respondent read a newspaper/news magazine		
Country	No	Yes
Armenia	43,5	55,8
Azerbaijan	67,5	28,4
Georgia	45,2	51,9

(in the last six months)

But of course, that could just be due to particular quirks: more television, or a bigger country in which relevant media does not make it out to the countryside. Just a blip? No, apparently not.

Discussed politics with friends or colleagues		
Country	No	Yes
Armenia	76,1	23,2
Azerbaijan	88,0	8,0
Georgia	71,3	25,8

(also asked for the last six months)

Azerbaijanis indeed are less engaged in events. Few say that they discuss what is going on politically. One reason may be that they live in much more homogenous political space.

Generally, levels of civic engagement are low. This recalls, of course, Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*, which says that civic association forms the basis of both political (in the sense of good governance: public health, education, policing, and so on) and of economic success. Conversely, a people caught in [amoral familism](#) will find it hard to collaborate to improve their communities; and since the majority of real public goods can only be attained by collective action, this could be a serious constraint on improving livelihoods.

Went to a meeting of a club or civic organization		
Country	No	Yes
Armenia	96,9	2,4
Azerbaijan	94,1	1,8
Georgia	96,3	0,7

(yep, last six months)

On that level, we are extremely glad that we have captured this data. It will allow us to track changes over time.

But is the news all bad? Actually, no. Azerbaijan sees quite some volunteering. As rumor has it, the communal *subotnik* which brings communities together to clean up and improve the neighbourhood

still is alive in some places (although volunteering may be encouraged top-down). See the data:

Did volunteer work		
Country	No	Yes
Armenia	93,6	5,7
Azerbaijan	73,0	22,9
Georgia	92,3	4,8

(still: in the last six months)

And in a similar vein, there are contributions to charity in Azerbaijan. In part, this may be because tithing (giving one tenth) to charity is mandated under Islam, and (as you may recall from our [previous post](#)) about 15% in Azerbaijan actually say that they pray every day. That almost adds up.

Contribution to charity		
Country	No	Yes
Armenia	93,3	6,0
Azerbaijan	82,4	13,5
Georgia	90,4	6,7

(remember for how many months...?)

What we are describing, ultimately, is a fascinating research agenda: filtering out who the socially active people in a community are, and what makes them different, and how they were mobilized, and how this could be replicated.