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[The Media in Armenia and Azerbaijan: Effective or Affective?](#)

Written by Arpine Porsughyan. Re-posted from the [Caucasian Knot](#).

Many academics argue that the influence of the media is especially strong in environments where citizens depend on a limited number of news sources. In contrast, when citizens have alternative sources of information they are less subject to the potential effects of media. Following this argument, how affective is the media in Armenia and Azerbaijan in establishing an image of the “other” in an environment where over 90 percent of the populations choose television as their primary source of information on current events with over 40 percent choosing family, friends, neighbors and colleagues as their second main source?

Well, according to the annual nationwide [Caucasus Barometer](#) conducted by the Caucasus Resource Research Centers (CRRC), a rather large percentage of people in both countries appear to agree that the media determines what people think. The figure was 39 percent in Armenia and 59 percent in Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, statistics highlighting the number of people who [approve or disapprove of friendship between Armenians and Azerbaijanis](#) illustrate that quite well. Only 28 percent of Armenian respondents approve of friendship with Azerbaijanis while just 1 percent of Azerbaijanis approve of friendship with Armenians.

Moreover, as the same theory on media effect also argues, those with little or no interest in politics are more prone to influence from the media. In Armenia, 37 percent of people are not at all interested or hardly interested in foreign policy. In Azerbaijan, that figure is 64 percent, but what about those who are interested in politics and access alternative sources of information? Academics have something to say about them as well.

Some argue that those with a strong interest in politics and access to various sources of information are subject to “biased processing,” the argument being that those that have a strong interest in politics tend to filter information based on their already existing views. Focus groups conducted by CRRC as part of the Eurasia Partnership Foundation [Unbiased Media Coverage of Armenia-Azerbaijan Relations](#) seem to support this argument. Focus groups participants, as well as active media consumers in the Armenian and Azerbaijani capitals, showed general dissatisfaction with the current state of the media in their respective countries and demanded unbiased media.

Yet, those same participants held very similar positions on the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, it being the one opined by the State.

Is there hope? Well, as CRRC’s report, Armenian and Azerbaijani International News Coverage – Empirical Findings and Recommendations for Improvement, suggests, “while the media can amplify existing tensions and reinforce differences, it also has the potential to build confidence across existing fracture lines by covering a wider spectrum of issues, diversifying sources, representing more voices than just the elite, and consciously eliminating bias from coverage.”

Social media and projects like [this one](#), as well as [Global Voices Online](#) and the [Social Innovation Camp Caucasus](#) have been a great kick start to providing a platform for discussing issues beyond the conflict. After all, we have so much in common to discuss and we share similar concerns. In both

countries the biggest concern in 2009 was the need to reduce daily spending in basic expenditures, both are worried about western influence, both perceive poverty as the biggest threat to the world, and in both countries, while generally uncertain, a significant percentage hopes that their children will be better off than they are (CRRC CB, 2009).