

DOI <https://doi.org/10.30525/2592-8813-2025-2-26>

THE EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN AZERBAIJAN FOLLOWING THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR

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Abstract. Purpose of the study is to analyze the key factors transforming political consciousness in Azerbaijan during and after the Second Karabakh War. By investigating the roles of Azerbaijanism, political parties, NGOs, and presidential leadership, the research seeks to understand their collective impact on the national political landscape and citizen engagement.

This study contributes significantly to the existing literature on political consciousness in Azerbaijan, providing an in-depth analysis of post-war transformations. It offers valuable insights into the evolving nature of national identity, political unity, and the influence of socio-political institutions in the country.

Results highlight that the Second Karabakh War acted as a catalyst for a profound transformation in Azerbaijan's political consciousness. The ideology of Azerbaijanism emerged as a unifying force, fostering national pride and unity among citizens, regardless of ethnic and regional differences. Political parties displayed unprecedented solidarity, prioritizing national interests over political competition and supporting government efforts during the war. NGOs significantly contributed to shaping public opinion, enhancing civic engagement, and promoting transparency and accountability.

Key words: Azerbaijanism, Political Consciousness, Karabakh War II, National Unity, Political Parties, NGOs, Ilham Aliyev.

Introduction. The Second Karabakh War (2020) and its aftermath significantly reshaped political consciousness in Azerbaijan, driven by key factors. Central to this transformation is the concept of "Azerbaijanism," which emphasizes national pride, cultural heritage, and unity, fostering a shared identity that transcends ethnic and regional divides. Political parties also played a critical role by reflecting public aspirations in post-conflict governance, enhancing political discourse and citizen participation in the democratic process. NGOs further contributed by addressing social and economic issues, promoting transparency, and empowering citizens, thereby strengthening civic engagement and democratic practices. Additionally, the President's leadership during and after the war bolstered national unity and garnered strong public support, enabling effective implementation of post-war reconstruction and advancing Azerbaijan's global interests. This study examines these factors, highlighting their individual and combined influence on the evolution of political consciousness in Azerbaijan.

Objective of the study. The objective of this study is to analyze the key factors that have transformed political consciousness in Azerbaijan during and after the Second Karabakh War. It aims to investigate the impact of these factors on the political dynamics of Azerbaijani society and to disseminate these findings to a broader audience.

Significance for the literature. The study makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on the development and transformation of political consciousness in Azerbaijan. By providing an in-depth analysis of the effects of the Second Karabakh War and the subsequent period, it offers valuable insights into the changing nature of political awareness in the country.

Research methods of the study. The study employs two primary research methods: literature review and systematic review. The literature review comprehensively analyzes existing scientific and theoretical sources, synthesizing the findings of contemporary research. The systematic review structures and analyzes data collected from various sources related to this topic. Additionally, the article

applies in-depth interpretation, critically analyzing the obtained data to ensure the results presented are precise and well-founded. This approach enhances the accuracy and validity of the article's conclusions.

Azerbaijanism

During the Second Karabakh War, the ideology of Azerbaijanism played a pivotal role in uniting the state and its citizens. Under the President's leadership, Azerbaijani youth mobilized to liberate occupied territories, with the ideology fostering solidarity among all ethnic groups in defense of the homeland. Citizenship emerged as the foundation of political consciousness, bridging morality and law, and promoting collective responsibility through social programs and initiatives. This principle, rooted in Azerbaijanism, emphasized patriotism as essential for national security and educating future generations in the spirit of statehood (Jabarov, 2022).

Patriotism and statehood, integral to Azerbaijanism, underpin nation-building by prioritizing the restoration of territorial integrity and the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. These principles unite citizens and Azerbaijanis worldwide, transcending political and geographic boundaries (Bayramlı, 2020, p. 15).

In the post-Second Karabakh War period, the ideology of Azerbaijanism emphasizes political loyalty as a cornerstone of the state-building process. Political loyalty, rooted in respect and trust, fosters stable social and state development. However, as Jabarov (2022) notes, no nation can sustain political loyalty if its territorial integrity and independence are threatened. Political stability is thus vital for maintaining a durable political consciousness, characterized by security, national identity, consistent governance, economic prosperity, rights protection, and unity.

A sense of security ensures citizens trust the government to protect territorial integrity and independence, reinforcing their loyalty to the state. Political stability fosters a unified national identity, where citizens feel pride in their nation, strengthening their bond with the state. Consistency in governance builds trust in government policies, encouraging civic engagement and sustained political awareness. Economic prosperity, driven by stability, attracts investments and improves citizens' quality of life, motivating political participation. Protecting rights and freedoms under stable governance upholds democratic principles and human rights, reinforcing citizens' confidence in their contributions to the system. Finally, national unity is bolstered during external or internal challenges, as stability unites citizens in prioritizing the nation's integrity over internal divisions.

Political Parties

K-War II demonstrated once again that patriotism fosters a profound connection between individuals and their country, compelling them to defend their homeland. This enduring sentiment transcends state structures and citizenship status. In the context of Azerbaijanism, patriotism signifies a citizen's stronger allegiance to their state, embodying the innate desire to defend the homeland, safeguard its independence, and contribute to its development, while upholding the principles of loyalty and tolerance. Therefore, patriotism plays a crucial role in the citizenship stance of every member of the Azerbaijani populace. Throughout the 44-day war, political parties demonstrated significant solidarity, actively contributing to national unity by issuing various statements condemning Armenia's aggression. The joint statements of political parties during this conflict were of particular importance. The strong unity between the Azerbaijani people and political factions played a crucial role in rallying around the Azerbaijani army and ultimately breaking the enemy's resistance. From the outset of the war, political parties operating in Azerbaijan adopted a unified national-state stance, maintaining close coordination with President Ilham Aliyev.

Since the onset of the war, many political parties in Azerbaijan have re-evaluated their roles within a different framework. Demonstrating commitment to the nation's future and the restoration of territorial integrity, these parties have prioritized state interests above all during difficult times for the country. In their official statements, political parties have unequivocally supported President Ilham

Aliyev's political and military measures aimed at preserving the country's territorial integrity and ensuring the safety of its citizens (Kazımoğlu, 2021). They have expressed unanimous support for the President's efforts to counter Armenia's large-scale terrorist provocations against Azerbaijan. In a Joint Statement signed by the leaders of 50 political parties, it was unequivocally declared: *"We, the political parties of Azerbaijan, resolutely support the policies implemented by our Commander-in-Chief, President Ilham Aliyev, aimed at ensuring the territorial integrity of our country and the safety of our population, as well as countering all forms of Armenian deception and provocations. We declare our strong unity around him and call on our people to be ready at all times to decisively cut off the bloody Armenian hands extended against our Motherland. We take pride in our Army with its honorable history and express our solidarity with it. We assure our esteemed President and Commander-in-Chief that each of us is a soldier ready at any moment to fulfill any task in the honor and dignity of our Motherland"* (Sayadoğlu, 2020).

In a wartime context, the primary focus is on military operations, while the role of political forces is to actively support the state in winning the information war against the enemy. During the conflict, the objective of political parties was not to scrutinize the government's actions, hold meetings, or vie for power. Instead, local organizations were advised to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities or potential provocations to state authorities (Qardaşxanova, 2022, p. 7). Efforts were also directed towards informing leading organizations, such as the European People's Party, about the non-compliance with UN resolutions. It was highlighted that Armenia targeted our cities, civilian structures, children, and the elderly, even outside the frontline areas. Representatives were urged to convey this information to their respective governments and exert pressure on Armenia. While political competition remained a separate issue, parties were called upon to actively support the state and the Army (Qardaşxanova, 2022, p. 7).

Aydin Mirzazade of the New Azerbaijan Party highlighted the proactive role of members, especially youth, in sharing accurate information about Nagorno-Karabakh and sending electronic letters to over 800 global figures about Armenia's occupation policy. Meanwhile, Ahad Mammadli of the AG Party noted that they halted opposition activities during the war, focusing on unity, monitoring frontline developments, engaging in the information war, and providing essential supplies like socks and hats to soldiers (Salamoğlu, 2020).

Over the past 20 years, Azerbaijan has demonstrated its commitment to strengthening civil society and the democratization process by successfully implementing political, socio-economic, and legal reforms. Significant progress has been made in ensuring human rights and freedoms, as well as in the establishment of democratic institutions. Currently, as emphasized by President Ilham Aliyev, the country is entering a new phase of civil society development, political pluralism, and the promotion of inter-party dialogue (Məmmədov, 2021, p. 6). The President underscores the necessity of continuous political reforms and dialogue between political parties to strengthen Azerbaijan's political system. This positive response to such efforts has created a transformative situation during the period of independence. Against the backdrop of ongoing political reforms, the country has achieved a constructive dialogue between the government and the opposition, leading to a reconfiguration of the political landscape. Notably, 22 political parties have been provided with offices, and seven additional political parties have been registered by the state following the Patriotic War. A significant meeting organized by the Presidential Administration's Department for Relations with Political Parties and the Legislative Authority, involving leaders of 45 political parties, underscores the importance of fostering dialogue and understanding in the new political reality (Turan İnformasiya Agentliyi, 2021).

Azerbaijan is successfully advancing the institutionalization of its socio-political framework, continuing the construction of a legal state and civil society. The enactment of the new law "On Political Parties" signifies this progress and reflects the strong political will to transform the evolving political landscape and dialogue from symbolic cooperation to constructive collaboration (president.az,

2023a). President Ilham Aliyev's initiative to foster a political dialogue environment invites all parties involved in the political process to engage in open and equal relationships. The adoption of the new law meets the demands of contemporary times, as the previous law, established in 1992, no longer aligns with modern requirements. The significant changes in social, political life, and political relations over the past three decades necessitated amendments to the legislation.

As a result of successful reforms, significant strides have been made in promoting national solidarity and political dialogue between the government and the opposition in Azerbaijan. The 44-day war witnessed the effective implementation of a national unity model, with numerous political parties demonstrating collective efforts towards a common goal. Throughout the war, eight joint statements and two joint appeals to international organizations were issued with the participation of political parties, exemplifying the strong national solidarity and unity between the people and the government (Qərib, 2020).

In his speech at the 7th Congress of the New Azerbaijan Party on March 5, 2021, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized the necessity of deepening political dialogue in the new era (president.az, 2021). He highlighted that consensus on national issues, such as the Karabakh issue, the activities of political parties, the promotion of democracy, economic freedom, and national strengthening, should prevail. The ongoing political dialogue is of paramount importance for the advancement of the country's future political system, a sentiment President Aliyev highly valued in his address.

NGOs

NGOs, another crucial component of civil society, also contributed significantly to the development of national unity during K-War II. The "GanjaFilm" Public Union for the Promotion of Cinematic Creativity, with financial support from the Council on State Support to NGOs under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, conducted a project monitoring the activities of the public sector and NGOs during the war and their coverage in mass media. This monitoring included social networks, internet media resources, and television and newspapers operating in the country. According to the results, from September 27, 2020—the date of the Armenian armed forces' attack on Azerbaijani positions and civilian settlements—the public sector was unanimously mobilized during the counter-offensive operations launched by the Azerbaijani army. During the 44-day Patriotic War, Azerbaijani NGOs actively supported national efforts in various ways (modern.az, 2020). They issued statements condemning Armenia's aggression and sent appeals to international organizations to advocate for Azerbaijan's position. On social networks, NGOs launched campaigns to defend national interests, foster public support for the army, and expose the enemy's aggressive nature through accounts linked to Armenian leaders. They also organized visits to the front lines to boost morale and promoted military patriotism with calls to action online. Throughout and after the war, NGOs demonstrated unanimous support for the Azerbaijani state and its president.

Media monitoring revealed that NGO statements, interviews, and campaign activities were prominently featured on internet platforms, television, and newspapers, and were widely shared on social networks. These efforts suggest that NGOs played an effective civic role in mobilizing public support and defending national interests during the war (modern.az, 2020).

During the 44-day war in Azerbaijan, the activities of NGOs significantly contributed to the development of national consciousness in several key ways. Firstly, by condemning Armenia's military aggression against Azerbaijan, NGOs played a crucial role in shaping public opinion. By openly denouncing the aggression, they fostered a unified approach to external threats and instilled a sense of national identity and solidarity (Xalq cəbhəsi, 2020, p. 9). The submission of appeals to international organizations demonstrated the NGOs' commitment to garnering international support for Azerbaijan. This diplomatic initiative was not only aimed at resolving the conflict but also highlighted the importance of the recognition and support of the country's national interests by the global community (yeniazərbaycan.com, 2020). Special campaigns on social networks served to mobilize

public support for the country's national interests and armed forces. The dissemination of information and the use of social media as a propaganda platform contributed to the formation of collective consciousness and shared values among the population. By emphasizing the aggressor's nature on social media accounts, NGOs influenced the perception of the conflict. This educational activity aimed to instill a strong sense of national identity by highlighting the threat posed by the enemy (yeniazərbaycan.com, 2020). Visits to the frontline regions to express public support for the army strengthened the connection between civilians and military personnel. The use of social networks to make appeals for reinforcing the sense of military patriotism further highlighted the role of NGOs in shaping collective consciousness. These appeals underscored the importance of national defense (Paşayeva, 2020).

Post-War Dynamics: The President's Influence

The 44-day war profoundly changed the political consciousness of Azerbaijan, shifting the nation from defeat to victory and instilling a sense of protection under a strong state. This military success deepened national pride and unity, reshaping how citizens perceive their identity and the power of their state. (Cabarov, 2021, p. 127). After witnessing the liberation of historic lands and the establishment of control over previously inaccessible territories, the issue of feeling like members of a defeated nation was eradicated among our citizens. The national unity that emerged during the war played a decisive role in this transformation. People from various regions, ethnicities, and social backgrounds set aside their differences to support the common cause of reclaiming Azerbaijani lands. This shared objective not only strengthened bonds among citizens but also contributed to the formation of a collective identity centered around the resilience and determination of the Azerbaijani people (Akimova, 2021, p. 5). Regarding the sense of being under the protection of a powerful state, the lingering sense of vulnerability from the previous conflict was replaced by confidence in the state's ability to protect its citizens and defend its territorial integrity. Furthermore, the victory in the 44-day war symbolized the Azerbaijani people's triumph over adversity. This pride was not merely a celebration of military success but also a manifestation of the resilience, unity, and determination that defined the national character during the conflict.

Secondly, the 44-day war played a significant role in reshaping the internal political landscape and elevating President Ilham Aliyev's stature both domestically and globally. Under his leadership, the reclamation of Azerbaijani territories and the success in the war significantly bolstered public trust and confidence in the government. The emphasis can be placed on both domestic and foreign policy. Concerning domestic policy, President Ilham Aliyev's decisive actions during the conflict resonated profoundly with the Azerbaijani population. His strategic planning, coordination of military operations, and effective communication with the public showcased not only determination but also capable leadership qualities. The direction and sense of purpose provided by President Aliyev became a unifying force that transcended political affiliations and garnered widespread support from various segments of the population. In this regard, the public eagerly anticipated President Aliyev's updates and good news shared on the social media platform Twitter (X) during the war. Furthermore, the precise and rhetorical statements he directed towards the head of the enemy country's government in his addresses to the nation remain memorable, even years after the war. These statements have even inspired musical compositions. Theoretically, these expressions serve as potent rhetorical tools. The effectiveness of rhetoric often lies in its ability to encapsulate complex situations or emotions in memorable phrases. In this case, President Aliyev's words succinctly reflected the military successes and the shifts occurring in the conflict.

During a conflict, people become more emotionally sensitive to the actions and statements of their leaders. Emotionally charged, memorable expressions become powerful tools for forging a connection between the leader and the populace. The emotional impact aids in etching these expressions into the collective memory. Their repetition in the media, social media, and public discussions reinforces their presence in collective memory. Repetition is a fundamental aspect of learning and memory, and

when expressions are consistently repeated, they are remembered by more individuals. During conflicts, leaders often use language that aligns with the aspirations and values of the people (Cabarov & Cahangirli, 2021). President Ilham Aliyev's speeches highlight his strategic use of rhetoric to foster collective memory and national identity. In Suqovushan on October 3, 2021, Aliyev directly challenged Serzh Sargsyan, emphasizing Azerbaijani strength and determination while dismissing Armenian claims. Such powerful rhetoric resonates deeply with the public, as many memorize these expressions, reinforcing a collective identity centered on defending national interests. This approach exemplifies a successful political communication strategy, where memorable language strengthens public unity and loyalty (qafqazinfo.az, 2021). On October 15, 2023, in Khankendi, Aliyev celebrated the liberation of occupied territories by emphasizing the sacrifice and patriotism of Azerbaijani soldiers. He credited the nation's success to its people and their unwavering devotion, honoring the martyrs and expressing pride in the Armed Forces. His words reinforced the long-established political consciousness and pride shared by Azerbaijanis globally, further solidifying the nation's unity and collective identity (president.az, 2023b).

A deeper analysis reveals that President Aliyev highlights how political awareness drives the people's determination to reclaim their lands, crediting the younger generation's critical role in the Patriotic War. Their readiness to sacrifice themselves reveals the deep-rooted patriotism that has long defined Azerbaijani society. Strengthened by education and historical propaganda, political consciousness has deepened loyalty to the homeland over personal interests. The President's tribute to martyrs underscores a collective memory in which past sacrifices, including recent ones, remain a driving force that unites and motivates the Azerbaijani people. President Aliyev underscores how political consciousness shapes the armed forces, praising Azerbaijani soldiers' heroism, patriotism, and self-sacrifice. Their commitment reflects a deeply rooted sense of duty in the national consciousness. He also notes that this pride extends to millions of Azerbaijanis worldwide, highlighting its transnational nature. Shared pride among the diaspora demonstrates how political consciousness transcends borders, forging a unified Azerbaijani identity. This unity, grounded in resilience and commitment, serves as a powerful force that mobilizes people in defense of the nation's welfare and territory.

Speaking at the 2nd Azerbaijan National Urban Planning Forum in Zangilan (September 29, 2023), President Aliyev emphasized Azerbaijanis' deep attachment to their homeland, noting how most IDPs, despite decades of displacement, wish to return to liberated territories. He highlighted a reversed migration pattern, with people leaving cities like Baku and Sumgayit for ancestral villages, reflecting strong emotional and cultural ties to the land (president.az, 2023c). This attachment goes beyond practical considerations, symbolizing the resilience of the Azerbaijani people and their determination to reclaim and restore their ancestral lands. The survey conducted to assess IDPs' intentions highlights the role of political propaganda in reinforcing the liberation of territories as a shared triumph. By aligning public sentiment with national goals, the speech projects the liberation as both a military and symbolic victory, shaping political consciousness and fostering a collective identity rooted in the nation's historical and cultural heritage.

Conclusion. The research highlights a significant transformation in Azerbaijan's political consciousness during and after the Second Karabakh War. The 44-day conflict unified political parties, reshaping their roles and priorities in unprecedented ways. Political parties demonstrated strong solidarity and national unity, issuing joint statements condemning Armenia's aggression and supporting the Azerbaijani army. This unity between political entities and the populace was pivotal in breaking the enemy's resistance. Many parties reevaluated their roles, prioritizing state interests and the restoration of territorial integrity over traditional political differences. They supported the military and political measures of President Ilham Aliyev, with 50 party leaders signing a Joint Statement endorsing his policies and condemning Armenian provocations. During the war, political parties shifted focus from internal debates to actively participating in the information war. They disseminated accurate

information globally about Nagorno-Karabakh, using social networks and public figures. Opposition activities were largely suspended, with parties like the AG Party adopting a unified stance. The government-opposition divide was deemed secondary to national interests, as parties worked to inform international organizations and pressure Armenia.

The war catalyzed a profound transformation in political consciousness, prioritizing national unity and loyalty over competition. It fostered a renewed sense of national identity, restructuring the ideological foundations of unity and patriotism. Post-war, political loyalty has emerged as a dynamic force in shaping civic engagement, and the political landscape has shifted toward dialogue, reconciliation, and reconstruction of socio-political structures.

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