

October / 2020

# **“THE GREAT RETURN TO KARABAKH” REPORT**



**SOCIAL  
RESEARCH  
CENTER**





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## REVIEW

□ A year ago, 57.3% of the respondents anticipated that the war would escalate in 2020 amidst Armenia's ongoing military provocations, while 42.7% harbored no such expectation.

□ The main reasons for the large-scale counter-offensive operation of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan are as follows: military provocations committed by Armenians in the last 3 months (57.3%); statements made by the Armenian Prime Minister a year ago ("Karabakh is Armenia and the point"), indicating that negotiations are futile (48.5%); the people's desire/demand for the liberation of the occupied lands at the earliest (46.3%).

□ 62.1% of the respondents believe that the counter-offensive operations started on time, while 33.4% think that the counter-offensive operations were delayed.

□ The absolute majority of respondents (96.3%) consider it impossible to reclaim the land through negotiations.

□ The following factors are cited as the reasons why the negotiations with Armenia in the last 28 years have not yielded any results: Global powers' lack of interest in solving the problem (69%); Ineffective activity of the OSCE Minsk Group (57.1%); The policy of aggression by the Armenian state (72.7%).

□ The vast majority of IDP respondents (84.1%) expressed their desire for the war to continue, while 13.2% of respondents expressed the opposite opinion.

□ 97.8% of the respondents who took part in the survey hope that their places of residence (city, town, village) will be freed in the near future.

□ 93.8% of respondents believe that all territories will be freed from occupation in the near future.

□ The absolute majority of respondents (95.9%) believe that the Azerbaijani army will restore our territorial integrity without the support of any foreign state.

□ 98% of respondents plan to return to their liberated regions in the near future.

□ The vast majority of respondents, i.e. 83.2%, plan to return to their homelands freed from occupation together with all their family members.

□ Almost all of the IDPs who participated in the survey (99%) expressed that the liberation of the land generated optimism and a desire to return home.

□ Half of the respondents (51.1%) kept the keys/documents of their houses in the occupied territories. 48.9% of those asked did not keep their opinion.

□ Although 86% of the respondents have seen the current images (pictures, videos, etc.) of our occupied and liberated territories, 13% have not seen these images.

□ The vast majority of respondents (91%) who rated the infrastructure poorly believe that the Armenian authorities avoided investing in those areas because they did not expect to stay there for a long time.

□ 62% of the respondents believe that Armenia did not improve the territories it destroyed because it lacked sufficient funds to rehabilitate all the territories it occupied.

□ Although 72% of IDP respondents believe that coexistence with the Armenian population in Karabakh is impossible, 14% believe that this situation will become possible only after a considerable amount of time.

□ One out of every 20 respondents (5.2%) is of the opinion that it may happen in the future as there was coexistence with Armenians in those lands before.

□ 90.3% of the respondents personally said that they would not live with Armenians in those lands in the future, and about 8% of the respondents said that they could.

□ The attitude towards both the Armenian people (99.4%) and the Armenian state (99.4%) is unequivocally bad.

□ 4.5% of the respondents have a neutral attitude towards the Armenian people.

□ The absolute majority of those polled (97.8%) think that the war strengthened the People-Supreme Commander-in-Chief unity.

□ 96.6% of the respondents are of the opinion that the war strengthened the unity of the People's Army.

□ 95.5% of the respondents think that the war strengthened national unity.

□ A little more than half of the respondents, specifically 56.7%, stated that the war strengthened the unity between the government and the opposition, while 19.4% had difficulty expressing their opinion on the matter.

# INTRODUCTION

The ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region began concurrently with the collapse of the former Soviet Union, leading to the largest influx of refugees and internally displaced persons in the region. Azerbaijan has one of the highest per capita rates of internally displaced persons in the world. Unfortunately, forced displacement has been a defining feature of our state for many years following independence.

Currently, official statistics indicate that 86% of IDPs in Azerbaijan reside in cities, primarily in Baku and Sumgait. In recent years, the government has taken substantial measures to improve the living conditions of internally displaced persons. A significant achievement was the discontinuation of "tent camps" by the end of 2007 and the construction of over 100 towns across Azerbaijan's regions. Over the past 18 years, 102 modern settlements equipped with all necessary infrastructure have been established for IDPs, including multi-story buildings. Despite unsuccessful negotiations regarding the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the people's longing for Karabakh has persisted over the past three decades, bolstering belief in the restoration of our territorial integrity.

On September 27, 2020, the news of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces' counter-offensive operations against Armenian army attacks on our civilian population was greeted with great enthusiasm and patriotism by the people. This signaled hope for the return of Karabakh, potentially altering the landscape of forced displacement. The decisive and successful advances of the Azerbaijani army, under the leadership of the Supreme Commander, bring us closer to the stage of the "Great Return," initiated four years ago with the reconstruction of the village of Jojug Marjanli in Jabrayil district.

The significant changes brought about by the Second Karabakh War are met with great joy by the Azerbaijani people, particularly by our compatriots who have long experienced forced displacement. This signifies not only a return to villages, homes, and hearths saved from the

enemy but also marks the beginning of a return to Nagorno-Karabakh and other lands subjected to Armenian aggression.

Considering these developments and the expectations among the internally displaced population, the Social Research Center conducted an opinion poll among this group. The primary objective of the research is to explore the respondents' expectations regarding the war and its aftermath, displaced families' plans to return to liberated lands, attitudes towards Armenians and coexistence with them, as well as the perceptions of the Azerbaijani army and the state's support for unity during the war.

## METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF RESEARCH

### Selection of study areas and respondents

The survey was conducted by phone with 464 IDP families who are provided with housing and actually live in the territory of Gobu settlement.

Respondents were selected based on the principle of random sampling.

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 27 basic and 9 demographic questions. Respondents were presented with questions in several areas:

Direction I - expectations regarding the war and its outcome;

Direction II - plan for the return of internally displaced families to liberated lands;

Direction III - attitude to Armenians and coexistence with them;

Direction IV - Attitude towards the Azerbaijani army and state.

### Field work

The survey was conducted from October 9 to 13, 2020.

### Ethical principles

During the survey, strict adherence to ethical research guidelines was maintained. Each respondent received comprehensive information about the conducting organization, the purpose, and the survey protocols. Additionally, respondents were informed in detail about the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to terminate the survey at any time, and the option to refrain from answering any question they wished. They were also assured that they could postpone the discussion if the timing of the call was inconvenient.

The confidentiality of all interviews was rigorously safeguarded, and anonymity was guaranteed for every participant. Respondents were reassured that their individual responses would be used only in aggregate form, thereby ensuring the integrity and reliability of the collected data.

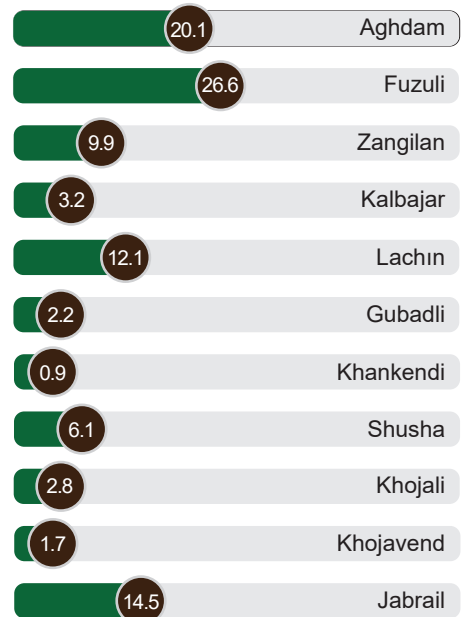
### Data processing and analysis

After the survey was concluded, the data gathered in the database for each questionnaire underwent analysis using a specialized program known as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Various tests were conducted to identify statistically significant relationships between variables and to compare variables across different socio-demographic groups.

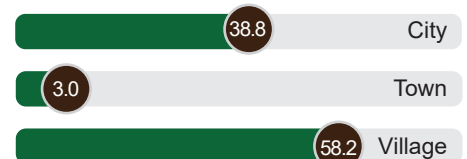
Please note that the percentages presented in charts may not sum up to 100% due to rounding.

**The distribution of IDP families covered by the survey by regions is as follows:**

District where you are forcibly displaced (in %)



Where you lived before you were displaced





# STATISTICAL AND ANALYTICAL ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS

## Attitude towards the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

A year ago, 57.3% of survey participants anticipated a larger-scale war in 2020 due to Armenia's ongoing military provocations, while 42.7% did not share such expectations. A statistically significant relationship between gender and this expectation was observed, with 47.9% of women and 62.7% of men foreseeing war in 2020 due to Armenian provocations ( $\chi^2(1)=9.598$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Notably, as respondents' age increased, so did their anticipation of a larger-scale conflict in 2020: 40% of those aged 18-30, 54.5% of those aged 31-50, and 63.1% of those over 51 shared this expectation.

The primary reasons for the Azerbaijani Armed Forces' large-scale counter-offensive operation were as follows:

- Military provocations by Armenians in the preceding three months (57.3%)
- The Armenian Prime Minister's statement a year ago ("Karabakh is Armenia and the point"), signaling the futility of negotiations (48.5%)
- Popular demand for the liberation of occupied lands (46.3%)

Only 15% of respondents cited Armenia's dispatch of a sabotage group for terrorist acts as a factor in the Azerbaijani counter-offensive.

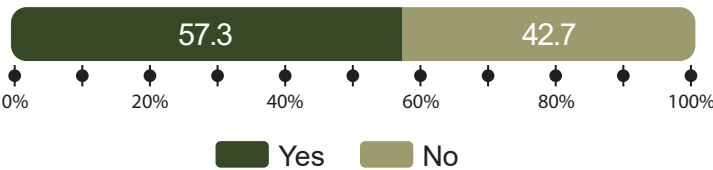
Both male and female respondents identified recent Armenian military provocations as the main trigger for the counter-offensive. This view was predominant among respondents over 31 years old. The statement made by the Armenian Prime Minister in Khankendi a year ago was considered the catalyst for the large-scale operations, with 55.6% of men and 36.1% of women expressing this sentiment. It is worth noting that men, according to another STM study, tend to be more informed about military and political matters than women. Among those selecting this option, respondents aged 18-31 constituted the majority (52%).

A divergence of opinion was observed regarding the timing of the counter-offensive operations launched in response to Armenia's military provocations. However, those believing that the counter-offen-

sive operations began at the appropriate time predominate. 62.1% of respondents believe that the counter-offensive operations started on schedule, while 33.4% believe they could have begun earlier.

**Diagram 1.**  
*Anticipation of war*

## Did you expect a year ago that the war would start on a larger scale as a result of Armenia's ongoing military provocations?



## What led to the large-scale launch of the counterattack operation? (in %)

Military provocations committed by Armenians in the last 3 months



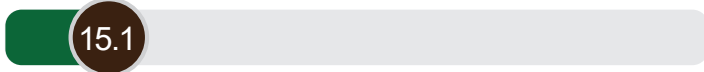
A year ago, the Prime Minister of Armenia showed that negotiations were useless with his statements



The populace strongly desires and demands the prompt liberation of the land from occupation



Sending a sabotage group by Armenia to commit terrorist acts in our country

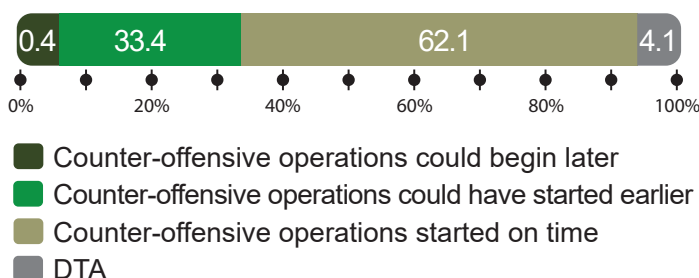


**Diagram 2.**  
*Reasons for counterattack operations*

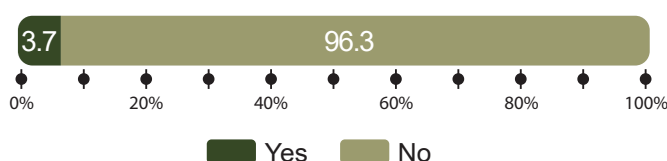
Women are more inclined to believe that the counter-offensive operations commenced late, with 41.4% of women and 28.8% of men expressing this sentiment. Conversely, men are more likely to believe that the operations started on time, with 69.2% of men and 49.7% of women indicating this view.

**Diagram 3. Relation to the timing of counter-offensive operations**

### How do you assess the timing of counter-offensive operations launched in response to Armenia's military provocations?



### Do you think the lands could be returned through negotiations?



**Diagram 4. The role of negotiations in land restitution**

ty of respondents (96.3%) consider land recovery through negotiations impossible. Among those viewing negotiations as ineffective for land recovery, men exhibit relatively greater dominance (men - 98.6%, women - 92.3%). Regardless of educational level, all respondents agree that negotiations would yield no benefit. These findings suggest that, according to the populace, war remains the sole viable solution to the conflict, necessitating its continuation.

There are mainly 3 factors as the reasons why the negotiations with Armenia have not yielded any results in the last 28 years:

- Global powers are not interested in solving the problem (69%). The majority of both sexes supported this idea. Thus, 70.5% of men and 66.3% of women are of the opinion that global powers are not interested in solving the conflict. Among both the young (63.6%) and the elderly (71.3%), there is a predominance of those who say that global powers are not inter-

ested in resolving the conflict.

- Ineffective activity of the OSCE Minsk Group (57.1%). 63.4% of men and 46.2% of women see the ineffective activity of the OSCE Minsk Group as the main reason for not resolving the conflict. Among older respondents, those who evaluate the activities of the OSCE Minsk Group as ineffective prevail (63.3%). Accordingly, this indicator is 42.9% for other age groups.

- The occupation policy of the Armenian state (72.7%).

It is interesting that only 13.6% of respondents see the strong activity of the Armenian diaspora abroad as one of the reasons. Also, 11.4% of respondents are of the opinion that international organizations do not put enough pressure on Armenia (sanctions are not applied).

**Diagram 5. Reasons why negotiations are not beneficial**

### What factors contribute to the lack of results in negotiations with Armenia over the past 28 years? (in %)



<sup>1</sup> President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev addressed the people. <https://president.az/articles/42411>

Thus, the respondents' attitude towards the negotiated settlement of the conflict is, in a certain sense, an indicator of the desire and belief in the continuation of the war. The vast majority of IDPs surveyed (84.1%) want the war to continue. A total of 13.2% respondents took the opposite position.

95.5% of the surveyed IDPs have close friends (family members and relatives/acquaintances) who are currently involved in the ongoing fighting.

### Expectations of the outcome of the war

97.8% of the respondents in the survey express hope for the liberation of their places of residence (cities, towns, villages) in the near future. The Azerbaijani army fulfilled this hope of the people through the battles that commenced on September 27. Among the IDPs whose territories remain under occupation, an overwhelming majority (97.5%) harbor this hope, believing that their former homes will soon be freed by our army. This sentiment is shared across all socio-demographic groups, indicating widespread optimism.

Overall, there is a prevailing belief in the liberation of all occupied territories as a consequence of the ongoing war. 93.8% of respondents anticipate the liberation of all lands in the near future. This conviction is slightly more pronounced among men (95.9%) compared to women (89.9%). Additionally, belief in the imminent liberation of the land increases with the respondents' age; 90.7% of those under 40 years old and 95.1% of those over 41 hold this belief.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (95.9%) trust that the Azerbaijani army will restore our territorial integrity without the assistance of any foreign state. It is noteworthy that trust and confidence in the army consistently rank higher than in all other branches of government and management institutions in various surveys conducted by SRC over time.

Diagram 6. Attitudes towards the continuity of war

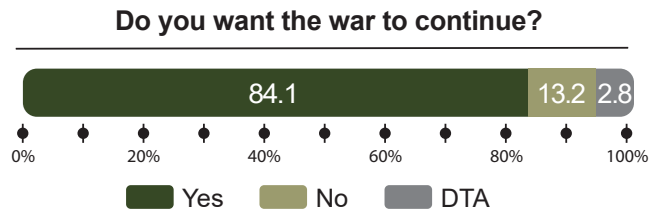


Diagram 7. Participation in war

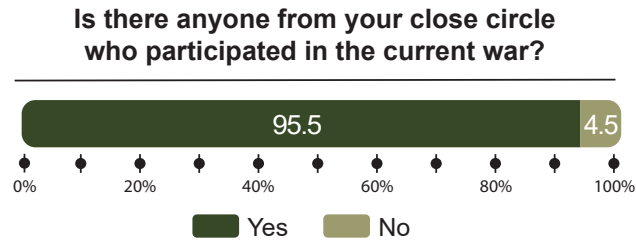


Diagram 8. The hope of land liberation from occupation

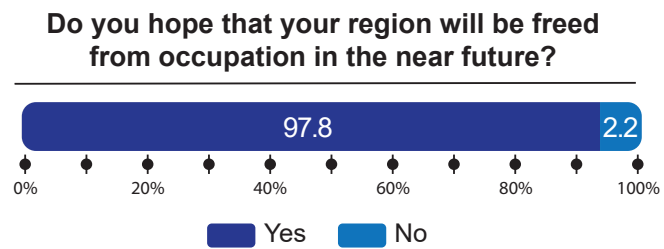


Diagram 9. Confidence in the return of occupied land



Diagram 10. Confidence in the strength of the army

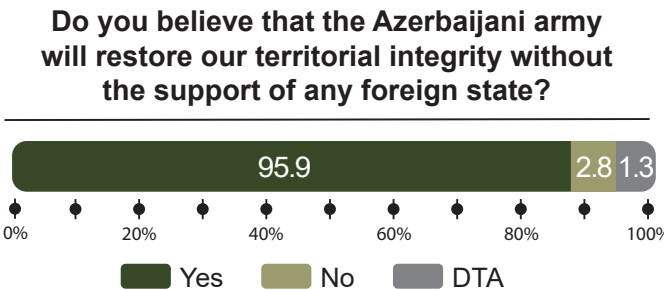
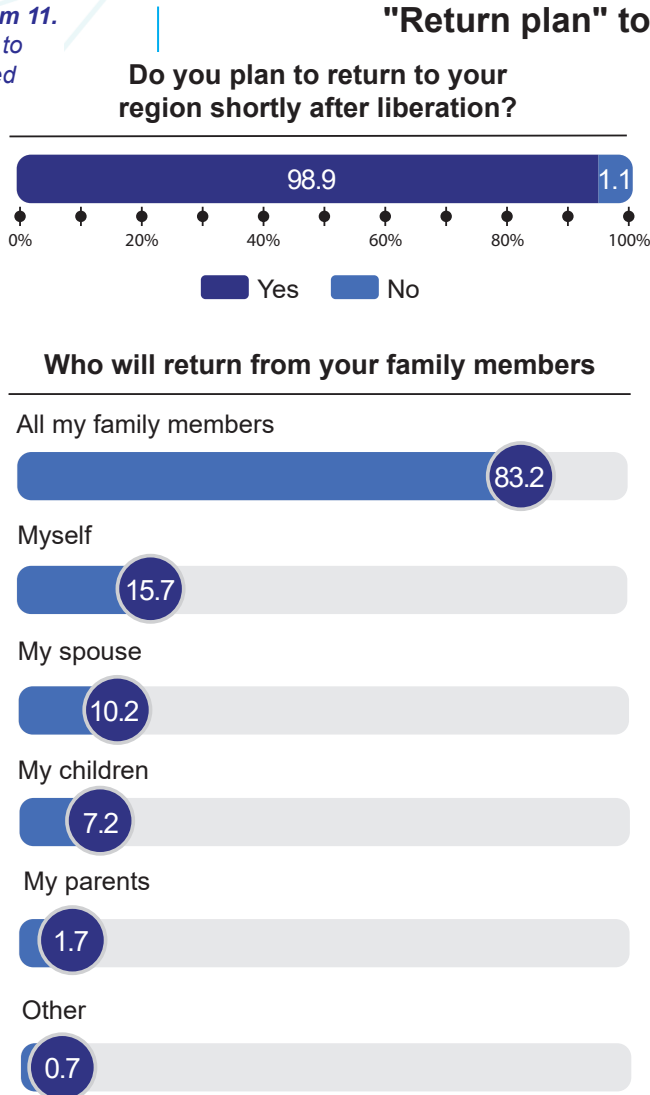


Diagram 11.  
Return to  
liberated  
lands



While there are varied opinions among the country's population regarding the return of families classified as forced migrants to their regions, the response from these migrants is unequivocal. The overwhelming majority of survey respondents, a staggering 98%, intend to return to their liberated regions in the near future. Plans for return are notably prevalent among young people, with 96% of young respondents expressing intentions to return to the liberated territories. These results underscore that most IDP families have formulated return plans.

Moreover, the vast majority of respondents, accounting for 83.2%, plan to return alongside all their family members. Among those who did not select this option, 15.7% indicated they would return alone, 10.2% with only their spouse, and 7.2% with only their child or children.

Since the commencement of the conflict, the successful operations of our army have led to the liberation of our lands from occupation, instilling a profound sense of victory throughout the country's populace. For IDPs, this feeling is distinctive. They rejoice and are eager to return home. Nearly all respondents (99%) expressed that the liberation of land instilled in them a desire to return home.

Another indication of the respondents' enduring hope for a return to their homes is the preservation of keys and documents for nearly 30 years. Notably, half of the respondents (51.1%) retain the keys/documents of their houses in the occupied territories.

Diagram 12.  
"Going home"  
mood

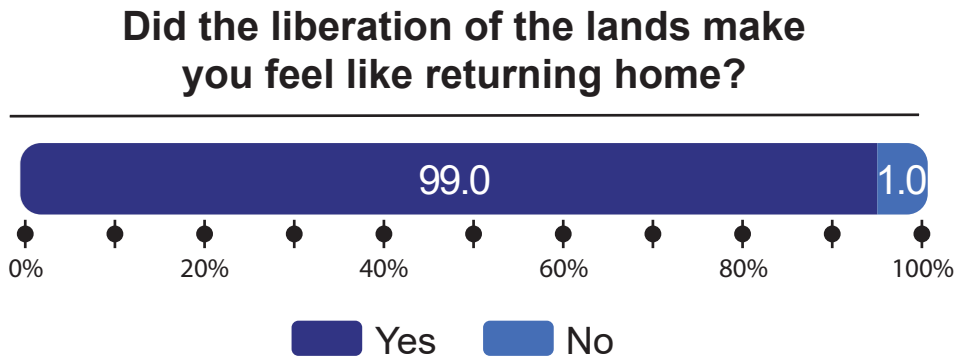
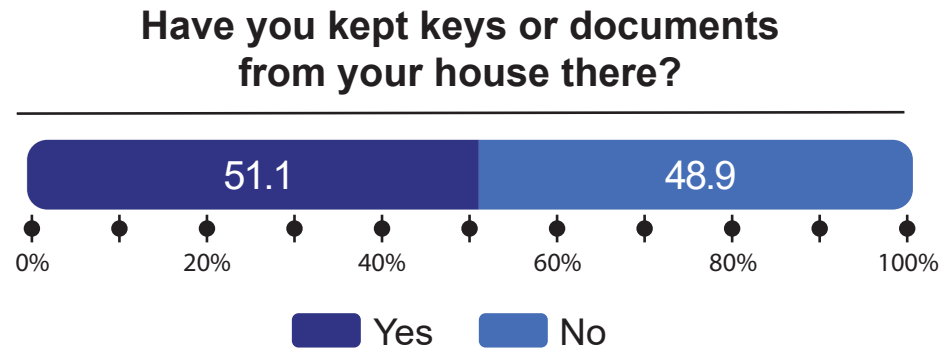


Diagram 13.  
The main  
symbol of return  
"House keys"





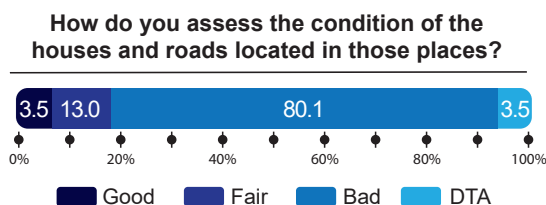
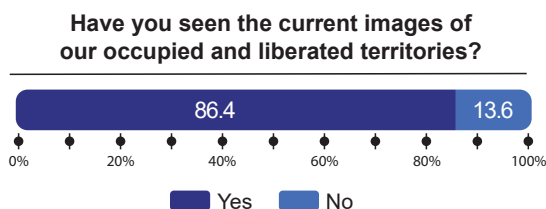
## The condition of the lands freed from occupation through the eyes of "past" and future residents

Images captured from our territories liberated from occupation by the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Azerbaijan are regularly disseminated in the media through videos and photos. While 86% of the respondents have viewed the current images (pictures, videos, etc.) of our previously occupied and now liberated territories, it is intriguing that 13% have not. Among those familiar with the images, 80% observed houses, roads, etc., in these areas and assessed their condition as poor, while 13% deemed it sufficient.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (91%), who rated the infrastructure poorly, believe that the Armenian authorities refrained from investing in these areas due to the belief that they could not maintain a presence there for an extended period. Additionally, 62% of those surveyed are of the opinion that Armenia lacked sufficient funds to improve all the occupied territories.

### Attitude towards coexistence with Armenians in lands liberated from occupation

Although the majority of families with displaced status (72%) believe that coexistence with the Armenian population in Karabakh is impossible, 14% of respondents believe that this situation might change, but only after a considerable amount of time. Young people express a strong belief that coexistence with Armenians will not be feasible (80%). The notion that coexistence with Armenians is possible is more prevalent among men (16.6%) compared to women (9.5%). Additionally, 5.2% of respondents hold the view that coexistence could occur in the future, citing historical precedence where cohabitation with Armenians existed in those lands. Furthermore, 90.3% of respondents stated that they personally would not consider living with Armenians in those lands in the future. However, about 8% of respondents expressed openness to the idea. Despite the overwhelmingly negative attitude towards both the Armenian people and the Armenian state (94.8% and 99.4%, respectively), the fact that 4.5% of respondents maintain a neutral stance towards the Armenian people indicates a distinction between public sentiment towards individuals and the state's stance on the Karabakh issue.



#### What do you think are the reasons why those places are in bad condition?

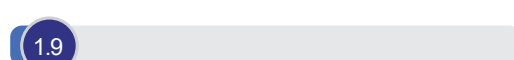
The Armenian authorities were reluctant to invest in those territories because they thought that they would not be able to stay for a long time



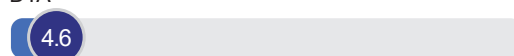
Armenia did not have enough funds to improve all the territories it occupied



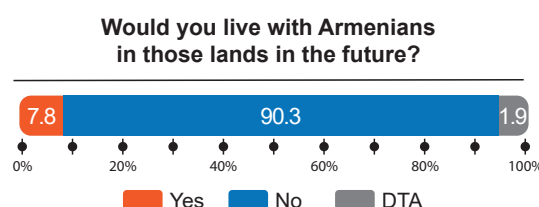
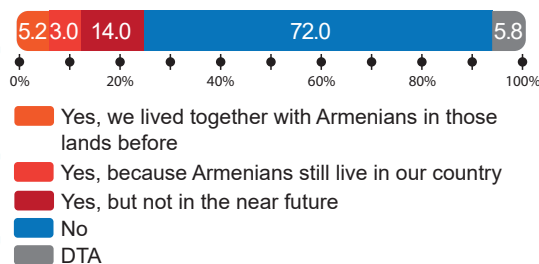
The geographical conditions of our occupied and liberated territories are not favorable for this



DTA



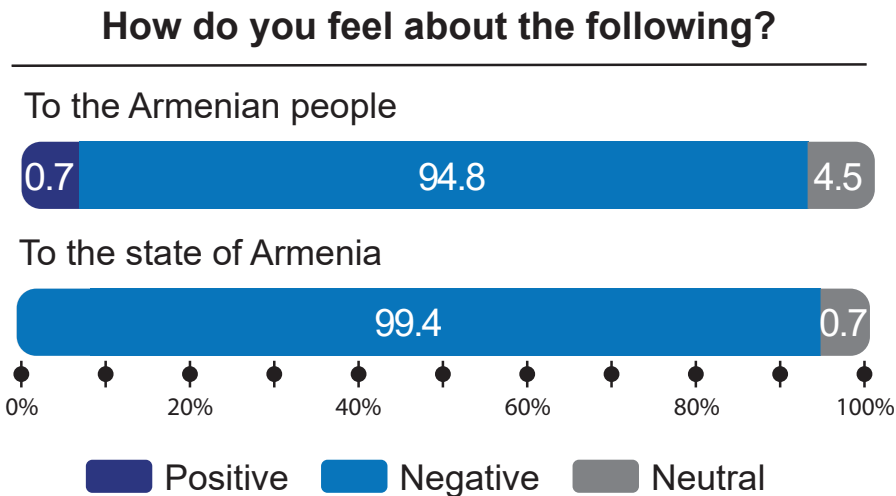
#### Do you think that someday the Armenian population of Karabakh will be able to live in Azerbaijan as well as representatives of other nationalities and ethnic minorities?



**Diagram 14.**  
Situations of lands freed from occupation - evaluation

**Diagram 15.**  
Attitude to live with Armenians in those lands

Diagram 16.  
Armenian  
state and  
attitude towards  
Armenians

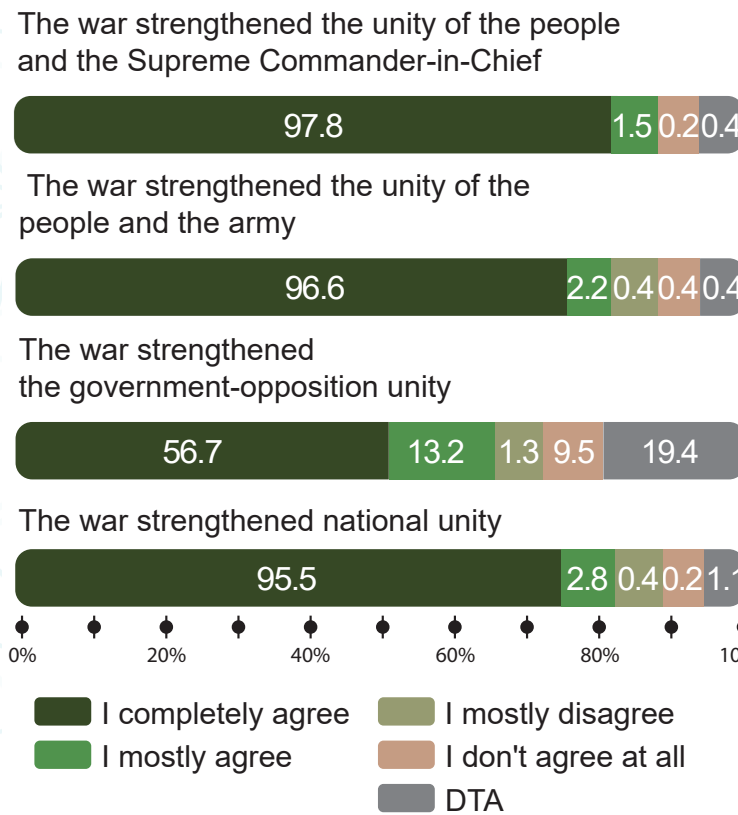


The main figures in the war that commenced in September are the Azerbaijani army and the Commander-in-Chief. The successful execution of the battle plan by our army, guided by the strategic decisions of President Ilham Aliyev, stands as the cornerstone of liberating our lands. The liberation from occupation not only bolstered the populace's trust and con-

fidence in the army and the Commander-in-Chief but also fortified unity. With a high level of trust and confidence in the army, the vast majority of respondents believe that the war bolstered the unity between the people and the army. This is evident in the robust support campaign for the army orchestrated by our citizens.

Diagram 17.

### To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



The news of victory was directly conveyed to the population by the Commander-in-Chief, and the President's regular addresses to the people fostered greater solidarity around him. Nearly all respondents (97.8%) affirm that the war reinforced unity between the people and the Commander-in-Chief. Interestingly, 56.7% of respondents perceive this historic event as positively impacting the ruling-opposition coalition. Notably, about 20% of respondents found it challenging to articulate their views on government-opposition unity. Once again, in the Second Karabakh War, we witnessed the quintessential unity of the Azerbaijani people, highlighting their ability to muster all efforts in challenging times. The responses of the participants unequivocally mirror the reality, with an overwhelming majority (95.5%) believing that the war strengthened national unity.

## CONCLUSION

- Amid ongoing Armenian provocations, a significant portion of internally displaced persons anticipated the imminent onset of war. This anticipation is particularly prevalent among men and individuals from the older generation.

- The main reasons for the large-scale counter-offensive operations are the Armenian provocations that began in July and have continued since then, along with the statements made by the Prime Minister of Armenia. Furthermore, the population's desire for a resolution to the conflict, which has persisted for almost 30 years, has been evident through their participation in the national unity march in July and their voluntary mobilization efforts.

- Among the IDPs, the majority believe that the counter-offensive operation started at the right time, representing two-thirds of the respondents. Although approximately one-third of the respondents anticipate a counter-offensive operation in the future, very few believe it will commence imminently.

- Another aspect reinforcing the respondents' viewpoint is the overwhelming majority who believe that the return of land through negotiations is implausible. They attribute the futility of negotiations over the past 28 years to several factors, including the disinterest of global powers in resolving the issue, the ineffectiveness of the OSCE Minsk Group, and Armenia's persistent policy of aggression. Current events align closely with the population's perceptions regarding the military support provided by both the OSCE Minsk Group and the countries advocating for peace in Azerbaijan to Armenia.


- The majority of IDPs express a desire for the continuation of the war. They hold firm belief that all lands will be liberated through ongoing military efforts, primarily due to their unwavering trust and confidence in our army. This confidence is deeply rooted in the population's perception of the strong material and technical foundation of our armed forces, coupled with the professionalism and patriotism exhibited by our soldiers and officers. Furthermore, their trust extends to the tactical decisions made by the Commander-in-Chief, who stands as the central authority in decision-making processes.

- The majority of IDPs harbor hope that their lands will be liberated from occupation in the future. A significant indication of this hope lies in the fact that half of the respondents still retain the keys and documents of their houses in those areas.

- The liberation of the lands from occupation has sparked a strong desire within them to return to their native lands. The majority of them intend to move back to these territories with their families in the near future. One in four respondents expressed that either they or someone from their family would be returning. Among young people, there is also a predominant inclination towards planning to return.

- IDPs, like all members of the population, closely follow the videos, photos, and reports from the territories liberated from occupation. Comparing the current state with the previous images of those areas, people generally express disappointment regarding the condition of roads, houses, and villages. For nearly 30 years, IDPs have cited several reasons why the Armenian state failed to improve these territories despite the occupation. Most of them attribute this to the reluctance of Armenian authorities to invest in those lands, anticipating their inability to maintain control for an extended period. While the Armenians occupied those lands with external support, they understood the challenge of sustaining control in the long term. Additionally, some respondents pointed out that Armenia lacks the necessary funds to enhance the occupied territories. These sentiments align with reality, as Armenia's state budget, one of the smallest in the Caucasus region (about 6 billion manats), is insufficient to fund reconstruction efforts.

- The vast majority of respondents are of the opinion that coexistence with Armenians in those lands will not be possible. However, although their number is small, there are those who think it is possible. They are of the opinion that it takes some time for coexistence to happen again. It should be noted that a small number of respondents are of the opinion that coexistence is possible on the basis that Armenians live in peaceful conditions in our country like representatives of other nations.



- Although our population shows tolerance towards the Armenians living in our country, in general, the attitude towards both the Armenian state and the Armenian people is unequivocally negative.

- The war united both the army and the Commander-in-Chief with the people. Also, our national unity and solidarity have strengthened. In particular, it should be emphasized that ethnic minorities in the country also demonstrate unity and support for the people, army and state of Azerbaijan with their activities. It is worth noting that in the war situation, the opposition was united with the government. At other times, representatives of the opposition, who were in conflict with the government, united around the Commander-in-Chief and the army. The fact that 50 of the 52 parties in Azerbaijan support the government is a clear proof of this.

- According to the results, it can be said that in response to the continuous military provocations by Armenia, the Azerbaijani army launched a large-scale counter-offensive operation. This operation provided the IDPs with the opportunity to return to their lands and open a new chapter in their lives after 30 years.

While the entire society is celebrating the victory, the IDPs are doubly optimistic. They are not only happy about the victory but also about returning home.



## NOTES

[illegible]





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