

# Perceptions of Identity and Attitudes Toward the Peace Process in Azerbaijan After the Second Karabakh War

Abdulla Khanayev\*  
Meral Balcı

**Abstract:** The Second Karabakh War led to radical changes in Azerbaijani society's perception of national identity and profoundly affected attitudes towards the peace process. In the aftermath of the war, Azerbaijani society has been going through various social and psychological processes both in search of internal identity and to contribute to the regional peace process. This study examines the transformation in Azerbaijanis' perception of national identity in the post-war period and the effects of this transformation on attitudes towards lasting peace. Within the scope of the research, a survey was conducted with 150 participants across Azerbaijan, and the data was analyzed using Python programming language. The findings show that the war has strengthened the perception of national identity and created a collective sense of victory throughout the society. Although the majority of the participants believe that peace is possible, they emphasize that a culture of peace based on mutual trust, empathy and education should be developed in order to achieve peace. Significant differences were observed in attitudes towards peace depending on age and education level. The study draws attention to the fact that the peace process may be damaged if national identity discourses evolve into an exclusionary structure. The results reveal that for peace to be sustainable in Azerbaijan, an inclusive identity and a dialog-oriented approach should be developed.

**Keywords:** Azerbaijan, Data Analysis, Field Study, Identity Policies, Peacebuilding, Second Karabakh War

**Öz:** İkinci Karabağ Savaşı, Azerbaycan toplumunun ulusal kimlik algısında radikal değişikliklere yol açmış ve barış sürecine yönelik tutumları derinden etkilemiştir. Savaşın ardından Azerbaycan toplumu, hem içsel kimlik arayışında hem de bölgesel barış sürecine katkı sağlama çabasında çeşitli sosyal ve psikolojik süreçlerden geçmektedir. Bu çalışma, İkinci Karabağ Savaşı'nın Azerbaycan toplumundaki ulusal kimlik algısı ve kalıcı barışa yönelik tutumlar üzerindeki dönüştürücü etkisini incelemektedir. Araştırma kapsamında, Azerbaycan genelinde 150 katılımcıyla bir anket yapılmış ve veriler Python programlama dili kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, savaşın ulusal kimlik algısını güçlendirdiğini ve toplumda ortak bir zafer duygusu oluşturduğunu göstermektedir. Katılımcıların çoğu barışın mümkün olduğuna inanmakla birlikte, barışı sağlamak için karşılıklı güven, empati ve eğitime dayalı bir barış kültürünün geliştirilmesi gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Barışa yönelik tutumlarda yaş ve eğitim düzeyine göre önemli farklılıklar gözlemlenmiştir. Çalışma, ulusal kimlik söylemlerinin dışlayıcı bir yapıya dönüşmesi halinde barış sürecinin zarar görebileceğine dikkat çekmektedir. Sonuçlar, Azerbaycan'da barışın sürdürülebilir olması için kapsayıcı bir kimlik ve diyalog odaklı bir yaklaşımın geliştirilmesi gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Azerbaycan, Barış İnşası, İkinci Karabağ Savaşı, Kimlik Politikaları, Saha Çalışması, Veri Analizi

\* Corresponding Author

@ PhD Candidate, Istanbul University, abdulla.khanayev@gmail.com  
Prof. Dr, Marmara University, mbalci@marmara.edu.tr

id <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5303-5141>  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3638-5339>

DOI: 10.12658/M0787  
insan & toplum, 2026; 16(1): 78-99.  
insanvetoplum.org

Received: 14.07.2025  
Revised: 08.09.2025  
Accepted: 29.09.2025  
Online First: 18.11.2025

## Introduction

In contemporary international relations and social sciences, the complex relationship between identity dynamics in post-conflict societies and sustainable peacebuilding processes is gaining increasing significance. This relationship encompasses critical elements such as the reconstruction of collective memory, the role of victimhood and victory narratives in social mobilization, and the transformation of perceptions of the “other” (Brewer, 2010, p. 536). Understanding this complex relationship is impossible without considering the historical background of the period prior to 2020. The first violent phase of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the modern era was the First Karabakh War, which began in 1988 and ended with a ceasefire in 1994. This war, which began during the collapse of the Soviet Union, resulted in the occupation by Armenian forces of the entire Nagorno-Karabakh region, including Hankendi, and seven surrounding Azerbaijani districts (Aghdam, Lachin, Kelbajar, Jabrayil, Fuzuli, Qubadli, and Zangilan) (Ibrahimov, 2021, p. 174-175). This occupation led to the loss of approximately 20% of Azerbaijan’s territory and the displacement of approximately one million Azerbaijanis within the country (internally displaced persons - IDP) (Sapmaz & Sarı, 2012, p. 2). This war has left a deep trauma in Azerbaijan’s social memory and identity construction, establishing itself as a “victim identity”. This thirty-year occupation and status quo, coupled with the failure of all diplomatic efforts within the Minsk Group and the inability to ensure territorial integrity, were the fundamental dynamics that paved the way for the Second War in 2020 (Yüce, 2022, p. 101). In this context, the Second Karabakh War of 2020 not only reshaped regional balances but also deeply affected the socio-psychological fabric of Azerbaijani society. The war, which lasted for 44 days of intense conflict, concluded with a military victory for Azerbaijan and the signing of a ceasefire agreement on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2020, resulting in the restoration of Azerbaijani control over significant parts of Karabakh. This victory led to a surge in national morale and solidarity within the country and initiated a new process toward normalization of relations with Armenia. However, the psychological impacts of the war continue to persist in the collective memory, thereby complicating the dynamics of the peace process. The “victim identity,” shaped over more than three decades of occupation and the displacement of approximately one million people, has been increasingly replaced by a strong “victory and revival identity”. This transformation is a typical manifestation of Tajfel and Turner’s social comparison mechanism, wherein groups enhance their identity by portraying themselves as superior to out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). For instance, the frequently used post-war metaphor of the “Iron Fist” symbolizes the

strength of the Azerbaijani army and reinforces national unity (AZERTAC, 2022). This transformation is not limited to political discourse; it finds concrete expressions in collective memory (monuments, curriculum, media, popular culture), collective self-confidence, and public trust in the state. However, the societal reception of this discourse constitutes a fundamental factor shaping attitudes toward the peace process. Moreover, the role of media and educational institutions in this period directly influences both identity construction and the dissemination of a culture of peace. This situation provides a striking example of how historical traumas are mobilized in the construction of modern national identity, within the framework of Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolism theory (Smith, 2009).

This study examines the reshaping of national identity in post-war Azerbaijani society and its relationship with attitudes toward peace. It begins with a Literature Review, outlining the theoretical foundations of identity and peacebuilding, followed by an analytical framework in the Theoretical Framework section, informed by Social Identity Theory, ethno-symbolism, and peace psychology. The research addresses two key questions: how the Second Karabakh War has shaped Azerbaijani perceptions of national identity and how this transformation influences attitudes toward lasting peace with Armenia? A quantitative research design, using Likert-scale surveys conducted with 150 participants, is employed to analyze trends across demographic groups. The Findings section statistically presents differences in identity and peace perceptions based on demographic variables, and the Conclusion discusses these findings in both theoretical and practical contexts. Consequently, this study aims to contribute to theoretical discussions on identity and peace in post-conflict societies and to offer policy recommendations for decision-makers to develop inclusive identity policies that promote sustainable peace.

## Review of the Related Literature

The conclusion of the Second Karabakh War in 2020 established a major milestone for Azerbaijan which brought about both territorial reunification and deep changes in national identity awareness together with public peace sentiment. During the post-conflict period of reconstruction and regional settlement Azerbaijan must utilize the essential knowledge from post-conflict identity and peace psychology literature to understand public discourse and intergroup relations dynamics. The literature cited presents broad assessments which do not apply to Azerbaijan. Research about the Caucasus region mainly explores military and political aspects while neglecting other dimensions (Broers, 2019). In this context, the present investigation aims to bridge the geographical and disciplinary void found in the literature through an

analysis of social identity connections to peacebuilding in Azerbaijan using social psychological methods.

The idea of post-war identity consciousness has emerged as a significant factor in Azerbaijan's 2020 post-conflict social environment. Since the 1990s Azerbaijan's national identity remained deeply connected to the Karabakh loss and the displacement of thousands of IDPs alongside the general perception of historical unfairness. According to Bar-Tal and Bennink (2004) scholars post-conflict identities are commonly shaped by stories which highlight collective suffering and heroic deeds of resistance. The national identity in Azerbaijan developed through educational programs and media coverage and public remembrance events which linked the country to its territorial restoration ambitions.

The swift and decisive outcome of the Second Karabakh War dramatically reoriented this identity. The long-standing perception of a "frozen conflict" evolved into a public understanding of a "resolved victory." The change in public perception led to a new understanding of collective identity which shifted from victims of injustice to victorious sovereigns. The new Azerbaijani identity after 2020 matches Volkan's (1998) theory of "large-group identity" through which collective memory along with shared trauma gets reshaped by major historical events. Identity exists as a dynamic entity that undergoes change. According to Kelman (2001) post-conflict periods create moments when identities can evolve toward more inclusive and future-oriented perspectives. The official state narratives in Azerbaijan present a unified nation that celebrates national pride while working to restore control over territories which were liberated. The narratives presented by the state face questions about their inclusiveness since they need to determine how returnees along with youth and minority populations fit into a national identity framework.

Attitudes to peace in Azerbaijan following the war are shaped by a tangled web of emotional, political, and historical factors. The termination of the war was seen by many as having delivered justice and honor for the Azerbaijani people, and this explains its high popularity among the population for the government's post-war political agenda. However, As Galtung (1996) added positive peace is not simply about the absence of violence-it is the building of intergroup trust, cooperative institutions, and reconciliatory attitudes.

Psychological literature on peace attitudes, such as the work by Nadler and Shnabel (2008), highlights the importance of recognition, justice, and acknowledgment in the aftermath of conflict. In Azerbaijan, peace attitudes are influenced by the extent to which the return of lands is perceived as sufficient redress for decades of displacement and suffering. While the dominant narrative centers on triumph and sovereignty,

the possibility of normalization with Armenia depends on more complex emotional and political processes, including acknowledgment of mutual suffering and the creation of conditions for dialogue. In the broader context, contact theory (Allport, 1954) and its adaptations (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011) suggest that structured intergroup interaction under equitable conditions can reduce prejudice and foster peace-supporting attitudes. However, due to the prolonged isolation between Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, opportunities for direct contact remain limited. In this vacuum, symbolic narratives, media portrayals, and state messaging play a critical role in shaping public opinion.

Young people in Azerbaijan have grown up in a post-ceasefire, pre-resolution context, shaped by strong patriotic education, the legacy of displacement, and national aspirations. Following the war, many youth view the outcome as the fulfillment of long-standing national goals, but their exposure to alternative narratives remains limited. As McEvoy-Levy (2006) suggests, youth in post-conflict societies are both the inheritors of historical narratives and the agents of future peace. Education and memory institutions thus play a dual role: reinforcing national identity and shaping peace consciousness. While peace education in its formal sense is underdeveloped in the region, there is growing scholarly recognition of the need for curricula that promote critical engagement with history, empathy, and regional understanding. Without such efforts, peace attitudes may remain fragile or conditional, based on security concerns rather than reconciliatory ideals.

## Theoretical Framework

The post-conflict nations will reshape the national identity since war stories of victory or defeat remake the in-group's perception of itself in relation to former enemies. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is a simple model for witnessing these processes. Social Identity Theory asserts that individuals derive a sense of self from their memberships in groups and strive for a positive social identity by contrasting their in-group favourably against suitable out-groups. In longstanding conflicts, this occurs as a radical "us versus them" divide: conflict conditions tend to reinforce in-group solidarity (in-group love) and foster distrust and enmity toward the out-group (out-group hate). The Second Karabakh War similarly consolidated such dichotomous identifications among Azerbaijanis. During Armenia's occupation of Karabakh, national identity in Azerbaijan was largely shaped around collective trauma and victimhood; lost territories and displaced populations formed the core elements of the national narrative. In Vamik Volkan's terminology, losing Karabakh was a "chosen trauma", an in-group wound to the past that united the in-group and provided the rationale for committing its hate against the out-group (Féron & Baser,

2023, p. 385). Annual commemorations of conflicts, martyrdoms, and territorial losses kept such memories alive, legitimizing the national self-concept as the victimized party and defining the other side as the enemy, thus rendering it the “other”.

With the 2020 victory and the restoration of Azerbaijani control over Karabakh, the foundations of this conflict-driven identity have begun to shift. The post-war period offers Azerbaijan an opportunity, and challenge to reconstruct its national identity from one centered on grievance to one incorporating a new narrative of triumph and restoration. Theories of nationalism such as ethno-symbolism highlight the importance of historic symbols and myths in this process. As Anthony Smith (2009) argues, national identities are built on shared memories and symbolic attachments to territory. In the Azerbaijani context, Karabakh (particularly culturally significant sites like Shusha) has long been portrayed as an “indivisible” part of the nation’s homeland and imagination. Reintegrating Karabakh thus carries profound significance: it transforms a key element of Azerbaijani identity (from a displaced, victimized nation to a victorious, territorially restored one) and requires reframing collective memory. Volkan’s theoretical concept of “chosen glory” (1998) is useful here: just as past defeat was mythologized as trauma, the recent military victory can become a chosen glory - a source of pride and renewed national unity. However, such glory can be double-edged. While it may bolster national self-esteem, it risks entrenching triumphalism unless coupled with a forward-looking inclusive narrative. Social Identity Theory warns that if positive distinctiveness for the in-group continues to rely on denigrating the out-group, the identity reconstruction will remain adversarial (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Therefore, a key theoretical consideration is whether Azerbaijan’s post-conflict identity will continue to be defined in opposition to Armenians or evolve toward a more confident identity that no longer requires an “enemy” for self-definition. This study’s conceptual framework thus treats national identity as malleable and responsive to conflict outcomes, drawing on Social Identity Theory to examine how group esteem needs, collective trauma, and victory narratives are shaping the new Azerbaijani identity. It asks how this evolving identity incorporates themes of loss and triumph, and how these, in turn, influence openness to reconciliation.

The second pillar of the framework explores how identity dynamics inform public attitudes toward peace and reconciliation. A core insight from peace psychology is that ending violent conflict (negative peace) is not the same as building reconciliation (positive peace)- the latter requires transforming intergroup attitudes and relationships. Galtung’s theory of positive peace emphasizes the presence of justice, equality, and harmonious social relations, not merely the absence of war (Galtung, 1969, p. 183; 190). In the context of Azerbaijan after 2020, this means that achieving a stable peace with Armenia involves more than a signed agreement; it entails fostering mutual

acceptance and trust between formerly warring societies. Theories of intergroup contact and reconciliation provide mechanisms for such attitudinal change. Allport's Contact Hypothesis (1954) argues that under appropriate conditions (e.g. equal status, common goals, institutional support), direct interaction between members of opposing groups can reduce prejudice and improve intergroup perceptions. Decades of near-total segregation between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, however, have deprived both populations of meaningful contact, instead allowing stereotypes and fears to go unchallenged. In the absence of contact, conflict narratives filled the void- as Bar-Tal (2013) describes, a "culture of conflict" took hold, marked by one-sided victimhood, an ethos of grievance, and the demonization of the rival group. Bar-Tal's work on the socio-psychological infrastructure of conflict suggests that for peace attitudes to emerge, this conflict-driven ethos must be supplanted by a "culture of peace". A peace culture narrative would acknowledge each side's legitimate rights and grievances, humanize the former enemy, and promote new norms of coexistence and reconciliation. Indeed, in contrast to the zero-sum historiography of conflict, peace narratives in both Azerbaijani and Armenian societies would need to revive memories of past coexistence, emphasize shared humanity, and encourage critical reflection on nationalist ideologies that fueled the war.

One influential theoretical perspective on reconciliation is Kelman's notion of peace as identity change. Kelman (2004) argues that lasting reconciliation between adversarial groups requires removing the negation of the "other" from each group's own identity. In protracted conflicts, national identities often become defined in mutually exclusive terms - for example, being a "good Azerbaijani" might implicitly entail seeing Armenians as enemies (and vice versa). Kelman's theory posits that peace is only possible when these identities are reconfigured so that accepting the former adversary is not seen as a threat to one's own national identity. Each side must be able to acknowledge the other's nationhood and narrative as legitimate, without feeling that doing so undermines its own dignity or core identity. This process may involve developing a more inclusive or supraordinate identity (e.g. a shared regional identity or simply a shared identity as humans or peace-seekers) alongside the traditional national identity, to reduce zero-sum perceptions (Kelman, 2008). In the Azerbaijani-Armenian case, applying Kelman's framework means examining whether Azerbaijani public discourse can move away from defining Azerbaijaniness in opposition to Armenians. The "hard work of reconciliation" is to "relegate negation of the other to the periphery of their own identities and eventually discard it", while reassuring people that their core national identity is not weakened by peace. Similarly, from Armenia's side, it would entail letting go of seeing Azerbaijanis solely as antagonists. This identity shift is inherently challenging after a bitter conflict,

but it is crucial: if the public's national self-image is predicated on triumph over a hated enemy, attitudes favoring peaceful compromise will remain frail.

Integrating these theoretical insights, the framework underscores that attitudes toward peace in post-war Azerbaijan are deeply intertwined with identity narratives. Empirical peace research supports this linkage for instance, studies of other post-conflict settings find that group members' willingness to support negotiations or concessions correlates with reduced feelings of competitive victimhood and increased out-group empathy (Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012; Shnabel, Halabi, & Noor, 2013). In Azerbaijan, efforts to foster conciliatory attitudes (for example, through peace education, intergroup dialogue initiatives, or media campaigns humanizing Armenians) can be viewed through Allport's contact theory and Bar-Tal's peace narrative lens. Even when face-to-face contact is limited, symbolic forms of contact – such as learning about the “other side's” culture or hearing their personal stories – may help counter dehumanization. Notably, the media and civil society can play a therapeutic role in post-conflict identity reconstruction by facilitating what Bar-Tal calls “alternative narratives”. This aligns with Peace Psychology approaches that stress healing historical grievances and transforming perceptions as preconditions for sustainable peace (Lederach, 1997; Volkan, 1998). Volkan's psychoanalytic theory adds that addressing collective trauma (e.g. honoring the losses on both sides and moving through grief) is necessary so that societies do not cling to trauma-based identities that perpetuate enemy images. All these theoretical viewpoints converge on a common premise: transformation at the identity level is key to unlocking more peaceful public attitudes. In practical terms, this means that Azerbaijan's post-war identity narrative must evolve to accommodate notions of coexistence seeing peace with Armenians not as a betrayal of national identity, but as a step toward a more secure and prosperous national future.

Guided by the above theoretical perspectives, this study's framework connects macro-level identity theories with micro-level attitude change processes to examine post-conflict Azerbaijan. Social Identity Theory and related nationalism theories establish a conceptual foundation for understanding how the Second Karabakh War's outcome could recalibrate Azerbaijani national identity potentially shifting from a trauma-centric, exclusionary identity toward a more confident and possibly more inclusive one. The analysis will use this lens to evaluate narratives in political discourse, media, and collective memory that signal how Azerbaijanis are redefining who “we” are after the war. Concurrently, theories of intergroup contact, peacebuilding, and reconciliation (Allport, Bar-Tal, Kelman, Galtung, etc.) illuminate how this identity shifts might influence public attitudes toward peace with Armenia. By applying Kelman's criterion of identity change (has the public started to remove

the enemy-negation from its self-concept?) and Bar-Tal's notion of ethos of peace (are new narratives challenging entrenched hostility?), the study directly links theory to its research questions. In essence, the theoretical framework posits that if post-war Azerbaijani identity reconstruction remains adversarial and glorifies the conflict, then public support for genuine peace will likely be low whereas if identity is reframed in a way that allows seeing Armenians as potential partners rather than eternal enemies, then attitudes favoring reconciliation should become more prevalent. These hypotheses, grounded in the chosen theories, will guide the interpretation of interview data and survey results on Azerbaijani societal attitudes. Ultimately, the framework provides a structured way to understand the complex interplay between national identity transformation and peace attitudes, ensuring that the study's analysis stays anchored in established scholarly insights while being tailored to the unique post-conflict context of Azerbaijan.

## Methodology

This study is a quantitative research that aims to examine identity perception and attitudes toward the peace process in Azerbaijani society after the Second Karabakh War. The research aims to analyze how social and psychological changes affect social reconciliation processes and how this transformation is reflected in the peace process. The research focuses on two main questions: (1) How has the Second Karabakh War shaped Azerbaijanis' national identity perception? and (2) How has this identity transformation affected Azerbaijanis' attitudes toward a lasting peace with Armenia?

### Participant Selection

The research was conducted on a sample of adults living in Azerbaijan after the Second Karabakh War. The aim of the research was to obtain the opinions of individuals living in Azerbaijan who could represent different socio-demographic groups. In selecting the participants, maximum diversity sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was preferred to examine social reality in a multidimensional way. In this context, data was collected from 150 participants aged 18 and over, considering variables such as age, gender, education level, occupation, and city of residence. The sample size was determined to enable reliable statistical analysis and comparison between subgroups. Informed consent forms were obtained voluntarily and completely from all participants in the study.

### Research Design and Data Collection Method

The research was conducted within the framework of the positivist scientific paradigm and based on a general survey model (Aliyu, Bello, Kasim, & Martin, 2014). A

structured questionnaire method was used in the research to measure and describe a social situation through a broad sample. Data was collected both through an online questionnaire (Google Forms) and face-to-face interviews. While the online data collection method provided the opportunity to reach a wider and more diverse group of participants, face-to-face interviews contributed to participants providing more detailed and careful answers to the survey questions. During the data collection process, participants' answers were based entirely on voluntary participation, and there was no pre-determination or steering of answers. A natural environment was provided in which participants could freely give their answers.

### **Data Collection Tool**

The data collection tool used in the study is a 30-item questionnaire developed by the researchers and structured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). The questionnaire consists of two main sections. The first section contains a total of 30 statements aimed at measuring identity perception, social memory, perception of peace, the influence of media and educational institutions, and social psychological factors. The second section contains five questions aimed at determining participants' demographic information (age, gender, education level, occupation, and city of residence). The statements in the first section are distributed across the following five sub-dimensions:

- Identity Perception: 1- 6 (6 statements)
- Social Memory: 7 - 12 (6 statements)
- Perception of Peace: 13 - 18 (6 statements)
- Media and Educational Impact: 19 - 24 (6 statements)
- Social Psychological Factors: 25 - 30 (6 statements)

Some statements in the questionnaire are structured in a reverse (negative) manner. These statements are numbered 3, 9, 15, 21, and 29, and were reverse-coded for analysis during the data analysis process.

### **Data Analysis Process**

The data obtained within the scope of the research was collected from online and face-to-face surveys and recorded in Excel format. The collected raw data was first subjected to a data cleaning and digitization process so that it could be analyzed using the Python programming language. During the data cleaning stage, missing and incorrect entries in the data set were checked, and blank or inconsistent

statements in the survey responses were excluded from the analysis. After ensuring data integrity, non-numerical categorical responses were made analyzable in the Python environment. In this context, the statements in the five-point Likert scale used in the survey form were converted into numerical data as follows: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree. The age variable in the demographic information in the data set has been categorized and classified into age groups of 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, and 56+. Additionally, the settlement variable in the demographic information provided by the participants in the study was recoded to enhance interpretability in data analysis and classified into two categories: “urban” and “rural”. Subsequently, the structural integrity of the scales used in the study was examined, and reliability analyses were conducted. Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was calculated to determine the internal consistency of the scale, and it was determined that the scale had a high level of reliability ( $\alpha = 0.857$ ). Since this value is very close to 1, it has been decided that the survey is reliable. Frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation values were calculated for each variable within the scope of descriptive statistics. First, Table 1 shows the average scores for each statement in the questionnaires used in the field research.

**Table 1**

*Average Scores for Each Statement in the Survey Used*

| <b>Statements</b>   | <b>Average</b> |
|---|----------------|
| I feel my Azerbaijani identity has become stronger after the Second Karabakh War.                       | 3,9            |
| My national values and culture have become more important to me after the Second Karabakh War.          | 3,6            |
| Being Azerbaijani means only the place where I was born.  | 2,4            |
| I believe the Azerbaijani identity has gained more acceptance in society after the Second Karabakh War. | 3,8            |
| My perception of identity has positively changed compared to before the Second Karabakh War.            | 3,5            |
| My Azerbaijani identity increases my hopes for the future.  | 3,6            |
| Remembering the Second Karabakh War strengthens the sense of unity in society.                          | 4,1            |
| Commemorations of the Second Karabakh War help transmit national values to younger generations.         | 4,1            |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Memories related to the Second Karabakh War cause divisions in society.                                    | 2   |
| Collective memory positively contributes to the peace process.   | 3,5 |
| The language used during the commemoration of the Second Karabakh War supports peace in society.           | 3,6 |
| The importance of the Second Karabakh War is preserved correctly and healthily in our collective memory.   | 3,9 |
| I believe that lasting peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia is possible.                                   | 3,1 |
| Mutual understanding and building trust are the most important factors for peace.                          | 4   |
| Our society does not show enough interest in the peace process and I do not believe peace is possible.     | 2,5 |
| Education of the youth is very important for achieving peace after the Second Karabakh War.                | 3,8 |
| Civil society plays a large and necessary role in peace negotiations.                                      | 3,8 |
| To achieve peace, we must forget the negative experiences of the past.                                     | 2,8 |
| The media plays a supportive role in the peace process after the Second Karabakh War.                      | 3,1 |
| Educational institutions make effective efforts to promote a culture of peace.                             | 3,2 |
| The war-related narratives used in the media increase polarization in society.                             | 3   |
| Topics of peace and reconciliation are sufficiently taught in schools.                                     | 2,9 |
| Media and education increase tolerance toward different cultures.  | 3,5 |
| The contribution of media and educational institutions to peace is not sufficiently recognized by society. | 3   |
| Empathy and understanding towards each other have increased in society after the Second Karabakh War.      | 3,2 |
| The effects of the Second Karabakh War have negatively impacted our personal and social mental health.     | 3   |
| Prejudices among different groups have decreased after the Second Karabakh War.                            | 3,2 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| I believe friendly relations can be established with Armenia in the future.       | 2,5 |
| The sense of trust among people has weakened after the Second Karabakh War.       | 2,2 |
| Psychological support services have a positive contribution to the peace process. | 3,5 |
| Overall average   | 3,8 |

When examining the average scores for the questions, it was found that the lowest scores were for negative statements, particularly statement 9 (Memories related to the Second Karabakh War cause divisions in society), while the highest score was for statements 7 (Remembering the Second Karabakh War strengthens the sense of unity in society) and 8 (Commemorations of the Second Karabakh War help transmit national values to younger generations). The demographic characteristics of the 150 people surveyed nationwide are demonstrated in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Frequency and Percentage Distributions According to Demographic Variables*

| <b>Groups</b>   | <b>Variable</b>     | <b>N</b> | <b>%</b> |
|-----------------|---------------------|----------|----------|
| Gender          | Female              | 93       | 62       |
|                 | Male                | 57       | 38       |
| Age             | 18-25               | 37       | 25       |
|                 | 26-35               | 60       | 40       |
|                 | 36-45               | 27       | 18       |
|                 | 46-55               | 12       | 8        |
|                 | 56+                 | 14       | 9        |
| Education level | Middle school       | 6        | 4        |
|                 | High school         | 12       | 8        |
|                 | Associate degree    | 12       | 8        |
|                 | Bachelor's degree   | 64       | 43       |
|                 | Postgraduate degree | 56       | 37       |

|                 |                |     |    |
|-----------------|----------------|-----|----|
| Occupation      | Student        | 21  | 14 |
|                 | Public sector  | 56  | 37 |
|                 | Private sector | 49  | 33 |
|                 | Retired        | 5   | 3  |
|                 | Unemployed     | 19  | 13 |
| Settlement type | Urban          | 109 | 73 |
|                 | Rural          | 41  | 27 |

When Table 2 is analyzed, it is seen that women constitute 62% of the total and have a higher rate than men. The age group with the highest proportion is 26-35 with 40% and the age group with the lowest proportion is 46-55 with 8%. When analyzed by occupation, the group with the highest percentage is the public sector with 37%, while the group with the lowest percentage is the retired group with 3%. When analyzed by education level, the group with the highest percentage is university graduates with 43%, while the group with the lowest percentage is middle school graduates with 4%. According to the city variable, the rate of those living in urban areas is higher than those living in rural areas with 73%.

In accordance with the research questions, an independent samples t-test was applied to examine differences between binary variables (e.g., gender). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine differences between multiple groups. To determine in detail which groups showed significant differences in the ANOVA results, a post-hoc Tukey test was performed. In all analyses, the significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

## **Ethical Approval**

Prior to conducting this research, ethical approval was obtained from the Nişantaşı University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee with decision number 2025-5 dated May 22, 2025. All individuals participating in the research gave their voluntary consent, and participant confidentiality was strictly maintained. The research was conducted in accordance with all ethical rules and scientific research principles.

## **Conflicts of Interests**

There are no conflicts of interest between the authors in the design, conduct, analysis, interpretation and publication of the results of the research presented in this article. Every author confirms that no financial or personal or institutional

relationships exist which might compromise the study integrity. This research took place independently and the results appear free from external influences or interest group pressures.

### Findings

In this section of the study, the results obtained from the responses to the research question are presented. Scores related to identity perception and attitudes toward peace were compared in terms of demographic characteristics; in this context, independent sample t-tests were applied for gender and settlement unit groups, while one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied for other demographic characteristics. Following the one-way ANOVA, Tukey’s multiple comparison test was used to identify statistically significant differences between groups showing statistically significant differences in demographic variables, thereby creating homogeneous subgroups.

**Table 3**

*t-test Results of Scores on Identity Perception and Attitudes Towards Peace by Gender*

| Gender | N  | $\bar{x}$ | Sd.    | Sd. error | t       | p      |
|--------|----|-----------|--------|-----------|---------|--------|
| Female | 93 | 3.4430    | 0.4480 | 0.0465    | -0.6867 | 0.4934 |
| Male   | 57 | 3.5000    | 0.5600 | 0.0742    |         |        |

Since, as can be seen from Table 3, according to the t-test results, there is no statistically significant difference in the female and male respondents’ average scores on peace attitude and identity perception ( $p > 0.05$ ). This finding indicates that gender cannot be treated as a distinguishing factor for the variables of concern, and both populations possess similar attitudes and perceptions at the population level. Therefore, according to the results obtained, the hypothesis of gender having significant effect on the variables cannot be verified.

**Table 4**

*t-test Results of Scores on Identity Perception and Attitudes Towards Peace by Settlement*

| Settlement | N   | $\bar{x}$ | Sd.    | Sd. error | t       | p      |
|------------|-----|-----------|--------|-----------|---------|--------|
| Urban      | 109 | 3.4257    | 0.4662 | 0.0446    | -1.5885 | 0.1143 |
| Rural      | 41  | 3.5683    | 0.5493 | 0.0858    |         |        |

As can be seen from Table 4, the t-test analysis conducted according to settlement (urban/rural) in terms of identity perception and attitudes toward peace revealed no statistically significant difference between the groups ( $p > 0.05$ ). Although the average scores of rural participants ( $\bar{x} = 3.568$ ) were relatively higher than those of urban participants ( $\bar{x} = 3.425$ ), the likelihood of this difference being random was found to be high. This finding indicates that place of residence does not have a significant effect on individuals' identity perception and attitudes toward peace.

**Table 5**

*Comparison of Scores Related to Identity Perception and Attitudes Towards Peace Among Age Groups Using ANOVA*

| <b>Age</b> | <b>N</b> | <b><math>\bar{x}</math></b> | <b>Sd.</b> |          |          |
|------------|----------|-----------------------------|------------|----------|----------|
| 18-25      | 37       | 3.416                       | 0.510      |          |          |
| 26-35      | 60       | 3.412                       | 0.520      |          |          |
| 36-45      | 27       | 3.441                       | 0.390      |          |          |
| 46-55      | 12       | 3.600                       | 0.411      | <b>F</b> | <b>p</b> |
| 56+        | 14       | 3.750                       | 0.510      | 8.537    | 0.000    |

The results of the ANOVA conducted to evaluate the differences between identity perception and attitudes toward peace scores according to age groups showed a statistically significant difference between age groups ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that there are significant differences in individuals' identity perceptions and attitudes toward peace according to their age. In particular, the fact that the 56+ age group has the highest average draws attention to the effect of age on these factors. The groups formed as a result of the Tukey test are given in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Tukey Test Results for Scores Related to Identity Perception and Attitudes Towards Peace Among Age Groups*

| <b>Age</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>Alpha value = 0.05</b> |          |
|------------|----------|---------------------------|----------|
|            |          | <b>1</b>                  | <b>2</b> |
| 26-35      | 37       | 3.412                     |          |
| 18-25      | 60       | 3.416                     |          |
| 36-45      | 27       | 3.441                     |          |

|          |    |       |       |
|----------|----|-------|-------|
| 46-55    | 12 | 3.600 | 3.600 |
| 56+      | 14 |       | 3.750 |
| <i>p</i> |    | 0.999 | 0.289 |

According to the results of the Tukey test, statistically significant differences were found between age groups in terms of relevant factor scores. When the homogeneous subgroups were examined, it was observed that the 26-35, 18-25, 36-45, and 46-55 age groups had similar mean scores. Additionally, there was no statistically significant difference between the 46-55 and 56+ age groups. However, statistically significant differences were identified between the 18-25 age group and the 56+ age group, the 26-35 age group and the 56+ age group ( $p\text{-adj}=0$ ), and the 36-45 age group and the 56+ age group ( $p\text{-adj}=0.0001$ ). These findings reveal the effect of age on the relevant factor and that individuals' attitudes and perceptions vary according to age groups.

**Table 7**

*Comparison of Scores Related to the Factor of Identity Perception and Attitudes Towards Peace Among to Educational Levels Using ANOVA*

| <b>Education Level</b> | <b>N</b> | $\bar{x}$ | <b>Sd.</b> |          |          |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|------------|----------|----------|
| Middle school          | 6        | 2.850     | 0.517      |          |          |
| High school            | 12       | 3.617     | 0.471      |          |          |
| Associate degree       | 12       | 3.342     | 0.632      |          |          |
| Bachelor's degree      | 64       | 3.594     | 0.396      | <b>F</b> | <b>p</b> |
| Postgraduate degree    | 56       | 3.377     | 0.502      | 23.1089  | 0.000    |

The results of the ANOVA comparing identity perception and attitudes toward peace scores according to educational levels revealed a statistically significant difference between educational levels ( $p < 0.05$ ). This finding shows that individuals exhibit differences in their identity perceptions and attitudes toward peace depending on their educational levels. It is particularly noteworthy that high school and college graduates have higher average scores than other educational levels. The situation in question is detailed in Table 7.

**Table 8**

*Tukey Test Results for Scores Related to Identity Perception and Attitudes Towards Peace Among Education Level*

| Education Level     | N  | Alpha value = 0.05 |        |       |
|---------------------|----|--------------------|--------|-------|
|                     |    | 1                  | 2      | 3     |
| Middle school       | 6  | 2.850              |        |       |
| Associate degree    | 12 | 3.342              | 3.342  |       |
| Postgraduate degree | 56 | 3.377              | 3.377  |       |
| Bachelor's degree   | 64 |                    | 3.594  | 3.594 |
| High school         | 12 |                    |        | 3.617 |
| p                   |    | 0.0001             | 0.9801 | 0.999 |

As detailed in Table 8, according to the results of the Tukey test, it was determined that educational levels created statistically significant differences in identity perception and attitudes toward peace factor scores. When homogeneous subgroups were examined, it was found that individuals with a middle school education level differed significantly from other education levels and had the lowest average score. Among the other groups, those with a postgraduate degree and those with an associate degree formed a homogeneous group, while those with a bachelor's degree and high school graduates formed a different homogeneous group with similar average scores.

**Table 9**

*Comparison of Scores Related to the Factor of Identity Perception and Attitudes Towards Peace Among to 'Occupations' Using ANOVA*

| Occupation     | N  | $\bar{x}$ | Sd.   |       |       |
|----------------|----|-----------|-------|-------|-------|
| Student        | 21 | 3.500     | 0.534 |       |       |
| Public sector  | 56 | 3.513     | 0.426 |       |       |
| Private sector | 49 | 3.376     | 0.561 |       |       |
| Retired        | 5  | 3.620     | 0.502 | F     | p     |
| Unemployed     | 19 | 3.474     | 0.452 | 3.488 | 0.008 |

As shown in Table 9, according to the ANOVA results comparing identity perception and peace-oriented attitude factor scores among occupational groups, a statistically significant difference was found between occupations ( $p < 0.05$ ). This finding shows that individuals in different occupational groups exhibit differences in their identity perceptions and peace-oriented attitudes. Notably, the average score of retired individuals ( $\bar{x} = 3.620$ ) is higher than that of other occupational groups.

**Table 10**

*Tukey Test Results for Scores Related to Identity Perception and Attitudes Towards Peace Among ‘Occupations’*

| Occupation     | N  | Alpha value = 0.05 |        |
|----------------|----|--------------------|--------|
|                |    | 1                  | 2      |
| Private sector | 49 | 3.376              |        |
| Unemployed     | 19 | 3.474              | 3.474  |
| Student        | 21 | 3.500              | 3.500  |
| Public sector  | 56 | 3.513              | 3.513  |
| Retired        | 5  |                    | 3.620  |
| p              |    | 0.5136             | 0.9992 |

According to the results of the Tukey test, it was determined that there were statistically significant differences between the identity perception and attitude towards peace scores of the occupational groups. When homogeneous subsets are analyzed, there is no statistically significant difference between the identity perception and attitude towards peace scores of the Private Sector, Unemployed, Student and Retired occupational groups. These groups are like each other in terms of this factor. There is also no statistically significant difference between the scores of Unemployed, Student, Public Sector and Retired occupational groups. These groups also exhibit similar characteristics within themselves. However, the most important finding of Table 10 is that there is a statistically significant difference between Public Sector and Private Sector occupational groups ( $p\text{-adj} = 0.0156$ ). The Public Sector group is not in subset 1, while the Private Sector group is not in subset 2. This indicates that there is a significant difference between these two groups in terms of mean scores.

## Conclusions

The Second Karabakh War brought about a profound transformation in the collective identity perception of Azerbaijani society, and this transformation has deeply influenced social attitudes toward the peace process. This study aims to examine, using quantitative methods, the relationship between Azerbaijani individuals' perceptions of national identity and their attitudes toward a lasting peace with Armenia in the post-war period. The research findings reveal that national identity has been significantly strengthened after the war and that a sense of victory has emerged at the societal level. While the vast majority of participants believe that peace is possible, they emphasize that it must be supported by a culture of peace based on mutual trust, empathy, and education.

Demographic analyses show that perceptions of peace and identity are not homogeneous within society. Age and education level emerged as key variables creating statistically significant differences in attitudes. It was observed that older age groups placed greater emphasis on identity and exhibited a conditional approach to peace, while younger and more highly educated participants approached peace with a more positive and dialogue-oriented perspective. As the level of education increased, identity was defined in a more inclusive manner and belief in the necessity of peace increased. In contrast, it was found that the variables of gender and settlement type did not create a significant difference.

As proposed in the theoretical framework, Social Identity Theory and ethno-symbolism perspectives have been effective in explaining the construction of a new collective self shaped by victory. However, the continued definition of this identity through exclusionary and hostile images should be considered one of the biggest psycho-social obstacles to lasting peace. As indicated by the peace psychology literature, in order to move beyond negative peace and establish positive peace, it is vital to transform identity-based exclusionary discourses and construct new narratives centered on dialogue.

In this context, the practical implications of the research point towards restructuring educational curricula and media content. Designing educational programs that develop critical historical awareness, empathy, and conflict resolution skills among younger generations will support social reconciliation. At the same time, civil society organizations and media outlets can create symbolic contact opportunities that contribute to the mutual humanization process.

Ultimately, Azerbaijan's ability to establish lasting and inclusive peace in the post-war period depends on redefining national identity within a framework that is

strengthened by victory but not closed to dialogue, confident and future-oriented. By revealing this complex relationship between identity and perceptions of peace, this study provides an empirical basis for both academic literature and policymakers. Future research is recommended to examine these dynamics in depth using qualitative methods and to offer comparative perspectives.

## References

- Ağazade, İ. (2021). Azərbaycan uşaq edebiyatında müharibə - Qarabağ. *Edebiyyatda Qarabağ mövzusu Respublika Elmi Konfransı Materialları* (pp. 24-27). Qerbi Kaspi Universiteti.
- Aliyu, A. A., Bello, M. U., Kasim, R., & Martin, D. (2014). Positivist and non-positivist paradigm in social science research: Conflicting paradigms or perfect partners?. *Journal of Management and Sustainability*, 4(3), 79-95. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jms.v4n3p79>
- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Addison-Wesley .
- AZERTAC. (2022, February 03). *Prezident İlham Eliyev: "Demir yumruq", sadece, güc deyil, bu, birlikdir*. AZERTAC:[https://azertag.az/xeber/prezident\\_ilham\\_eliyev\\_demir\\_yumruq\\_sadece\\_guc\\_deyil\\_bu\\_birlikdir\\_video-1998599](https://azertag.az/xeber/prezident_ilham_eliyev_demir_yumruq_sadece_guc_deyil_bu_birlikdir_video-1998599)
- Bar-Tal, D. (2013). *Intractable conflicts: Socio-psychological foundations and dynamics*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139025195>
- Bar-Tal, D., & Bennink, G. H. (2004). The nature of reconciliation as an outcome and as a process. In Y. Bar-Siman-Tov (Ed.), *From conflict resolution to reconciliation* (pp. 11-38). Oxford Academic. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195166439.003.0002>
- Brewer, M. B. (2010). Intergroup relations. In R. Baumeister & E. J. Finkel (Ed.), *Advanced social psychology: The state of the science* (pp. 535-571). Oxford University Press.
- Broers, L. (2019). *Armenia and Azerbaijan: Anatomy of a rivalry*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Féron, É., & Baser, B. (2023). Pathways to Conflict Transportation and Autonomisation: The Armenian Diaspora and the Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. *Ethnopolitics*, 22(4), 384-400. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2023.2199601>
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167-191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>
- Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221631>
- Ibrahimov, R. F. (2021). Azerbaijan: From small to regional power? *Journal of International Analytics*, 12(2), 170-181. <https://doi.org/10.46272/2587-8476-2021-12-2-170-181>
- Jafarova, N. (2020, November 17). *Restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity means restoration of historical justice*. Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences: <https://science.gov.az/en/news/open/15063>
- Kelman, H. C. (2001). The role of national identity in conflict resolution: Experiences from Israeli-Palestinian problem-solving workshops. In R. D. Ashmore, L. Jussim & D. Wilder (Ed.), *Social identity, intergroup conflict, and conflict reduction* (pp. 187-212). Oxford University Press.
- Kelman, H. C. (2004). Reconciliation as identity change: A social-psychological perspective. In Y. Bar-Siman-Tov (Ed.), *From conflict resolution to reconciliation* (pp. 111-124). Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195166439.003.0006>
- Kelman, H. C. (2008). Reconciliation from a social-psychological perspective. In A. Nadler, T. Malloy & J. D. Fisher (Ed.), *The social psychology of intergroup reconciliation* (pp. 15-32). Oxford University Press.

- Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. United States Institute of Peace Press.
- McEvoy-Levy, S. (2006). *Troublemakers or peacemakers?: Youth and post-accord peace building*. University of Notre Dame Press.
- Nadler, A., & Shnabel, N. (2008). Instrumental and socioemotional paths to intergroup reconciliation and the needs-based model of socioemotional reconciliation. In A. Nadler, T. Malloy & J. D. Fisher (Ed), *The social psychology of intergroup reconciliation* (pp. 37–56). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195300314.003.0003>
- Noor, M., Shnabel, N., Halabi, S., & Nadler, A. (2012). When suffering begets suffering: The psychology of competitive victimhood between adversarial groups in violent conflicts. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 16(4), 351-374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868312440048>
- Pettigrew, T. F., Tropp, L. R., Wagner, U., & Christ, O. (2011). Recent advances in intergroup contact theory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(3), 271-280. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.03.001>
- Sapmaz, A., & Sari, G. (2012). Dağlık Karabağ sorununda Azerbaycan tarafından kuvvet kullanım olasılığının analizi. *Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi*, 8(15), 1-32.
- Shnabel, N., Halabi, S., & Noor, M. (2013). Overcoming competitive victimhood and facilitating forgiveness through re-categorization into a common victim or perpetrator identity. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 867-877. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2013.04.007>
- Smith, A. D. (2009). *Ethno-symbolism and nationalism: A cultural approach*. Routledge.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Ed.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-48). Brooks/Cole. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.30820.60809
- Volkan, V. D. (1998). *Bloodlines: From ethnic pride to ethnic terrorism*. Westview Press.
- Yüce, M. (2022). Karabağ Zaferinden Sonra Azerbaycan Dış Politikasının Öncelikleri. *Türk Dünyası Akademik Bakış*, 2(3), 100-141. DOI: 10.52703/ay.98