

What

The study examines Armenian civil society in terms of active participation, volunteering and trust. The research is based on the theoretical framework claiming that the Soviet experience of mistrust and 'compulsory volunteering' left its negative impact on civil societies in post-communist countries, leading to **low trust, and low membership in associations**. Combined with the overall social disengagement, this is the essence of the current "weakness" of "post-communist" civil society (Howard 2003). Howard's assessment is the starting point of our research project, to be tested for current day Armenia. The main concepts of the study are: **trust towards NGOs, membership in NGOs and volunteering**. The main questions posed are:

- Is Armenian civil society still post-communist?
- What (if anything) has changed?
- Is the younger generation different?

How

Levels of analysis:

- Macro: cross-country comparison
- Mezo: Armenian NGOs
- Micro: individual attitudes (quantitative and qualitative)

Methods:

Secondary data: World Values Survey, Caucasus Barometer, Life in Transition, Civil Society Index
NGO Survey: (online and phone) 188 responses, respondents identified through *Googling technique*
Semi-structured interviews: 20 NGO leaders and 10 volunteers (purposive sampling to maximise diversity)

Secondary Data Analysis

- **Post-communist countries** still have **lower membership in associations**, compared to the rest of the world; the difference is statistically significant.
- Armenia has the **lowest and decreasing levels of trust** towards NGOs in the South Caucasus (Figure 1).
- NGOs in Armenia are **trusted less than the police and the media**.
- **Young people and rural residents** have more trust towards NGOs in Armenia.
- **Membership in associations** in Armenia is extremely low and decreasing.

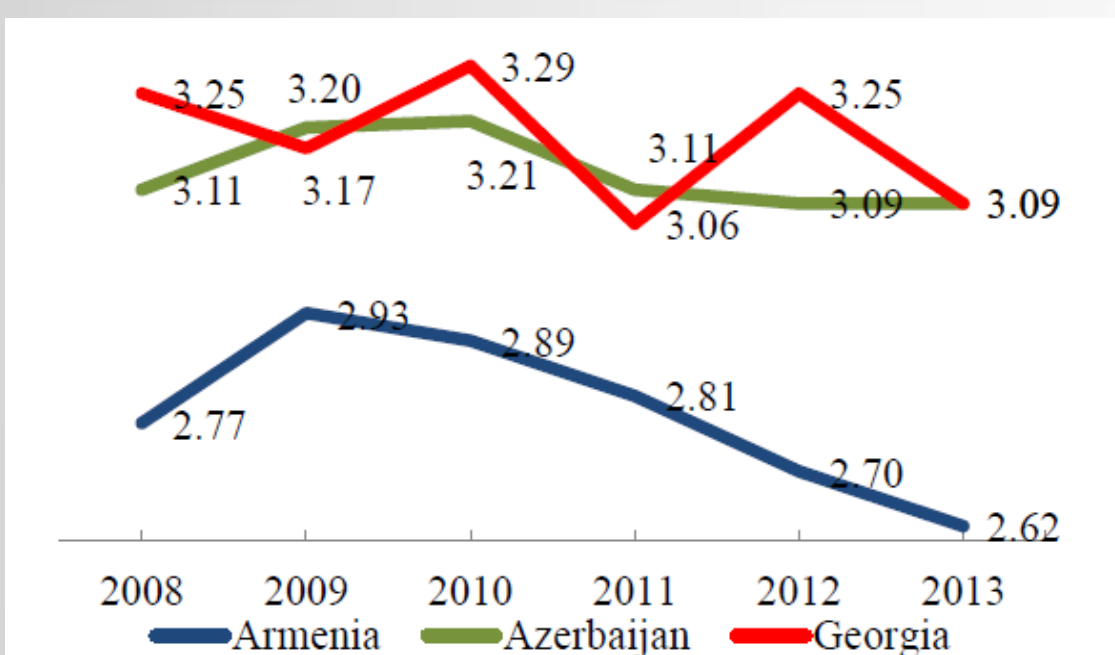


Figure 1. Average trust towards NGOs, Caucasus Barometer, mean on a scale from 1 to 5 ("fully trust")

- Armenia has **higher and increasing numbers of volunteers** in the South Caucasus (Figure 2)
- Older people volunteer less in Armenia
- Men volunteer more in Armenia

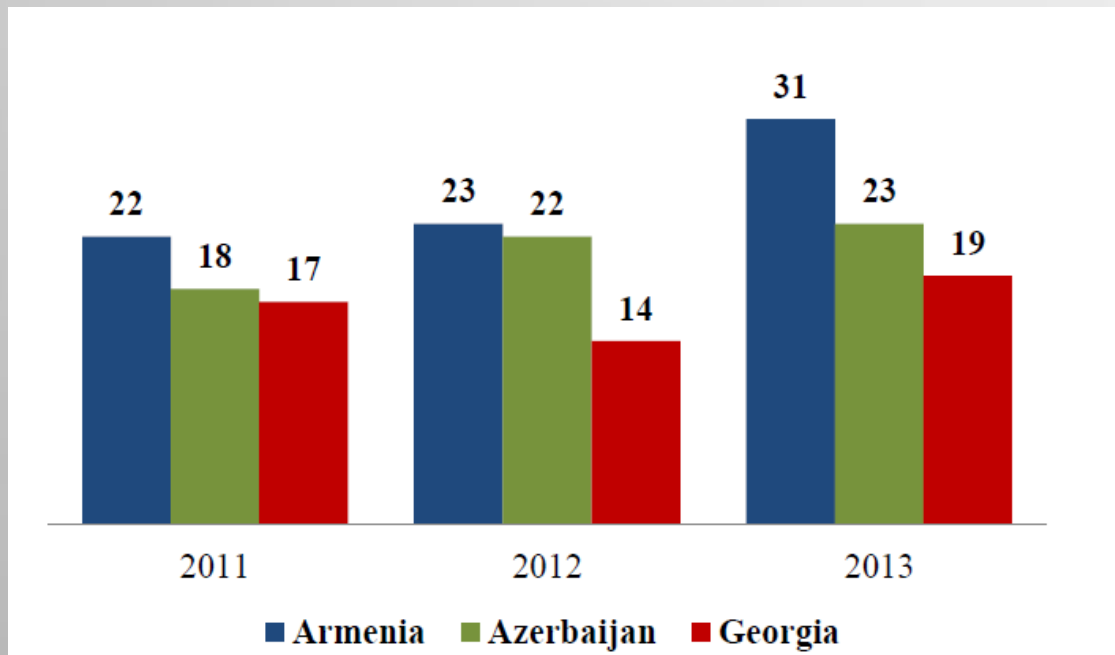


Figure 2. Self-reported volunteering in the South Caucasus, Caucasus Barometer, % of "yes"

Qualitative Study Findings

Changes as a result of transition period: **Psychological change** of growing interest related to the on-going social and political phenomena within society, resulting in **behavioural change** manifested in active public participation and increased volunteering. The change of the **institutional environment** has resulted in great diversity of NGOs that has led to competition and thus difficulties of getting financed. **Technological advancement** is a change which has resulted in increased working productivity and visibility of civil society organisations.

The civil society sector is:

Distrusted because of	Trusted because of
Governmental policies including oversight mechanisms	Civic activists
Spread of governmentally organised civil society organisations	Youth
Negative image	
Public mentality	

Organisational Survey

- Half of the NGOs surveyed claim to be active in the human rights sector
- Most organisations (75%) have experienced **leadership change**.
- Old organisations run by founding leaders receive fewer grants
- Most NGOs **are run by men**, women have supporting roles.
- 90% of NGOs have volunteers
- 72% of NGOs have websites, 65% use Facebook
- NGOs **overestimate public trust** towards them (Figure 3).
- **Older organisations are better institutionalised** in terms of leadership change, their staff is paid more and they receive more grants per year.
- "Younger" NGOs use **Internet and social media** more.

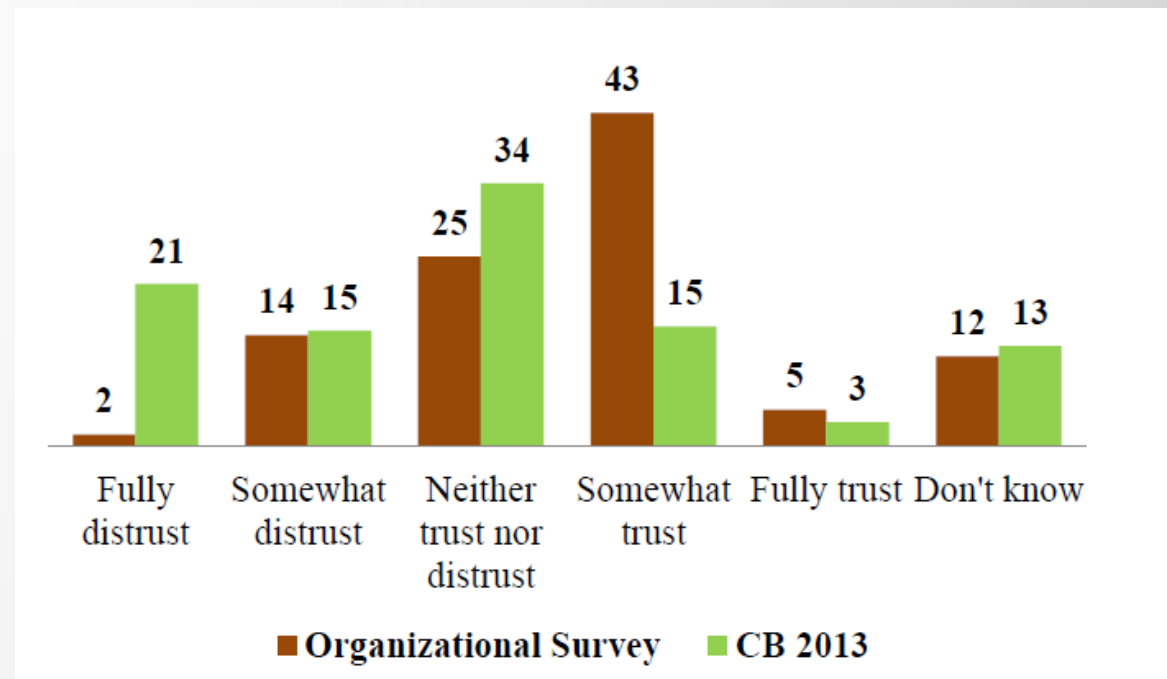


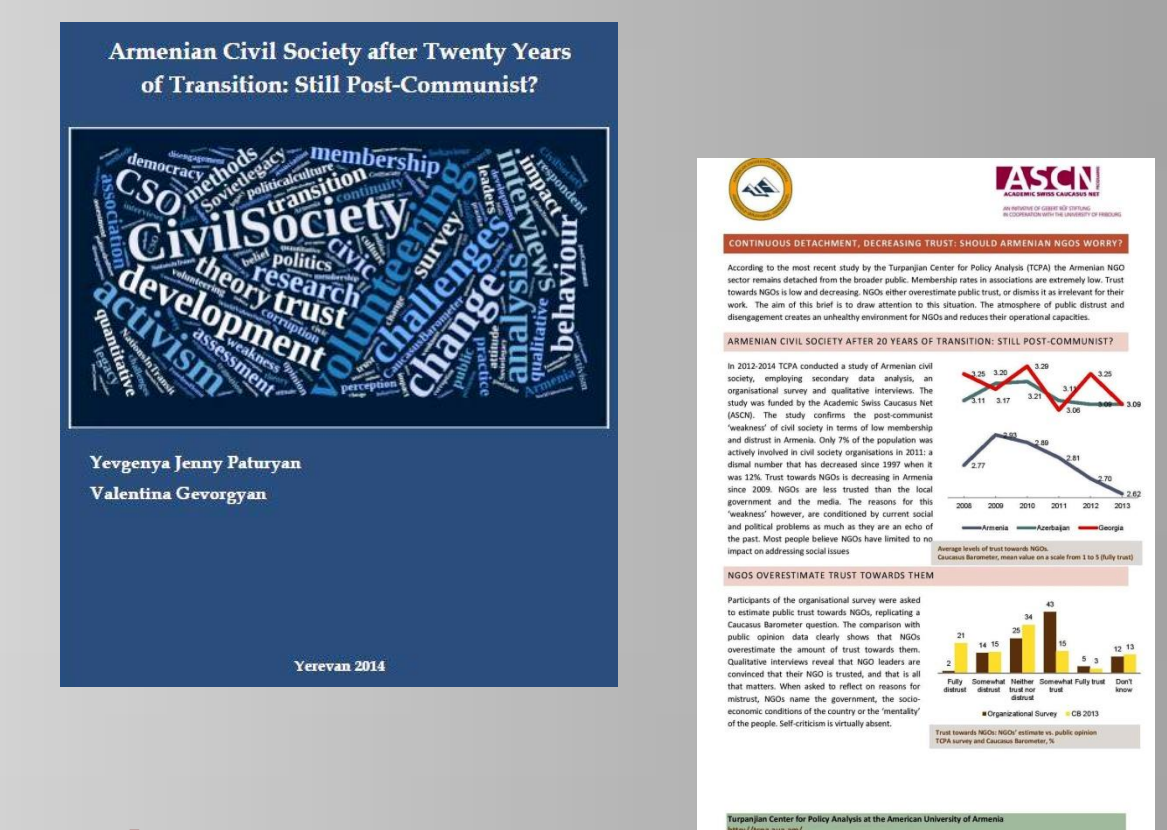
Figure 3. Trust towards NGOs: Organisational survey vs. Caucasus Barometer, 2013, %

Conclusion

- Post-communist weakness of civil society persists in the region and in Armenia: mistrust and disengagement are still widespread
- The reasons for the "weakness" are rooted in the current reality more than in the communist legacy
- The Armenian NGO sector is institutionalised but detached from the public
- People join associations mostly out of career expectations
- Informal volunteering is on the rise

Publications

- "*Armenian Civil Society after Twenty Years of Transition: Still Post-Communist?*" Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis, November 2014
- "*Is Googling a method? What the Internet Can Tell Us about the Non-Governmental Sector in Armenia?*" Haigazian Armenological Review Journal of Haigazian University, July 2014
- "*Trust towards NGOs and Volunteering in South Caucasus: Civil Society Moving Away from Post-Communism?*" special issue of the Southeast European and Black Sea Studies Journal, May 2014



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ASCN About Academic Swiss Caucasus Net
ASCN is a programme aimed at promoting the social sciences and humanities in the South Caucasus (primarily Georgia and Armenia). Its different activities foster the emergence of a new generation of talented scholars. Promising junior researchers receive support through research projects, capacity-building trainings and scholarships. The programme emphasizes the advancement of individuals who, thanks to their ASCN experience, become better integrated in international academic networks. The ASCN programme is coordinated and operated by the Interfaculty Institute for Central and Eastern Europe (IICEE) at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). It is initiated and supported by Gebert RUF Stiftung.