

DIASPORA IN ARMENIA: IMMIGRATION AND POLITICAL INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN ARMENIANS¹

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ABSTRACT

Political integration of migrants is currently one of the issues that have attracted the broader attention of scholars. Even though this issue is not discussed actively, it is an important component of migrants' overall integration in host societies. The lack of consensus on the definition of political integration of migrants and the ambiguity in identifying the factors that indicate or impact political integration are seen as obstacles for conducting empirical studies in this context (Morales, 2011). Nonetheless, in this paper, the political integration of Syrian Armenians in the life of the Republic of Armenia is examined.

Political integration in this study is operationalized as the participation of the immigrants in conventional (elections) and unconventional (protests, online political activities, etc.) politics in Armenia. By conducting an online survey and qualitative interviews with Syrian Armenians residing in Armenia, the first part of the paper established whether the Syrian Armenian immigrants are participating in the politics of Armenia, hence, becoming integrated politically. The second part studied the native Armenians' attitude towards the political participation of Syrian Armenian immigrants.

INTRODUCTION

The presence of Diaspora Armenians in the Republic of Armenia, predominantly the increasing numbers of Syrian Armenians in the past ten years, has driven numerous scholars to explore the consequences of immigration and its impact on social and economic life in Armenia. While several studies have identified the challenges faced by Syrian Armenians, little research has been done on the political participation of Syrian Armenians and their political integration.

There is a difference between the political culture in Armenia and the political culture in Syria. Unlike in Syria, society in Armenia has an interest in and is provided with the opportunity to be engaged in the political process. After resettlement in Armenia, Syrian Armenians experienced a change in political environment, due to the new political culture, which led to a new way of understanding politics. This study examines whether the Syrian Armenians,

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approximately ten years after immigration, have been able to achieve political integration in Armenia. Since Syrian Armenians are becoming an inseparable segment of society in Armenia, it is important to study their political integration in the life of the country, particularly from a societal perspective.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. To what degree have the Syrian Armenian immigrants integrated into the political life of the Republic of Armenia?
2. To what extent has the Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 affected Syrian Armenian immigrants' political participation?
3. What is the attitude of native Armenians towards the Diaspora's participation in the politics of the Republic of Armenia?

LIMITATIONS ON DIASPORA ARMENIANS RUNNING FOR POLITICAL POSITIONS

Prior to the discussion whether the Armenian Diaspora should directly participate in the politics of Armenia, and before measuring the desire of the Armenian Diaspora for political participation in Armenia, it must be noted that legal requirements must be fulfilled to be eligible for attaining political positions. As presented in the Constitution of the country (2015), dual citizenship and duration of residency can be considered obstacles for Diaspora Armenians wishing to attain political positions (Manougian, 2020).

Who is eligible to become a member of the Parliament in Armenia?

Everyone who has attained the age of twenty-five, has held citizenship of only the Republic of Armenia for the preceding four years, has been permanently residing in the Republic for the preceding four years, has the right of suffrage and has command of the Armenian language, may be elected as a Deputy of the National Assembly. (*Constitution of the Republic of Armenia*, 2015 Article 48)

The requirements set forth in the Constitution for being an MP are identical to the requirements for being a member of the Government. The Constitution also provides the requirements for being elected President of the Republic:

Everyone having attained the age of forty, having held citizenship of only the Republic of Armenia for the preceding six years, having been permanently residing in the Republic of Armenia for the preceding six years, having the right of suffrage and having command of the Armenian language may be elected as President of the Republic. (*Constitution of the Republic of Armenia*, 2015 Article 124).

However, in the case of the requirements for local government bodies, there is no reference to dual citizenship and duration of residency.

Citizens of the Republic of Armenia having attained the age of eighteen on the day of election or referendum shall have the right to elect and be elected during the elections of local self-government bodies, and the right to participate in a local referendum. The law may prescribe the right of persons not holding citizenship of the Republic of Armenia to take part in the elections of local self-government bodies and in local referenda. (*Constitution of the Republic of Armenia*, 2015 Article 48).

These requirements are perceived as limitations on broader participation of the Armenian Diaspora in the politics of Armenia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Immigration is the term used to describe the movement of people from their area of residence to settle in another country, whether temporarily or permanently (Kukathas, 2004). *Migration*, in the same manner, refers to a temporary or permanent residential change. While immigration occurs when people cross the borders of a country, in migration no distinction is placed upon the movement within the political borders of a county or beyond the borders (Lee, 1966). Concerning international migration, cosmopolitan scholars call for open political borders. They argue that people should have the right and freedom of association (Hidalgo, 2016; Kukathas, 2004). Advocates of closed borders, however, argue that societies in a receiving country should have the right to control the change of their nation (Miller, 2005). In this regard, Wellman (2008) states that people should have the right of disassociation.

An evident consequence of migration is acculturation, defined as “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2005; 698). Based on two dimensions (a) the immigrants’ will to maintain their original cultural identity in the host society, or (b) their will to be engaged with the host society, Berry developed four acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization (Berry, 1997, 2005). Of these, integration is considered the most favorable for absorption, while marginalization is considered the least favorable, and separation and assimilation are intermediate (Berry, 1997; Yijala and Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2010).

Political integration of migrants is a new track in the literature. In democratic systems, the political integration of migrants constitutes a critical part of integration and a matter worth paying attention to. Yet, there is a lack of consensus in defining political integration and identifying its indicators. According to Morales, “[academic] works have skipped the clear definition of what exactly is political integration or incorporation, how we go about measuring it and, especially, how we identify it when we see it” (2011, p. 20).

In this paper, political integration is operationalized as the participation of the immigrants in conventional (elections) and unconventional forms of politics (protests, public meetings, and online political activities). Although party affiliation and activity are core indicators of political interest, they are not measured in this paper because, in practice, it is challenging to get information about Syrian Armenians' party affiliations.

Few scholars have empirically studied political integration. Migrants' political participation has been identified by measuring their participation in voting in elections, party activity, signing petitions, and their political interest (Strömblad & Adman, 2010). Johnston and Audunson (2019) studied political inclusion by observing conversations where immigrants discussed the common issues of the country with the natives.

Time could be an important factor in political integration. According to Adman and Strömblad, time is a crucial factor since, over time, immigrants are exposed to political developments similar to the natives and experience political life (2018). This, in turn, facilitates political integration. Furthermore, political culture in the host country plays a key role. Bartram argues that if the political participation of the natives in the host country is high, then the political participation of the immigrants will be correspondingly high, and vice versa (Bartram, 2016). One needs to focus on the relationship between associational life and political participation. Strömblad and Adman (2010) argue that general associational activeness increases the political participation of the immigrants in the host societies. In this context, Johnston and Audunson argue that the public sphere increases the political integration of migrants (2019).

MIGRATION POLICY IN ARMENIA

Migration policy identifies the strategies and responsibilities that governments hold towards foreign citizens residing within the political borders of their countries. In the same manner, through laws and regulations, migration policy identifies the rights, obligations, and responsibilities of migrants toward the authorities and society in the host country.

Armenia is one of the countries that is known for its large and strong Diaspora communities. Several studies examine the migration policy of Armenia and how it impacts the repatriation process of the Diaspora. Interestingly, in the migration policy of the RA, there is not a distinct strategy for repatriation. Repats, unlike "foreigners," "returnees," "internally displaced persons," "asylum seekers," "refugees", and "forced deported persons," does not constitute a separate category (Tanajyan et al., 2020, p. 15). Lack of a well-defined migration policy in the RA is a critical factor that discourages the inflow of Diaspora Armenians (Mkrtchyan, 2008; Stepanyan, 2016).

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN ARMENIANS IN ARMENIA

Hakobyan studied the political engagement of Syrian Armenians in Armenia, arguing that political involvement is crucial in becoming full Armenian citizens. By comparing the political culture and participation of Syrian Armenians in Syria and Armenia, Hakobyan (2016) argues that Syrian Armenians have two options: either to be integrated into the political life of Armenia, or to be separated from the political reality.

Hakobyan's (2016) study suggests that Syrian Armenian immigrants who have party affiliations are slightly more interested in politics. Mirzoyan and Hakobyan, on the other hand, indicate that Syrian Armenians' neutrality and being distanced from politics in the RA are due to certain factors related to the country of origin and general interest. The political culture in Syria, lack of knowledge of Armenia's politics, and lack of political interest, in general, are seen as important factors that limit the political participation and engagement of Syrian Armenians in Armenia (Mirzoyan & Hakobyan, 2017).

In order to increase Diaspora Armenians' political participation in general, Cheterian argues that Diaspora communities first need to be engaged in politics in their home country and need to be informed about their responsibilities towards the homeland. Cheterian emphasizes that the Diaspora should contribute to politics in Armenia but not "replace" it (2021).

Diaspora should become simultaneously more political, but also know the limits of the scope of its political activities. To become partners, Diaspora institutions should not try to "replace" the state in Armenia, neither by attempting to take over some of its functions, nor attempting to take over the leadership role in Armenia. (Cheterian, 2021).

In the scope of this study, some political parties, charitable organizations and NGOs are identified as capable of enhancing the community activities and participation of Syrian Armenians in politics in the RA. These include:

1. «Aleppo» Compatriotic Charitable Organization (ACCO),
2. Armenian Democratic Liberal Party,
3. Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU),
4. Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF),
5. Center for Coordination of Syrian Armenians' Issues,
6. Social Democratic Hunchakian Party,
7. Syrian Armenians' Union NGO (SAU),
8. Tekeyan Centre Fund – Armenia.

ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

Descriptive Characteristics of the Survey Participants

The total number of Syrian Armenians who completed the survey questionnaire was 149. Of these 108 were females, and 41 were males. The average age of participants was 32 years, and they ranged from 18 to 83 years of age (Table 1). As shown in Table 2, 73% of the participants moved to Armenia between 2011 and 2015, 21% between 2016 and 2020, and only 5% moved between 1998 and 2010.

Table 1: Age Range of the Participants		
Age	Respondents	Percentage
18-24	50	34
25-34	56	38
35-44	18	12
45-54	8	5
55+	17	11
<i>Note.</i> Total number of participants is 149. The percentage results are rounded.		
Table 2: Immigration Year of the Participants		
Immigration Year	Respondents	Percentage
1998-2010	8	5
2011-2015	109	73
2016-2020	32	21
<i>Note.</i> Total number of participants is 149. The percentage results are rounded.		

Table 3 presents the educational background and employment status of the respondents. Among the participants, cumulatively 78% had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 23% whose highest level of education was middle, high, or vocational school. In terms of employment, employed and self-employed participants constituted 58% of the responses, unemployed participants constituted 19%, and those who were looking for a job constituted 10%. Participants who were students constituted 8%, and only 5% were retirees or chose the 'other' option.

Asked about their Armenian citizenship status, 81% of the respondents held Armenian citizenship, 13% held a special residency passport of Armenia, 3% were planning to apply for Armenian citizenship, and another 3% had either applied for Armenian citizenship, were not planning to apply, or did not hold Armenian citizenship and/or a special residency permit (Table 4). Considering the intention of the participants to stay in Armenia, for 44% of the respondents, Armenia is a country of permanent residence. Another 44% mentioned that they had not decided yet whether to stay in or leave Armenia. For the remaining 12%, Armenia was a country of temporary residence; in other words, Armenia was a country of transit.

Table 3: Descriptive Characteristics of the Participants		
Demographics	Respondents	Percentage
Highest level of education		

	Middle School	4	3
	High School	16	11
	Vocational School	13	9
	Bachelors	88	59
	Masters	27	18
	Doctorate	1	1
Employment			
	Employed	67	45
	Unemployed	28	19
	Self-employed	20	13
	Looking for a job	15	10
	Studying	12	8
	Retired / Other	7	5
Note: All 149 participants of the survey answered the questions related to Education and Employment. The percentage results are rounded.			

Table 4: Armenian Citizenship Status of the Participants		
Citizenship Status	Respondents	Percentage
I hold Armenian citizenship.	121	81
I hold a special residency passport of Armenia.	19	13
I am planning to apply for Armenian citizenship.	4	3
Other	5	3
Note. Total number of responses is 149. The category 'other' consists of one response indicating that the participant has applied for Armenian citizenship, another one response indicating that the participant is not planning to apply, and three responses indicating that the participants hold neither Armenian citizenship nor a residency permit. The percentage results are rounded.		

IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF SYRIAN ARMENIANS IN ARMENIA

In the second section of the survey questionnaire, based on the self-assessment principle, the participants were requested to reflect on their level of satisfaction with different aspects of life in Armenia. The level of satisfaction was measured on a scale of one to four, where one indicated that the participants are 'not satisfied at all', two indicated 'dissatisfied', three 'satisfied', and four 'highly satisfied'. The findings revealed that Syrian Armenians were mostly satisfied with the social activities in Armenia, as the mean value is 3.07, the highest compared with other aspects of life. The Syrian Armenians were also relatively satisfied with life in Armenia in terms of communicating with native Armenians, the traditions of native Armenians, and the housing system, with mean values of 2.89, 2.85, and 2.79, respectively (Table 5). Table 5 also shows that the Syrian Armenians were less satisfied with the educational system (mean value 2.40) and health system (mean value 2.34) of Armenia. It also indicates that the immigrants were dissatisfied with life in Armenia in terms of job opportunities, monthly income, and governmental assistance, with mean values of 2.13, 1.96, and 1.83, respectively.

Table 5: Levels of Satisfaction of Syrian Armenians with Different Aspects of Life in Armenia and Their Mean Values					
	Highly satisfied	Satisfied	Dis-satisfied	Not satisfied at all	Mean values
Social activities	30	10	49	3	3.07
Communication with native Armenians	19	56	21	5	2.89
Traditions of native Armenians	23	46	26	6	2.85
Housing	23	41	27	9	2.79
Educational system of Armenia	9	42	28	21	2.40
Health system	4	42	37	17	2.34
Job opportunities	3	34	36	27	2.13
Monthly income	2	27	36	35	1.96
Governmental assistance	2	18	40	40	1.83
<i>Note.</i> Total number of responses is 149. The percentage results are rounded.					

In order to study the perceptions of Syrian Armenians in terms of their social, economic, and political integration in Armenia, the survey questionnaire provided a question for self-assessment. The participants, on a scale of one to four, indicated their integration level. One meant that they are ‘not integrated at all’, two ‘not integrated’, three ‘integrated’, and four ‘highly integrated’. The findings revealed that Syrian Armenians, based on the principle of self-assessment, are more integrated socially, compared with their integration in the economy and politics. The mean value for social integration is 3.04, whereas it is 2.46 and 2.08 for economic and political integration, respectively (Table 6).

Table 6: Perspective of Syrian Armenians in Terms of Social, Economic, and Political Integration on a Scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (highly integrated) and Their Mean Values					
Integration	Highly integrated	Integrated	Not integrated	Not integrated at all	Mean values
Socially	29	50	17	4	3.04
Economically	9	39	40	11	2.46
Politically	5	28	39	20	2.08
<i>Note.</i> Total number of responses is 149. The percentage results are rounded.					

The Syrian Armenians were also asked to indicate whether or not they were a member of a non-governmental organization in Armenia. The total number of responses for this question was 144. Of these 29% responded ‘yes’, and 71% responded ‘no’.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF SYRIAN ARMENIANS IN SYRIA

The third section of the survey questionnaire assessed the respondents’ political involvement in Syria by measuring their participation in political demonstrations, public meetings, civic activities, and elections. The level of participation was measured on a scale of one to four, where one indicated that

respondents ‘did not participate (or attend) at all’, two ‘rarely participated (attended)’, three ‘infrequently participated (attended)’, and four ‘actively participated (attended)’.

The findings imply that the respondents participated in civic activities relatively infrequently with a mean value of 2.38. Likewise, they participated relatively infrequently in elections with a mean value of 2.31. In terms of public meetings and political demonstrations, the data shows that most of the respondents did not participate in or attend public meetings and political demonstrations, with mean values of 1.33 and 1.13, respectively (Table 7). It is important to mention that for the variable “elections”, all the cases with an age range of 18 to 26 were eliminated. This is because those who were under 18 years of age at the time of their immigration were not eligible to participate in elections in Syria.

Table 7: Mean Values of Syrian Armenians’ Political Participation in Syria on a Scale from 1 (did not participate) to 4 (actively participated)		
Political Activities	N	Mean values
Civic Activities	148	2.38
Elections	82	2.31
Public Meetings	140	1.33
Political Demonstrations	144	1.13

Table 8 presents further detail about the political participation of Syrian Armenians in Syria. The question related to political demonstrations indicates that 90 of the survey respondents did not participate in political demonstrations at all; 8% rarely participated, i.e., once or twice, and only 2% infrequently participateded, i.e., a few times. Similar results were obtained for respondents’ participation in public meetings. 79%, reported that they did not attend public meetings at all, 10% rarely attended, 9% infrequently attended, and 1% reported that they actively attended public meetings (Table 8).

Detailed results for the question related to civic activities show that 34% of the participants reported that they did not participate in civic activities at all, 25% actively participated, 22% infrequently, and 18% rarely participated.

Another factor that implies political involvement is voting. The respondents were asked to report how frequently they participated in elections in Syria. Based on the finding, 53% of the respondents did not participate at all, 18% infrequently participateded, and another 18% rarely participated. Only 11% of the respondents reported that they actively participated in elections in Syria.

Table 8: Political Participation in Syria	Active	Rare	Infrequent	Not at all
Civic activities	25	22	18	34
Elections	28	29	18	34
Public meetings	2	9	10	79
Political demonstrations	0	9	8	90

Note. Total number of responses for the question about civic activities is 148; elections 82; public meetings 140; political demonstrations 144. The percentage results are rounded.

The survey questionnaire also included questions that imply the respondents' political interest to some extent. In this regard, Table 9 portrays the respondents' frequency in following the local Syrian news and the Armenian news in Syria. The findings indicated that 32% of the participants followed the local Syrian news 'daily', 29% 'two-three times a month', 21% 'two-three times a week', and 18% 'did not follow at all'. In terms of the Armenian news, 31% followed the news 'two-three times a month', 24% 'daily', another 24% 'two-three times a week', and 22% 'did not follow at all'.

Table 9: Frequency of Following News in Syria		
Frequency	Syrian local news	Armenian news
Daily	32	24
Two-three times a week	21	24
Two-three times a month	29	31
Did not follow at all	28	22
Total number of respondents	147	144
<i>Note.</i> The percentage results are rounded.		

In order to understand whether the respondents were exposed to conditions that encourage political participation, they were asked to indicate whether or not they were a member of a local NGO and whether or not they were a member of an Armenian party or organization in Syria. Table 10 shows that only 15% of the participants were members of a local non-governmental organization in Syria, while 80% were members of an Armenian party or organization.

Table 10: Comparison: Membership of Syrian Armenians in a Local NGO and in an Armenian Party/Organization		
	Yes	No
Member of an NGO in Syria	15	85
Member of an Armenian party/organization in Syria	80	20
<i>Note.</i> Total number of responses for the question related to membership in a local non-governmental organization is 146, while it is 142 for membership in an Armenian party/organization. The percentage results are rounded		

The final two questions in this section aimed to assess the respondents' frequency in sharing political news and posting political comments on their social media pages when living in Syria. According to Table 11, 73% did not share political news at all. In the same manner, Table 12 reveals that 80% of the participants did not post political comments at all.

Table 11: Frequency of Sharing Political News on Social Media in Syria		
Frequency	Respondents	Percentage
Actively shared	6	4
Infrequently shared	14	10

Rarely shared	20	14
Did not share at all	106	72
<i>Note. Total number of responses is 146. The percentage results are rounded.</i>		
Table 12: Frequency of Posting Political Comments on Social Media in Syria		
Frequency	Respondents	Percentage
Actively shared	3	2
Infrequently shared	8	5
Rarely shared	18	12
Did not share at all	118	80
<i>Note. Total number of responses is 147. The percentage results are rounded.</i>		

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT OF THE SYRIAN ARMENIANS IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

The questions in section four attempted to understand the degree to which Syrian Armenian immigrants participated in politics in Armenia over time. Respondents were asked to report whether or not they voted in the presidential elections of 2013, the constitutional referendum of 2015, and the parliamentary elections of 2017. To analyze participation in elections, only the eligible cases were selected, i.e., the respondents who held Armenian citizenship and were at least 18 years old in the year of the election.

Table 13 shows that 86% of the respondents did not vote in the presidential elections of 2013. Likewise, 88% did not vote in the constitutional referendum of 2015, and 84% did not vote in the parliamentary elections of 2017.

Table 13: Participation in the Presidential Elections of 2013, the Constitutional Referendum of 2015 and the Parliamentary Elections of 2017			
Answers	2013	Constitutional referendum of 2015	Parliamentary elections of 2017
Yes	86%	88%	84%
No	14%	12%	16%
<i>Note. Total number of responses for the 2013 presidential elections is 100, 101 for 2015 and 102 for 2017. The percentage results are rounded.</i>			

The participants were asked to reflect on the degree to which they were aware of Armenian political developments during the period of the four-day war in Nagorno Karabakh in 2016 (Table 14). The responses indicated that 41% of the participants were ‘not very aware’ of Armenian politics during the four-day war of Nagorno Karabakh in 2016, 34% were ‘somewhat aware’, 16% were well aware, and only 9% were ‘not aware at all’.

Table 14.- Syrian Armenians' Awareness of Armenian Politics during the Period of the Four-Day War in Nagorno-Karabakh 2016		
Level of Awareness	Respondents	Percentage
Very aware	17	16
Somewhat aware	37	34
Not very aware	44	41
Not aware at all	10	9
<i>Note. Total number of responses is 108. The percentage results are rounded.</i>		

Nevertheless, in order to assess the validity of the previous question, the participants were asked about the political position of “My Step Alliance” in 2016. Table 15 shows that only 8% of the participant reported that the Alliance had not been formed in 2016. This figure does not match the results of the respondents' awareness of Armenia's politics in 2016, where an aggregate of 50% reported that they were somewhat or very aware of Armenia's politics during Nagorno Karabakh's four-day war in 2016.

Table 15: Syrian Armenians' Responses about the Political Position of My Step Alliance in 2016					
	Alliance with the government	Opposition to the government	Do not know	My Step Alliance was not formed	Other
Responses	9	39	41	8	2
<i>Note.</i> Total number of responses is 97. The percentage results are rounded.					

The respondents were also asked about their participation during the Nagorno Karabakh war of 2016. Table 16 shows the answer to the question of “How did you participate during the Nagorno-Karabakh four-day war of 2016?” The respondents were given the possibility to select more than one option. Of the total number of survey participants, 75 respondents answered this question. As shown in Table 16, 59% of the total respondents reported that they participated by providing ‘goods donations’; the option ‘financial donation’ was selected by 44% of the total respondents; 33% of the total respondents stated that they volunteered during the Nagorno Karabakh war of 2016, and the ‘other’ option was selected by 4% of the total participants.

Table 16: Syrian Armenians' Participation during Nagorno-Karabakh Four-Day war of 2016		
Participation	Number of responses	Percentage
Goods donation	44	59
Financial donation	33	44
Volunteering	25	33
Other	3	4
<i>Note.</i> Total number of the respondents is 75. The percentage results are rounded.		

Participation in the protests of April-May 2018 is also considered to be a robust indicator of the Syrian Armenians' involvement in Armenian politics. Therefore, the survey included a question about this to assess the degree of the Syrian Armenians' political participation in the period mentioned above. According to the results, 56% of the respondents did not participate in the protests at all. On the other hand, 15% of the respondents ‘rarely participated’, another 15% ‘infrequently participated’, and yet another 15 percent ‘actively participated’ (Table 17).

Table 17: Syrian Armenians' Participation in the Protests in April-May 2018		
Participation	Respondents	Percentage
Actively participated	18	15
Infrequently participated	18	15
Rarely participated	18	15
Did not participate at all	69	56
<i>Note.</i> Total number of responses is 123. The percentage results are rounded.		

Concerning the question “How often did you follow the local Armenian news during the protests in 2018?”, 69% of the participants mentioned that they followed the news on a daily basis, and only 8% reported that they did not follow the news at all (Table 18).

Table 18: Frequency of Following the Local News in Armenia during the Protests in 2018		
Frequency	Respondents	Percentage
Daily	86	69
Two-three times a week	21	17
Two-three times a month	7	6
Did not follow at all	10	8
<i>Note.</i> Total number of responses is 124. The percentage results are rounded.		

A similar self-assessment question, i.e., a question considering the respondents' awareness of politics in Armenia, was also asked for the time period of 2018. The result implied that 76 percent of the respondents think that in 2018 they were somewhat or well aware of Armenian politics (Table 19).

Table 19: Syrian Armenians' Awareness of Armenian Politics in 2018		
Level of Awareness	Respondents	Percentage
Very aware	32	26
Somewhat aware	60	50
Not very aware	23	19
Not aware at all	6	5
<i>Note.</i> Total number of responses is 121. The percentage results are rounded.		

The respondents were also asked to reflect on their online political activities during 2018. The results implied that 70% of the participants did not post political comments in 2018. Similarly, 61% did not share political news at all (Table 20).

Table 20: Frequency of Sharing Political News and Posting Political Comments on Social Media Pages in 2018				
	Actively shared/posted	Infrequently shared/posted	Rarely shared/posted	Did not share/post at all
Shared political news	11	16	11	61
Posted political comments	11	11	7	70

Note. Total number of responses for the question related to the frequency of sharing political news is 123, while it is 122 for the frequency of posting political comments. The percentage results are rounded.

Furthermore, in order to assess whether or not there was a change in terms of participation during the elections, the respondents were asked to report whether they had voted in the snap parliamentary elections of 2018. 36% of the participants had voted in contrast to 64% during the snap parliamentary elections of 2021. This finding indicates that there is an increase in the percentage of respondents who voted in elections.

In order to obtain information about the recent political activeness of the Syrian Armenians, the survey questionnaire also posed questions related to the respondents' involvement during the Nagorno Karabakh war of 2020. Table 21 presents the answers to the question related to the respondents' participation during the Nagorno Karabakh war of 2020. The total number of respondents for this question was 135. The respondents were given the possibility to select more than one option. According to the data, 73% of the total number of respondents participated through 'goods donation', 68% contributed through 'financial donation', 44% of the total respondents volunteered, 16% of the total respondents organized donations, 6% of the total number of respondents participated through 'blood donation', and 5% of the total respondents mentioned other participation approaches.

Table 21: Syrian Armenians' Participation during Nagorno Karabagh War of 2020		
Participation	Number of responses	Percentage
Goods donation	98	73
Financial donation	92	68
Volunteering	60	44
Organizing donations	22	16
Blood donation	8	6
Other	7	5
<i>Note.</i> Total number of the respondents is 135. The percentage results are rounded.		

Similar to the previous questions related to the frequency of following local Armenian news and awareness of Armenian politics in 2018, the survey participants were asked to answer relevant questions for the time period of 2020. Thus, Tables 22 and 23 show the respondents' frequency of following the local Armenian news and their level of political awareness during the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, respectively. According to the data, the vast majority of the respondents, 97 percent, followed the news. Likewise, most of the respondents reported that they were 'somewhat aware' or 'very aware' of Armenian politics during the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, with percentages of 51 and 39, respectively.

Table 22: Frequency of Following the Local News in Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020		
Frequency	Respondents	Percentage
Daily	43	97
Two-three times a week	1	1
Two-three times a month	1	1
Did not follow at all	2	1
<i>Note.</i> Total number of responses is 147. The percentage results are rounded.		
Table 23: Syrian Armenians' Awareness of Armenian Politics during the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020		
Level of Awareness	Respondents	Percentage
Very aware	56	39
Somewhat aware	73	51
Not very aware	10	7
Not aware at all	5	3
<i>Note.</i> Total number of responses is 144. The percentage results are rounded.		

Concerning online political activeness, 47% of the respondents reported that they actively or infrequently shared political news during the Nagorno Karabakh war of 2020. On the other hand, cumulatively, 35% of the respondents mentioned that they actively or infrequently posted political comments on their social media pages (Table 24).

Table 24: Frequency of Sharing Political News and Posting Political Comments on Social Media Pages in 2020				
	Actively shared/posted	Infrequently shared/posted	Rarely shared/posted	Did not share/post at all
Shared political news	32	15	20	33
Posted political comments	23	12	14	50
<i>Note.</i> Total number of responses for the question related to the frequency of sharing political news is 146, while it is 145 for the frequency of posting political comments. The percentage results are rounded.				

The final question of the survey aimed to assess whether or not Syrian Armenians were involved in the very recent demonstrations (2020-2021). According to Table 25, 92% of the respondents 'did not participate at all' in the recent demonstrations, 4% 'actively participated', 3% 'infrequently participated', and 1% 'rarely participated'.

Table 25: Syrian Armenians' Participation in the Demonstrations of 2020-2021		
Participation	Respondents	percentage
Actively participated	6	4
Infrequently participated	4	3
Rarely participated	1	1
Did not participate at all	130	92
<i>Note.</i> Total number of responses is 141. The percentage results are rounded.		

COMPARISON OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF SYRIAN ARMENIANS BY LOCATION AND/OR TIME

The findings of quantitative data show that the political participation of Syrian Armenians in Armenia increased to some extent. Table 26 compares the Syrian Armenians' participation during demonstrations in both Syria and Armenia. In more detail, those who reported that they somewhat participated were compared with those who did not participate at all. Irrespective of the location and time, overall the participation of the respondents in political demonstrations was rare. Nevertheless, Table 26 indicates that during the demonstrations of April-May 2018, 44 percent of the Syrian Armenians reported infrequent participation.

Table 26: Participation in Political Demonstrations by Location and Time			
	Demonstrations in Armenia (2020-21)	Demonstrations in Armenia (2018)	Demonstrations in Syria
Some participation	8	44	10
Low participation	92	56	90
<i>Note.</i> The frequency of participation was measured on a scale of one (not at all) to four (actively participated). Total number of respondents for demonstrations in Syria is 144; Armenia in 2018 is 123; Armenia in 2020-2021 is 141. The percentage results are rounded.			

In the same vein, the respondents' participation during the elections in Armenia demonstrates that more residents are voting. Only respondents who obtained Armenian Citizenship status were selected to analyze the participation of Syrian Armenians during elections. The findings revealed that there is an increase in involvement during elections from 2013 to 2018. As shown in Table 27, while 14% of the respondents voted during the presidential election of 2013, 36% voted in the snap parliamentary election of 2018. A precise comparison is provided in Table 27. Table 27 also shows that the increase between 2017 and 2018 is not due to a new group of politically active Syrian Armenians who arrived and got engaged, rather it means the same people who did not vote in 2013, 2015, 2017 were integrated and voted in the snap parliamentary election of 2018. Precisely 22 Syrian Armenians who did not vote in 2017 participated in the 2018 elections following the Velvet Revolution, making 36% of the total respondents.

Table 27: Political Participation through Voting				
Participation	Presidential Elections of 2013	Constitutional Referendum of 2015	Parliamentary Elections of 2017	Snap Parliamentary Elections of 2018
Yes %	14	12	16	36
No %	86	88	84	64
N	100	101	102	103
<i>Note.</i> Total number of responses for the question related to participation in the presidential election of 2013 is 100, while it is 101 for the constitutional referendum of 2015, 102 for				

the parliamentary elections of 2017, and 103 for the snap parliamentary elections of 2018. The percentage results are rounded.

Concerning online political involvement of Syrian Armenians, the findings imply that online political participation is increasing (Figure 1). Figure 1 demonstrates that while on average 36% of the respondents shared political news in Syria, 45% shared political news in Armenia in 2018, and 62% in Armenia in 2020. Likewise, while 32% posted political comments in Syria, 41% posted in Armenia in 2018, and 52% in Armenia in 2020. The comparison of the frequencies for each experience, is provided in Tables 28 and 29.

Figure 1: Online Political Participation by Location and Time

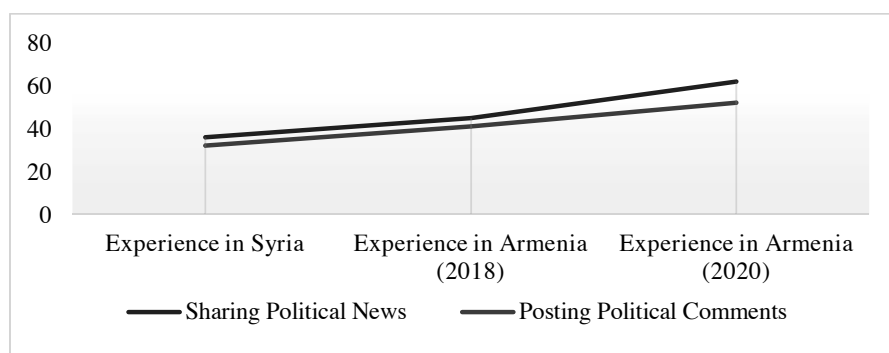


Table 28: Sharing Political News on Social Media by Location and Time			
Frequency	Experience in Syria	Experience in Armenia in 2018	Experience in Armenia in 2020
Actively shared	4	11	32
Infrequently shared	10	16	15
Rarely shared	14	11	20
Did not share at all	73	61	33
Number	146	123	146
Note. The percentage results are rounded.			
Table 29: Posting Political Comments on Social Media by Location and Time			
Frequency	Experience in Syria	Experience in Armenia in 2018	Experience in Armenia in 2020
Actively posted	2	11	23
Infrequently posted	5	11	12
Rarely posted	12	7	14
Did not post at all	80	70	50
N	147	122	145
Note. The percentage results are rounded.			

In order to examine the correlation between the online activities of Syrian Armenians in Syria and Armenia, an index was created. Online activities in Armenia were measured by computing four variables (sharing political news in 2018 and 2020 and posting political comments in 2018 and 2020), whereas

online activities in Syria were measured by computing two variables (frequency of sharing political news and posting political comments in Syria). Likewise, an index that measured the frequency of following Armenian news in Armenia was computed (frequency of following Armenian news in Armenia in 2018 and 2020).

The analysis in Table 30 shows a statistically significant correlation between Syrian Armenians' frequency of following the Armenian news in Syria and Armenia (.005). Likewise, there is a statistically significant correlation between online activities in Syria and Armenia (.000), as portrayed in Table 31. The frequency of following the news was measured on a scale of one (not at all) to four (daily); likewise, online activities were measured on a scale of one (not at all) to four (actively shared or posted political news and comments). The correlations are positive, meaning that Syrian Armenians who followed the Armenian news more frequently in Syria followed the Armenian news in Armenia more regularly. Besides, Syrian Armenians who participated more commonly in online political activities in Syria were similarly more engaged in online political activities in Armenia.

Table 30: Correlation between Following Armenian News in Armenia and Following Armenian News in Syria			
		Following Armenian News in Armenia	Following Armenian News in Syria
Following Armenian News in Armenia	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1.00 149	.23 .005 149
Following Armenian News in Syria	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.23 .005 149	1.00 149
Table 31: Correlation between Online Activities in Armenia and Online Activities in Syria			
		Online Activities in Armenia	Online Activities in Syria
Online Activities in Armenia	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1.00 119	.53 .000 116
Online Activities in Syria	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.53 .000 116	1.00 145

POLITICAL INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN ARMENIANS IN ARMENIA

The study used t-tests to examine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the Syrian Armenians who did and did not vote in different elections in Armenia in terms of their age. In order to conduct the analysis, only the cases reporting that they had obtained Armenian citizenship and were at least 18 years old in the year of the election were selected. According to the data, there is no statistically significant correlation between age and Syrian

Armenians' participation in the Constitutional Referendum of 2015 and the Parliamentary Elections of 2017. Nevertheless, there is a correlation between their age and participation in the Presidential Election of 2013 (.000) and the snap parliamentary election of 2018 (0.10). According to the data, older people participated more in both elections as the values of the means for those who answered *yes* are 53.50 and 40.57; while, for those who answered *no*, they are 36.42 and 32.75, respectively.

The chi-square analysis showed no statistically significant difference between gender and Syrian Armenians' participation in elections. Similarly, there is no statistically significant difference between gender and Syrian Armenian participation in demonstrations, gender and online activities, gender and political awareness, and gender and frequency of following the local Armenian news.

The impact of immigration year on online activities, political awareness, and frequency of following the news was also examined. According to the analysis, there is no statistically significant correlation between the year of immigration and the online activities of Syrian Armenians or the immigration year and political awareness of Syrian Armenians. However, Table 32 shows a statistically significant correlation between Syrian Armenians' immigration year and following the news (.000). The frequency of following the news was measured on a scale of one (did not follow at all) to four (daily). The correlation is negative, meaning that Syrian Armenians who immigrated to Armenia earlier followed the news more frequently.

Table 32: Correlation between Immigration Year and Following Armenian News in Armenia				
			<i>Immigration Year</i>	<i>Following Armenian News in Armenia</i>
<i>Immigration Year</i>	<i>Pearson Sig.</i>	<i>Correlation (2-tailed)</i>	1.00	-.61
	<i>N</i>		149	149
<i>Following Armenian News in Armenia</i>	<i>Pearson Sig.</i>	<i>Correlation (2-tailed)</i>	-.61	1.00
	<i>N</i>		149	149

Tables 33 and 34 also show statistically significant correlations between immigration year and participation in the protests in 2018 (.001), and between immigration year and participation in elections in Armenia (.000). Note that 'elections in Armenia' is an index constituted from four variables. In the former analysis (Table 33) the correlation is negative, which means that Syrian Armenians who moved to Armenia earlier participated more during the protests as participation in the protests was measured on a scale of one (not at all) to four (actively). In the latter, the correlation is positive (Table 34). This means that Syrian Armenians who moved later participated more in the elections.

Table 33: Correlation between Immigration Year and Participation in the Protests in 2018				
			<i>Immigration Year</i>	<i>Participation in Protests in 2018</i>
<i>Immigration Year</i>	<i>Pearson Sig.</i>	<i>Correlation (2-tailed)</i>	1.00	-.29
	<i>N</i>		149	123
<i>Participation in Protests in 2018</i>	<i>Pearson Sig.</i>	<i>Correlation (2-tailed)</i>	-.29	1.00
	<i>N</i>		.001 123	123

Table 34: Correlation between Immigration Year and Participation in Elections in Armenia				
			<i>Immigration Year</i>	<i>Elections in Armenia</i>
<i>Immigration Year</i>	<i>Pearson Sig.</i>	<i>Correlation (2-tailed)</i>	1.00	.40
	<i>N</i>		149	.000 113
<i>Elections in Armenia</i>	<i>Pearson Sig.</i>	<i>Correlation (2-tailed)</i>	.40	1.00
	<i>N</i>		.000 113	113

Furthermore, the analysis also revealed a correlation between the frequency of following the news and the political awareness of Syrian Armenians (.000) and the frequency of following the news and their online activities (.001). The frequency of following the news was measured on a scale of one (did not follow at all) to four (daily); in the same manner, political awareness and online activities were measured on a scale of one (not at all) to four (highly). Positive correlations indicate that Syrian Armenians who followed the news more frequently are more aware of Armenian politics and participate in more online activities.

To conclude, the major finding implied by the quantitative data is that today Syrian Armenians are more actively engaged in politics compared with their experience in Syria and their political participation at the early stages of immigration. The impact of time on political inclusion is notable. It is observed that Syrian Armenian immigrants, over time, participate more in elections, are more aware of the politics of Armenia, and are more active in terms of online political activities. Likewise, the data show that political developments are critical and may enhance political integration to a great degree. It is worth noting that compared with previous experience in Syria, participation in protests during April and May 2018 increased. Participation during the Nagorno Karabakh wars of 2016 and 2020 is also noticeable.

The survey data also imply that while Syrian Armenians who moved to Armenia later have more actively participated in elections, Syrian Armenians who moved earlier more actively participated during the 2018 protests.

ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Sociopolitical Experience of Syrian Armenians

Social and Political Culture in Syria

After administration of the online survey, semi-structured online interviews with Syrian Armenians were conducted for a better understanding of their political involvement in Armenia. The participants were asked to reflect on the sociopolitical culture in Syria and their political participation in Armenia.

It is essential to make a comparison between the political culture of the former and the host countries of immigrants to recognize the factors that influence or hinder political involvement in the receiving country. Positive, active, simple, easily connected, and enjoyable are a range of adjectives used to describe social life in Syria. However, it is highly important to emphasize that the participants were describing their social life in Syria within the Armenian circle. One of the interviewees reflected:

In Syria, social life [of Armenians] is more linked to an associational life, and it is divided into fragments. Each person is born into his/her [Armenian] association by luck; I mean that people do not decide their affiliations. When you are brought up in a given association, you spontaneously organize your social life accordingly. Once I was eighteen years old, my social life got different colors: I had my university friends, my friends from the association I grew up in, and my friends from different factions of Armenian society.

For many of the respondents, social life in Syria was limited to being involved in the Armenian community. Expressions such as “we lived in a balloon,” “we created an imaginary country,” “we lived in a small Armenia” reinforced the abovementioned comment.

Syrian Armenians in Syria distanced themselves from political conversations and limited their political participation. The political disengagement of Armenians in Syria is linked to several factors. Some of the respondents indicated that Armenians were satisfied with their living standards in Syria; therefore, they found no need to be engaged and interested in political life. Others stated that Armenians who arrived in Syria after the Armenian Genocide had a fear of politics due to the incidents that developed during the Ottoman Empire. One person conveyed:

Because you were a second or third generation after the Genocide, your parents always maintained that there was the fear of losing, losing again (because it was still alive in their memories what had happened). Like an everyday meal, they kept telling us that we have no interest in politics. We only care about our daily life, our job, and our family. The previous generations used to incite fear in us, despite the fact that the country welcomed us, and if people and the government had not wanted us, they would not have had a welcoming attitude. But fear was dominant. Even during my university years, I remember, fear was present subconsciously.

Discussing politics with non-Armenians was much easier as a respondent, who was half Armenian and half Arab, conveyed:

We [the Armenians] were very apolitical, and still, we are. It was different with my Arab friends. They used to speak about political issues sometimes. ... Personally, I used to discuss political issues but more with my non-Armenian friends. I can say that it was difficult to discuss politics with Armenians.

An additional factor among the reasons for Syrian Armenians avoiding political conversations, implied from the analysis, is that prior to the war the country lived in peace and prosperity for decades. That is to say that no major political developments occurred that would attract people's attention to politics. As mentioned by the vast majority of the respondents, political conversation intensified after the escalation of the conflicts in the country and the region in 2011.

Integration and Social Culture in Armenia

Before discussing political involvement in detail, the interviewees were asked to reflect on their integration experience in Armenia and describe the social culture in the host country. Some of the respondents highlighted the language barrier as a crucial factor hindering effective communication. Vocabulary choices and their different meanings in various contexts are seen as a primary cause of misunderstandings and miscommunication. Others indicated that language was not the main obstacle for integration because Syrian Armenians hosted many artists and professionals from Armenia, which helped them become acquainted with Eastern Armenian. Additionally, as a few participants reported, Syrian Armenians were familiar with the language through literature. Other immigration integration issues mentioned during the interviews included housing, the school system, and the low monthly income.

In terms of social culture, despite the fact that some of the respondents were familiar with the culture of the host country, others mentioned that they were shocked. One of the respondents mentioned:

After moving to Armenia, I did not think that I would experience a culture shock. But for one year, I did. While walking in the streets, a lot of things looked strange to me. I was coming from an Arab world, and I was feeling a Syrian Armenian more than Armenian. Everything around me seemed so Western.

Another respondent commented:

We were different culturally, and I was shocked culturally. For me, it was very strange that people used harsh expressions and had stern faces. But later, I recognized that this is how it is; their attitude and being unfriendly was not directed at me; it was not something personal.

Some of the respondents reflected that when living in Syria they lacked knowledge about the social culture in Armenia. The picture of the motherland

most interviewees had prior to arrival was contradictory to contemporary Armenia. Syrian Armenians, while living in Syria, were not aware of the lifestyle in Armenia. In this regard, a respondent emphasized the fact that having insufficient historical background and insufficient knowledge of the Soviet system and culture are crucial factors that cause confusion:

In Syria, there are some social criteria that each Armenian needs to meet. When I came to Armenia, for the first year I had that mindset, particularly on the 24th of April. I was asking why are the shops open? Why are people out? Why are they eating? Why are they happy? It was difficult for me to handle this in the first year [after immigration]. But in time, I started to talk with people, and I understood why we are different and why they [the natives] are different.

We sometimes forget how very much Arab culture impacted our identity and how people here are influenced by Russian culture. We forget, and we even do not know, what 'Soviet' is. I had not learned it at school and did not know how Armenia was during the Soviet times because there is a [Armenian] history gap at [the Armenian] schools in Syria. History stops with the Genocide and starts after independence. There are seventy or eighty years when we have no idea what happened in Armenia.

The change of socioeconomic conditions also caused misapprehension of the social culture in Armenia. For some period, this transformation influenced the absorption of the new social culture.

We used to live a "spoiled" life in Syria, and we expected the same from Armenia. However, we saw that all of us are the same. On the one hand, this was good, but on the other hand, this was a challenge because we were not yet used to this new reality.

Political Culture in Armenia

In the final stage of the interviews, the respondents talked about political culture in Armenia by using a range of expressions and providing instances from their experience. Political knowledge seemed to develop through being exposed to information and experiencing political incidents. When comparing political culture in Syria and Armenia, many of the respondents indicated that political culture in Armenia is open, and people express their concerns more freely. One of the respondents talked about the socioeconomic conditions of Armenia and how they influence political engagement, i.e., the low monthly income and standards of living in Armenia are reasons why the citizens are more engaged in politics. Another respondent reinforced this idea by discussing the connection between living a good life and disinterest in politics in Syria. Many of the interviewees highlighted the fact that demonstrations and public meetings were new concepts as they lacked similar experiences in Syria:

The political culture is very different from Syria. I think it was in 2013, when there was going to be an increase in public transport fares. Maybe it was in 2013 or 2014; I do not remember it exactly, but the 150-dram protests [protests against increasing

the fare of public transport from 100 to 150] emerged, and it was something frightening for me. Oh, protests. The words revolution and protests had a negative connotation. I was terrified; I did not leave the house. Okay, they are protesting. What is happening?

Another respondent conveyed:

During the 150-dram protests, I lived through an extraordinary experience. Even when I did not want to pay 150 drams and wanted to join the movement, when I was on the bus (they had already changed the fare and everyone was asking me only to pay 100), I could not pay only 100 because in Syria we were not acquainted with a culture of opposition. I paid 150 and left the bus rapidly.

For one of the respondents, it was odd to see university students discussing political issues:

When in my first year of university, I observed how my friends were engaged in politics. I remember one of my friends was very much involved to the degree that everyone used the title “president” before calling her name. I was surprised to see that eighteen-year-olds were aware of politics to this degree. I also thought that it had some relation with knowing Armenian history. ... But for me, I had no idea at all. I only knew the name of the president. Even the name of the foreign minister I did not know at that time.

Syrian Armenians also described how they developed more interest in politics over time. For respondents who moved to Armenia between 1997 and 2007, the events of the 1st of March 2008² were seen as a starting line for developing political interest, whereas, for most of the respondents who moved to Armenia in 2012, the starting line was either Yerevan’s Bus Fare Protests or Electric Yerevan.³

For the first few years, I was still felt like going back to Syria. Consequently, I was not that integrated politically. But I was exposed to many things inevitably, from the news, people around me, and my network. I used to hear more about these things and consequently became more aware compared with my previous experience in Syria. When, during Electric Yerevan, I saw everything live, next to me, some kind of interest arose in me, and I was like, okay, I can relate to this. These people are the ones living next to me, my neighbor, my friend. I know the people who are protesting. I know their problem; they are not ‘the others’. I started to understand more. I have become more into politics, and I have started to develop in my mind the image of the utopian motherland that I wanted.

One of the respondents reflected on her experience:

At some point, I think interest in politics started at the university. What is it? Why? Then, the protests of Electric Yerevan emerged. Although I did not understand why, I tried to follow them. During the revolution, I took my camera and went down to the streets. I was in the streets just to understand what was happening because, even

² Following the presidential elections of the same year, demonstrations took place in Armenia; March 1st marks the day when the police tried to disperse the demonstrators

³ Protests which took place against a 17% increase in the electricity rate.

though I knew why they were protesting, I did not know whom to follow. And this is how I started to become interested in politics.

Another respondent conveyed:

During the Electric Yerevan, I really wanted to participate because I followed my friends' posts on Facebook and also the news. But something was preventing me from participating, the feeling that maybe what I am doing is wrong because I was not used to this. Then, I went and passed by the protests to observe but did not participate. This situation changed on the 16th of April 2018.

From the abovementioned comments, it is obvious that the political developments in Armenia in the last ten years played a significant role in directing the attention of Syrian Armenians towards politics. When asked whether patriotism or residency was the driving force for being interested in politics, most of the participants mentioned that residency had a more direct impact than patriotism. However, there were a few others who thought that patriotism was a key factor that influenced their engagement and awareness of the politics of Armenia. One of the respondents mentioned:

I think now I am more aware of the politics of Armenia. This is because I am Armenian, and the political developments that we witnessed during the last years increased interest in general. Revolution is the turning point. Until the revolution, I still was not very aware about politics. I started to know the names of the political parties [the main ones], and then my family participated in the election [the snap parliamentary election of 2018]; because of this, we started to discuss political issues in our house.

Another commented in this context:

My interest in the politics of Armenia is because I am an Armenian and not because I am a resident. In the initial stages, I used to be involved in discussions with Turkish and Azerbaijani people on Facebook. During the conversations, I had to read in order to understand and be informed. This is how my interest in the politics of Armenia, in general, emerged.

Concerning comments related to residency and developing interests in politics, one of the respondents reported that:

Definitely, there is a relation between my knowledge of politics in Armenia and being a resident. Maybe if I were in Syria, I would not have been interested in politics to this degree. I can say that I understand what is happening, maybe not in a professional sense, but when I compare my knowledge of politics with others, I think that I have adequate knowledge.

Another commented:

The interest in politics developed because I think that I have to be an active citizen. If I need a change, I also should participate and be involved in the change; and I can only make a change if I am well informed.

According to one of the respondents, being in close relation with native Armenians helps one to better understand politics.

The thing which helped me to understand politics is that I mixed with the native Armenians at university. I mixed with people from the regions. I started to listen to their everyday problems. The issues I heard were not conveyed by a foreigner and were not the information broadcast on a TV show. At work, I saw the pros and cons of the Soviet influence; I saw the problems of the independence of Armenia.

On the other hand, there were also a few respondents who reported that politics was not their primary interest, and even though they were exposed to the political developments in Armenia, they still preferred to be distanced from politics.

I never thought of politics in Syria. I had very basic information; I only knew a few officials and the name of the governing party. The same is also the case in Armenia. Until the Velvet Revolution, I did not even think about politics. In the aftermath of the revolution, okay, I knew that there is this party X and there is another party Y, and they are in conflict. But politics per se is not that interesting for me.

Another person reported:

I am not against the idea that people should have their own opinion about political developments. Rather, I do not find it logical for everyone to force their opinions on social media or do political analysis.

Whether the participants were interested in politics or whether politics was an inessential issue for them, all interviewees confirmed that they obtained adequate knowledge of Armenian politics, particularly during the Nagorno Karabakh War of 2020. The vast majority of the participants indicated that they frequently, if not daily, discussed politics during the war and continue to be engaged in political conversations as the country encounters an unstable political situation.

The interviews conducted with Syrian Armenians show that their inclusion in the political culture of Armenia is taking place over time. While Syrian Armenians encountered difficulties in understanding and adapting to the political environment of Armenia soon after their immigration, today, they participate more in political activities and are more aware of political developments. From the interviews, it can also be inferred that the Nagorno Karabakh War of 2020 certainly impacted the political inclusion of Syrian Armenians.

NATIVE ARMENIANS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT OF SYRIAN ARMENIANS

Consequences of Syrian Armenians' Immigration

Native Armenians were interviewed to identify their perception regarding the consequences of the immigration of Syrian Armenians. This is crucial as it implies the degree to which the receiving society has absorbed immigrants into its community. In the interviews conducted with native Armenians, while

general questions were covered to identify broader social issues, specific questions were asked to comprehend the degree to which native society is prepared to tolerate the political engagement of Syrian Armenians. Syrian Armenian families predominantly settled in Yerevan, with a few cases who preferred to settle in the regions or in Artsakh. In order to obtain rich data, native Armenians from different regions, who currently reside in Yerevan, were also interviewed. Many of the respondents from the regions implied that they became acquainted with Syrian Armenians only after moving to Yerevan:

When I was in my town [DELETED], I did not notice how the immigration process of Syrian Armenians was and how it influenced life in Armenia. You have some basic knowledge that there is a war; people moved; there is the issue of tax policies and privileges and building districts for them. Why these tax issues? Why build these districts? ... but when I moved to Yerevan in 2016, I met Syrian Armenian students at my university; I noticed the restaurants, the new cuisine. So, I felt the change in daily life.

For those who were from Yerevan, they noticed new businesses owned by Syrian Armenians and became acquainted with Syrian Armenian staff. Jewelers and mechanics for auto shops are professions mentioned by native Armenians as those where Syrian Armenians are very successful. The other socioeconomic consequence of immigration emphasized by the respondents is the constructive impact of diversity on the development of various aspects of life in Armenia. Initiating new businesses, increasing the population, and bringing diversity to mindsets were among the benefits of immigration. One of the respondents conveyed:

Armenia has some demographic issues, and indeed, increasing the population helps the country. For instance, new businesses, a new work force, growth in budgets and the economy are important consequences. It is a different question how the government managed the repatriation and, due to the mismanagement, what kind of negative consequences have arisen.

Factors that Hinder Communication and Integration

The interviewees were asked to reflect on the factors that may hinder communication between the native and Syrian Armenians. Linguistic barriers and cultural divergence were mentioned by the respondents as factors that hinder communication. Most of the interviewees either mentioned both or one of the reasons specified above. However, as reported by the majority, miscommunication decreases over time as both sides become acquainted with each other's language.

A different way of thinking and diverse mindsets are other factors that hinder communication and, hence, integration:

We [native Armenians], despite the fact that we are trying to become modern, are not an open-minded society. We have some kind of firm understanding of how a boy

should look, how he should communicate. And this is an obstacle to living any new experience or acquaintance with an individual. Diversity is not initiating interest; instead, it is broadening the gap.

Also, Syrian Armenians, in their turn, should accept the change. I have noticed that, specifically, Armenians coming from countries that have had conflicts are firmly holding on to their identity.

For a few respondents, some negative stereotypes that Syrian Armenians hold regarding the native Armenians' attitude towards them also prevent integration.

A more serious problem [preventing integration] is the fact that many Syrian-Armenians, or let's say Armenians from the Diaspora, think that the native Armenians are not accepting their presence. I have seen this. I think that they have their own reasons. They have some negative opinion. They think that we [the native Armenians] will not accept them.

Another respondent conveyed that people from the Diaspora usually create a safe zone for themselves and mostly communicate and socialize with other Diasporans. This implies that lack of integration is not only related to the refusal of the host society to accept immigrants in their community. Rather, the immigrants are not willing to be integrated: "If you don't have any Diasporan friends, you're not going to get to know any other Diasporan people. That's the complication."

Impact of Diaspora on Armenian Politics

Native Armenians who were interviewed were asked to discuss the role and impact of the broader Armenian Diaspora on the politics of the Republic of Armenia. Most of the interviewees talked about the importance of financial support provided by the Diaspora to the motherland and how it can impact domestic politics.

I would not say that I like the fact that the Diaspora is seen as a financial resource for Armenia. But indeed, it is. This is because the standard of living in Armenia is low. When there is an important political incident in Armenia, the Diaspora also has its say. The church in the Diaspora plays an important role, and it has an indirect influence on politics.

Nonetheless, for some of the respondents, the involvement of the Armenian Diaspora should not be limited to monetary donations. Lobbying in favor of the Armenian government is also a sort of political participation. It was also mentioned that the networks and connections of the Diaspora are misused.

I cannot say that the Diaspora has no influence at all because it does have some impact. But the Diaspora is a misused resource (by saying resource, I am not necessarily talking about financial support). It is mismanaged. And its impact is lower than it should be.

On the other hand, some respondents think that living in Armenia and/or obtaining Armenian citizenship are prerequisites to having the right to directly impact politics in Armenia:

The influence is indirect because only an Armenian citizen has the right to impact domestic politics directly. If you are not an Armenian citizen, I mean, if you cannot participate in elections, you cannot have a direct impact. In this case, you can only have an indirect influence on those people who have a direct influence.

Syrian Armenians and Their Impact on Armenia's Domestic Politics

In the interviews, there were specific questions related to whether the immigration of the Syrian Armenians influenced Armenia's domestic politics. According to some of the respondents, Syrian Armenians can have an impact on domestic politics by voting in elections and participating in demonstrations. One person conveyed:

I do not think that in policymaking the presence of the Syrian Armenians makes a change, or I do not think that in any major decision making anything changes. I mean, if we talk about voting and similar stuff, I see no impact. But considering the recent protests, I do believe that Armenians from the Diaspora had a huge impact. [This comment refers to the recent demonstrations organized by the opposition (2020-2021 protests), where members of the major political party of the Diaspora participated]

Another respondent commented:

At least, I can see the growth and presence of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation directly. With the immigration of Syrian Armenians and the Diaspora in general, the party started to work more actively. From this perspective only, I can see the impact of Syrian Armenians on the domestic politics of Armenia.

For a few respondents, citizenship is a key factor that determines the political participation of Syrian Armenians. If Syrian Armenians hold Armenian citizenship, then they have the rights and duties of political participation.

If a Syrian Armenian is a citizen, then inevitably, he or she has an influence on domestic politics, and the extent of the impact is in his or her hands. They will decide whether or not they want to become involved in political life.

From another perspective, a few respondents think that it is the duty of the Armenian government to attract the Syrian Armenians and encourage their engagement in politics. Only in this way can they impact domestic politics. As one respondent emphasized, "no political party made an effort to attract the Syrian Armenians." In his opinion, the presence of Syrian Armenians is not seriously considered by the political parties. Another person commented:

I can tell you that only some individuals and non-governmental organizations initiated some kind of program and thought about strengthening the relationship between the Syrian and native Armenians and increasing their social and political participation.

To the question whether ten years is a sufficient period for Syrian Armenians to become acquainted with the social and political culture of Armenia and whether this allows them to obtain a position in the government, the vast majority of the respondents stated that five years is sufficient to acquire the political culture of Armenia.

Interviews with native Armenians were important to examine their attitude towards the Diaspora's political participation in Armenia, particularly Syrian Armenians' political inclusion and participation. The findings indicate that the general attitude is neutral.

From the survey analysis and semi-structured interviews with Syrian Armenians, it can be inferred that Syrian Armenians' inclusion in the political life of Armenia has been achieved to some degree. The interviews with native Armenians, on the other hand, implied that their general attitude towards the political participation of Syrian Armenians is neutral.

CONCLUSION

The combined results of the survey and semi-structured interviews with Syrian Armenians imply that the political integration of Syrian Armenians in Armenia has been achieved to some degree.

First, by comparing the political participation of Syrian Armenians in Syria and in Armenia, the study found that Syrian Armenians are more actively engaged in politics in Armenia. This, in turn, implies that the political culture of Armenia impacts Syrian Armenians' political participation.

Second, by comparing the participation of Syrian Armenians in political activities in Armenia in the early stages after immigration with their participation after approximately ten years, it is noted that Syrian Armenians are more actively involved in politics today. The combined results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis also reveal that the political awareness and political participation of Syrian Armenians in Armenia are increasing over time.

The major findings derived from the analysis are that the time factor and political developments have played a crucial role in the process of political inclusion. By comparing voting in elections, following the news, and online activities in the earliest stages after immigration with today's reality, and by comparing participation during the Nagorno Karabakh Wars of 2016 and of 2020, the aforementioned argument is confirmed. The conclusions about the impact of political developments on the political integration of Syrian Armenians was reached not only by looking at the participation of Syrian Armenians in the Nagorno Karabakh Wars. The study also looked into the participation of Syrian Armenians during the Velvet Revolution and inferred that their participation during the protests of April-May 2018 and their participation in snap parliamentary elections were relatively high compared to other periods.

The findings of the study also indicate that the Syrian Armenians actively participated during the Nagorno Karabakh War of 2020 and continue discussing the consequences of the war and its impact on social life in Armenia. Indeed, the Nagorno Karabakh War of 2020, to a visible degree, positively affected Syrian Armenian immigrants' political inclusion.

By comparing these findings with existing literature, it is concluded that the argument provided by Adam and Strömbola (2018) concerning the impact of time on political integration and the argument provided by Bartram (2016) concerning the impact of political culture on political inclusion are supported.

Furthermore, it is observed that the general attitude of native Armenians towards the political participation of the Diaspora is neutral. According to the native Armenians, the political participation of Syrian Armenians does not have an immense and direct impact on Armenia's domestic politics.

This study examined Syrian Armenian political integration in Armenia. As a concluding note, it should be mentioned that Syrian Armenians to some degree are integrated politically in Armenia. It is also noted that, despite the desire of the Syrian Armenians to participate in the politics of Armenia and despite the attitude of native Armenians, the fulfillment of legal requirements is the factor that shapes the broader political participation of the Diaspora, in general, and Syrian Armenians in particular.

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ՍՓԻԻՌԸ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ՄԷՋ.

ՍՈՒՐԻԱՀԱՅԵՐՈՒ ՆԵՐԳԱՂԹԸ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆ ՈՒ ՀԱՄԱՐԿՈՒՄԸ

(Ամփոփում)

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Յօդուածը կ'ուսումնասիրէ հայրենիք տեղափոխուած սուրիահայերու համարկումը Հայաստանի քաղաքական մշակոյթին՝ ի մասնաւորի անոնց մասնակցութիւնը Հայաստանի քաղաքական տարբեր իրադարձութիւններուն: Քաղաքական համարկումը մեծ դեր կը խաղայ գաղթականներու եւ ընդհանրապէս այլ երկիր տեղափոխուած անձանց նոր միջավայրի եւ նոր մշակոյթի ամբողջական ընդգրկման գործընթացին մէջ:

Յօդուածը կը փորձէ սահմանել քաղաքական համարկումը եւ բացատրել գործօնները որոնք ուղղակի եւ անուղղակիօրէն կ'ազդեն քաղաքական համարկումի գործընթացին: Հետազոտութիւնը կ'ուսումնասիրէ սուրիահայերու մասնակցութիւնը Սուրիա տեղի ունեցած տարբեր քաղաքական իրադարձութիւններու եւ կը համեմատէ անոնց մասնակցութիւնը նոյնանման կամ այլ քաղաքական իրադարձութիւններու՝ Հայաստանի մէջ:

Հետազոտութեան երկրորդ մասը կը ներկայացնէ տեղաբնիկ հայաստանցիին մօտեցումը սուրիահայերու քաղաքական ընդգրկման եւ մասնակցութեան հարցին: Հարցախոյզի եւ հարցազրոյցներու արդիւնքներուն հիման վրայ, կարելի է հաստատել, որ սուրիահայերը աւելի գործուն են Հայաստանի մէջ քաղաքական գետնի վրայ, քան էին Սուրիոյ մէջ: Քաղաքական մշակոյթի տարբերութիւնը, ինչպէս նաեւ կեանքի ընդհանուր պայմանները մեծ դեր կը խաղան անոնց՝ քաղաքական ընդգրկման գործընթացին մէջ: