

Cliometric Study of Public Opinion; A Case Study of Inter-Faith Harmony and Multiculturalism in the Post-Soviet Azerbaijan

Freidun Sarkisov (Corresponding Author)

Research Associate at the Pak-Iran Intellectuals Forum (Qom Office)

Email: piif.editors62@gmail.com

Muhammad Asim

Research Supervisor, Assistant Professor at the Government Graduate College Asghar Mall, Rawalpindi, and the Honorary Vice-President at the Pak-Iran Intellectuals Forum (Islamabad Office)

Publication History:

Received: November 26, 2022

Revised: December 20, 2022

Accepted: December 23, 2022

Published Online: January 01, 2023

Keywords:

Armenian Aggression,
Structural Functionalism,
Shusha,
Gorno-Badakhshan,
Vilayat-e-Faqih,
Hindu Temple,

Research related to Academic Areas:

Ethnography, Demographic Studies, Azerbaijan Studies, and Post-Soviet Studies

Acknowledgment:

Author 02 supervised **Author 01** in the research, specifically in facts evaluation and data collection.

Ethical Consideration:

This study aims only to investigate public opinion through a cliometric approach. There is no aim to hurt any community or religious fractions. Author(s) respect the religious identity and sectarian beliefs of everyone. However, the nature of this study urges the authors to portray what Azerbaijanis believe (whether it is globally, regionally or domestically criticized, disapproved or complained about).

Abstract

Since the inauguration of the Cliometric approach in the social sciences academia, it has been easy to highlight any sociopolitical or economic dilemma through statistics. Experts in mystical, spiritual and theological studies have also been facilitated by this approach. Therefore, this study utilizes the Cliometric approach to analyzing public opinion about the level(s) of inter-faith harmony in Azerbaijan. Demographically, till the end of 2022, Azerbaijan is significantly hosting Muslims (including Sunni-Hanafi, Sunni-Shafi, Sunni-Maliki, Twelver-Shia and Turkish-Sufi), Jews, and Christians (Armenian Catholics, Roman Catholics, Georgian Orthodox and Russian Orthodox). This study investigates the questions; How Post-Soviet Azerbaijan as a significant Muslim country has warm diplomatic relations with Israel? How, Post-Soviet Azerbaijan never observed sectarian clashes between the Sunnis and Shias, or between the Sunni segments? What are the secrets of inter-faith harmony and multiculturalism in Azerbaijan? And, whether Azerbaijan's recapturing of Nagorno-Karabakh would accommodate Armenian Catholics with other religious/sectarian segments in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan.

Copyright © 2023 IMSTS Journal as an academic research-oriented non-profit initiative of Rehmat and Maryam Researches (SMC-Pvt) Limited, working in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Lodhran under the Security and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). This is an open-access article. However, its distribution and/or reproduction in any medium is subject to the proper citation of the original work.

Introduction

The Cliometric approach is the quantitative approach to interpreting the social and economic history of any phenomenon (Asim, 2020). Modern researchers whenever seeking quantitative or statistical

exhibition of any sociopolitical or economic phenomenon, use a cliometric approach. However, now its usage has been common also in other disciplines of social sciences including mystical, spiritual and theological studies.

Although Azerbaijan is a Muslim-majority state, it is considered a secular state where inter-faith harmony and multiculturalism can be commonly observed (Asim, 2020). The table given below shows the current religious demography in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan.

Religious demography in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan till December 2022		
Twelver-Shia Muslims	80%	Entire country but mainly in Baku and Lenkoran
Sunni Muslims (including Hanafi, Shafi and Maliki)	10%	Scattered throughout country
Salafi-Muslims	1%	Mainly located at the Azerbaijan-Russia borderland
Bahai Faith	0.04%	Baku and Nakhchivan
Armenian Catholics	3%	Mainly in Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan
Georgian Orthodox	1%	Scattered throughout the country
Russian Orthodox	1.2%	Scattered throughout the country
Zoroastrians	0.86%	Mainly in Baku
Jews (including Georgian Jews, Mountain Jews and Ashkenazi Jews)	1%	Mainly in Baku, Privolnoye, Quba and Oguz
Others (including irreligious or atheist people and Hindus)	0.9%	Mainly in Baku, Ganja and Nakhchivan

(US-State, 2022) (PIIF, 2022)

Exhibition of Inter-Faith Harmony and Multiculturalism in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan

Besides such diverse demography, Azerbaijan never experienced religious riots. Sometimes, various scholars trace the reason for inter-faith harmony in the country because of public inspiration from the teachings of Imam Shafi. According to Bahadur Mammadov (a Sunni-Shafi scholar in Ganja), "Abu Hanifa imposed 17 conditions for resolving any problem by Ijtihad. On the other hand, Imam Shafi just relies on one narrate, actions depend on intentions. He argues that "restrictions always make a person aggressive and depressed while, ease always facilitate a person to perform any task happily. Therefore, the followers of Imam Shafi never go for any militant struggle while, the followers of Abu Hanifa always criticize for initiating any militant activities, specifically in Afghanistan, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Pakistan" (Mammadov, 2022).

Constitution of Azerbaijan

Secularism in the constitution of Azerbaijan assists inter-faith harmony and multiculturalism for each religious segment in the state. Therefore, no one can claim Azerbaijan as a religiously divided society. For example;

Articles 25 and 44 of the constitution grant equality of rights and liberties for everyone, regardless of their religion, race, nationality, language, origin, sex, financial position, political convictions, occupation, trade unions, membership in political parties, and other public organizations (Aliyev, 1995).

As inter-faith harmony and multiculturalism in Azerbaijan have been appreciated globally, the President of Azerbaijan declared 2016 to be the “Year of Multiculturalism” (Karimova, 2016).

Research Questions

However, since the recapturing of Nagorno-Karabakh, some US federated states and France have shown their reservations about religious policy in Azerbaijan. Politically, they are expecting a religious rift between ‘Armenian Catholic residents of former Artsakh’ and ‘the Azerbaijani resettlements (once forced to leave the region because of Armenian aggression)’ (Macron, 2020). Therefore, this study tries to evaluate whether French fears are justified or not. However, for generalization of the study, it has been decided to look at many other questions that are frequently highlighted related to the religious demographics of Post-Soviet Azerbaijan, such as;

- 1) How Post-Soviet Azerbaijan as a significant Muslim country has warm diplomatic relations with Israel?
- 2) How, Post-Soviet Azerbaijan never observed sectarian clashes between the Sunnis and Shias, or between the Sunni segments?
- 3) What are the secrets of inter-faith harmony and multiculturalism in Azerbaijan? And,
- 4) Whether Azerbaijan’s recapturing of Nagorno-Karabakh would accommodate Armenian Catholics with other religious/sectarian segments in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan, or not?

Sample

Data has been collected from N=100. However, this number is further divided into 5 fractions where;

- N=20 represents Twelver-Shia Muslims
- N=20 signifies Sunni-Hanafi Muslims
- N=20 characterizes Sunni-Shafi Muslims
- N=20 indicates Armenian Catholics
- N=20 epitomizes Jews

Furthermore, the cities – from where data is collected – are Baku, Quba, Ganja, Shusha and Nakhchivan.

Cliometric Analysis

Question: How Post-Soviet Azerbaijan as a significant Muslim country has warm diplomatic relations with Israel?	
Public Arguments	Percentage
Iran wanted to promote pro-Vilayat-e-faqih ideology in Iran, and it ultimately shows Iranian expansionism towards other Muslim states. Iran has also tried to do so in Iraq (1991) and Tajikistan (during Gorno-Badakhshan Conflict 1992-1997). On the other hand, Azerbaijan never wanted to be a theocratic state like Iran (Asim, 2020).	17%
Iranian support to Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict forced Azerbaijan to come close to Israel for military cooperation (Asim, 2020).	30%
As Azerbaijan is a centuries-old land of Jews, Christians and Muslims; therefore, historical socio-cultural associations between regional Muslims and Jews urged Post-Soviet Azerbaijan to move forward as a secular state regarding establishing cordial relations with Israel (Shafiyev, 2021).	53%

(Sarkisov & Asim, 2022)

This assessment highlights the majority of Azerbaijanis prefer multiculturalism and centuries-old socio-cultural association as the base of their inter-faith harmony and secularism.

Question: How, Post-Soviet Azerbaijan never observed sectarian clashes between the Sunnis and Shias, or between the Sunni segments?	
Public Arguments	Percentage
No one society can socio-politically and economically grow until social segments do not ignore their ideological conflicts and believe in pragmatic oneness (Asim, 2020).	41%
The history of Azerbaijan does not allow any Muslim segment to confront others but believes in multiculturalism within their folds and with other religions (Karimova, 2016).	9%
Neither Twelver-Shia nor Sunni-Shafi and Sunni-Maliki Muslims are extremists, but they follow the teachings of their religious forefathers regarding following the last verse of Surah Kafiron; "For you, your religion, for us, our religion" (Mammadov, 2022).	20%
Because of the very nominal number of Sunni-Hanafi and Salafi Muslims in Azerbaijan, religious extremist tendencies could not be triggered (Mammadov, 2022).	30%

(Sarkisov & Asim, 2022)

This evaluation exhibits that;

- Azerbaijanis (regardless of religion and sect) believe in pragmatism and structural functionalism. Moreover, it has also been observed by the first argument that they believe in the narrate of Prophet Muhammad, "A man's freedom begins with his economy."
- Secondly, Azerbaijanis believe that the roots of religious militancy begin with the teachings of Imam Abu Hanifa, or are triggered by the social segments following Salafi Islam.

Question: What are the secrets of inter-faith harmony and multiculturalism in Azerbaijan?	
Public Arguments	Percentage
Azerbaijanis know that religious, linguistic, and identical conflict just damage the state, society and economy. Therefore, they believe in oneness for shared prosperity (Karimova, 2016).	74%
The multicultural history of the land where currently Azerbaijan exists urges the local people to be united (Karimova, 2016).	4%
The secular nature of Azerbaijan's constitution facilitates inter-faith harmony and multiculturalism (Karimova, 2016).	19%
As Azerbaijan is a Muslim majority state, Muslims (whether Sunni or Shia) follow the last verse of Surah Kafiron; "For you, your religion, for us, our religion" (Hajizadeh, 2022).	3%

(Sarkisov & Asim, 2022)

Through this analysis, this study comes to know that Azerbaijanis just ignore religious, sectarian, linguistic and other identical differences just for the sake of their mutual growth. Although some voices have been raised from Southeastern Azerbaijan for severing "Talysh-Mughan Republic", ground reality does not confirm what UNPO is being projected globally. The same is the case with Nakhchivan. Various western or pro-Armenian scholars highlight a 35% share of Nakhchivan in the whole annual income of Azerbaijan per year as a tool for emerging new Azerbaijani nation on the globe soon. However, those, who personally visit Nakhchivan and observe political culture, neither believe in pro-Armenian assessment nor find any sign of evolving any new Azerbaijani or Turkic nation in the region (Asim, 2020).

Question: Whether Azerbaijan's recapturing of Nagorno-Karabakh would accommodate Armenian Catholics with other religious/sectarian segments in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan, or not?	
Public Arguments	Percentage
Azerbaijan never warned Armenian Catholics or former Artsakh residents to leave Nagorno-Karabakh when it was going to recapture its former territory (Hajizadeh, 2022).	31%
Historical churches in Nagorno-Karabakh are a tool for ensuring and protecting inter-faith harmony and multiculturalism between Azerbaijani Muslims and Armenian Catholics (Hajizadeh, 2022).	5%
Azerbaijan never followed the policy of promoting religious militancy as once Armenia once followed during capturing Nagorno-Karabakh. Moreover, Armenian Catholics are not only the sole resident of Nagorno-Karabakh. Demographics of Azerbaijan show thousands of Armenian Catholics are lived in various cities of Azerbaijan since 1991, and they never got hurt by any other religious community. So, this is just propaganda that Azerbaijanis will not tolerate with the Armenian catholic residents of former Artsakh (Hajizadeh, 2022).	64%

(Sarkisov & Asim, 2022)

The public argument of the majority at this question indicates that there is a huge machination against multiculturalism and inter-faith harmony in Azerbaijan. Neither the constitution of Azerbaijan nor the history of Azerbaijan allow such propagandas but only believe in ensuring peace, progress and prosperity in the country for shared socio-political and economic growth (PIIF, 2022).

Conclusion

According to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev,

“Multiculturalism has no alternative. Of course, we all know that there are different ideas. Some say that multiculturalism failed or didn't work. But there are positive examples. For us multiculturalism is a state policy and is our lifestyle” (Nabiyev, 2017).

This is not a romantic statement by the president but the cliometric study for investigating inter-faith harmony and multiculturalism in Azerbaijan indicates;

- The majority of Azerbaijanis follow the principle of mutual respect and traditional coexistence between distinct ethnic cultures (Nabiyev, 2017).
- Azerbaijan always prefers inter-cultural dialogue (Nabiyev, 2017).
- Inter-faith harmony and multiculturalism would be the only reason Azerbaijan will join European Union (Asim, 2020).
- The centuries-old cultural life of Azerbaijan never allows any religious segment to confront others (Nabiyev, 2017).

References

- Aliyev, I. (1995, November 12). *The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan*. Retrieved from The Republic of Azerbaijan:
<https://president.az/en/pages/view/azerbaijan/constitution#:~:text=state%20of%20Azerbaijan,I.,of%20Azerbaijan%20is%20a%20party>.
- Asim, D. M. (2020, July 23). *Political Economy of Ethno-National Movements in the Post-Soviet Eurasian Region and Its Impacts on Iranian Azerbaijan Region*. Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan: Department of Political Science at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur.
- Hajizadeh, S. Y. (2022, November 19). *Reasons of Multiculturalism in Azerbaijan*. (F. Sarkisov, Interviewer) Baku.
- Karimova, A. (2016, January 11). *Azerbaijan declares 2016 Year of multiculturalism*. Retrieved from Azer News: <https://www.azernews.az/nation/91533.html>
- Macron, E. (2020, November 11). *France struggles to retain Karabakh sway after Armenia defeat*. Retrieved from France 24: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201127-france-struggles-to-retain-karabakh-sway-after-armenia-defeat>
- Mammadov, B. (2022, November 2022). *Difference between Sunni-Hanafi and Sunni-Shafi Islam in Azerbaijan*. (F. Sarkisov, Interviewer) Ganja.
- Nabiyev, F. (2017). *Azerbaijan is the land of tolerance*. Retrieved from The Republic of Azerbaijan State Migration Service:
https://migration.gov.az/en/press_detail/273#:~:text=Multiculturalism%20policy%20in%20Azerbaijan%20is,process%20among%20civilizations%20and%20cultures.
- PIIF. (2022). *Inter-Faith Harmony and Multiculturalism in Azerbaijan*. Qom: Pak-Iran Intellectuals Forum.

Shafiyev, D. F. (2021, July 29). *Azerbaijan and Israel: Friendship of values*. Retrieved from Center of Analysis of International Relations: <https://aircenter.az/en/single/azerbaijan-and-israel-friendship-of-values-754>

US-State. (2022, June 2). *2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Azerbaijan*. Retrieved from US Department of State: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/azerbaijan/#:~:text=Ethnic%20Azerbaijanis%20are%20mainly%20Muslims,Baku%20and%20other%20urban%20areas.>