



## Securitisation of Identity Issues In the Nagorno-Karabakh War in Azerbaijan, 2020

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### Abstract

The conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia has persisted for over a century, primarily revolving around cultural issues and territorial disputes, particularly concerning Nagorno-Karabakh. Since the first Nagorno-Karabakh war (1994), the two countries have been in conflict at least seven times, varying in intensity. The conflicts in 1994 and 2020 were the two largest in the history of both countries. This research is a descriptive study with a qualitative approach, aiming to explain the securitization process undertaken by Azerbaijan in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War. The study employs the Copenhagen School's securitization theory based on Barry Buzan's "Security: A New Framework for Analysis". The research concludes that the modern Azerbaijan identity is significantly influenced by the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and anti-Armenian sentiments. These sentiments facilitate the Azerbaijani government in securitizing Nagorno-Karabakh issue as an existential threat to the identity of Azerbaijan. The securitization process by the Azerbaijani government involves the education system and mass media in shaping national identity.

**Key Words:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Securitization, Sentiment

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## INTRODUCTION

The Nagorno-Karabakh war of 2020 was a war rooted in territorial dispute between two Caucasus nations, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The dispute began in 1991 when the Armenian ethnic majority of Nagorno-Karabakh decided to separate themselves from Azerbaijan and declare independence as Republic of Artsakh with the support of Armenia. The support however made identity issues a highly sensitive topic when addressing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, extending the issue beyond territorial dispute.

The Nagorno-Karabakh war of 2020 lasted for 44 days, starting on September 27 and ending on November 10, 2020. 30 percent of Nagorno-Karabakh's population was displaced as the result of the war leaving the land unsafe for Karabakh Armenians (Group, 2021). It is important to highlight that although the Nagorno-Karabakh war of 2020 was short and devastating, it is not unpredictable. The war occurred as a result of the ineffective peacebuilding and mediation efforts following the first Nagorno-Karabakh War in 1994 (Smolnik et al., 2021, p. 3)

The first Nagorno-Karabakh war occurred between 1988 and 1994. The war took place during the early years of Armenia and Azerbaijan's independence from the Soviet Union. The outbreak of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War was triggered by demonstrations in Nagorno-Karabakh led by Armenian nationalist groups demanding the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia in 1988. Although the Soviet Union rejected these demands, Soviet Armenia supported Nagorno-Karabakh's claims, which ultimately prompted a military response from Azerbaijan (Aslanli, 2022, pp. 151–154)

The First Nagorno-Karabakh War ended on May 12, 1994, with the signing of the Bishkek ceasefire agreement, brokered by the OSCE Minsk Group, Iran, Russia, and Turkey. The ceasefire required external parties to play an active role in maintaining peace, involving peacekeeping forces from Russia, Turkey, and the United States. Azerbaijan suffered a devastating defeat in the First Nagorno-Karabakh war, losing seven regions, including Nagorno-Karabakh, to Armenian control. The Azerbaijan sources reported that Armenian occupation resulted in the deaths of 30,000 people and the ethnic cleansing of 700,000 Azeris during Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territories (Hakan Yavuz & Gunter, 2023, hlm. 67).

Azerbaijan's defeat in the First Nagorno-Karabakh war fueled a rapid growth of anti-Armenian sentiments among its population. According to the fifth report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on Azerbaijan, discrimination against the Armenian minority in Azerbaijan is deeply rooted in the government and education systems where they closely tied the sentiments to the

Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Azerbaijani politicians frequently reflected this discrimination in their speeches, and it was further promoted through the Azerbaijani education system (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2023, pp. 10–16). With a society already harboring intense anti-Armenian sentiments, the securitization of identity issues and the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute became highly politicized in Azerbaijan. As the government systematically normalized the anti-Armenian sentiment, the Second Nagorno-Karabakh war eventually seemed inevitable.

After the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan were limited to sporadic armed clashes from 1994 to 2020. At least five clashes and ceasefire violations occurred during this period: The First Clash (2008): Took place in Levonarkh, Martakert Province, Nagorno-Karabakh, triggered by unrest following Armenia's 2008 elections in Yerevan. The clash resulted in two Azeri deaths and one Armenian injury (BBC News, 2008). The Second Clash (2010): Occurred in September 2010, with a clash happening in the village of Chaylu saw both sides accusing each other of provocation. Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense reported casualties of three Armenian and two Azerbaijani personnel (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2010). The Third Clash (2012): Took place in June 4, 2012, where a clash occurred along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in Tavush Province, Armenia, and Qazax, Azerbaijan (Wolfinbarger, 2015, pp. 2–3). The Fourth Clash (2014): The clash was different in comparison to the previous clashes. Whereas the previous clashes are short and highly intense, the clash of 2014 was a year-long, low-intensity conflict that claimed around 100 lives on both sides (Sanamyan, 2016). The Fifth Clash (2016): Known as the "Four-Day War" or "April War," that occurred in April 2016 in Talish and Madagis, Tartar District, Azerbaijan. It ended on April 5, 2016, with a new ceasefire. Azerbaijan secured 8 kilometers of Nagorno-Karabakh territory, including the village of Talish. The operation was done to test Azerbaijan's newly modernized military equipment that was supported by Israel and Turkey (Erickson, 2022, pp. 224–225). Between 2016 and 2020, although the tensions between two countries remained high, no significant clashes occurred until July 2020 with a confrontation in Tavush Province, Armenia. The confrontation resulted in numerous casualties, including a National Hero of Azerbaijan, Major General Polad Hashimov who took part in the First Nagorno Karabakh war and the Four-Day War of. The death of the war hero enraged the Azerbaijani public and eventually contributed in escalating the tensions into a full-scale war in September 2020 (Erickson, 2022, pp. 233–234; Hakan Yavuz & Gunter, 2023, p. 160).

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War began on September 27, 2020, with Azerbaijan launching military operations targeting strategic cities in Nagorno-Karabakh, including Stepanakert, Shusha, Jabrayil, and Zangilan. By October 2020,

Azerbaijan gained the upper hand, capturing Jabrayil and surrounding areas on October 10. Armenian forces gradually retreated to Hadrut, Fuzuli, and eventually Shusha. On November 8, Azerbaijan seized Shusha, a strategic location in Nagorno-Karabakh, effectively gaining control of most of the region.

The war ended on November 10, 2020, with a ceasefire agreement mediated by Russia (Erickson, 2022, pp. 236–239). Under the agreement, Russia would oversee the ceasefire for five years, during which both sides would de-escalate, and Armenian forces would withdraw from Nagorno-Karabakh (Kremlin, 2020).

## Literature Review

Securitization theory defines "security" as a process of politicization that transforms an issue from an ordinary concern into a more critical one, thereby elevating its status above regular political discourse (Buzan et al., 1998a, p. 23). The theory posits that national security emerges from the politicization of issues by security actors to serve their own interests. Understanding the definition and criteria of securitization requires recognizing its foundation on intersubjective grounds (collective beliefs) about existential threats deemed significant enough to have substantial political effects (Buzan et al., 1998a, p. 25). This intersubjective basis has broadened the scope of security studies, moving beyond its previous military-centric focus on state-level concerns to include new sectors that allow security analysts to investigate securitization processes in more specific and directed frameworks.

The Copenhagen School of securitization classifies the securitization process into five sectors: Military, Political, Economic, Societal, and Environmental. Identifying the sector of a securitization process helps isolate relevant variables and interaction patterns related to the process. By breaking down complex variables, securitization can be better summarized and simplified for analytical purposes (Buzan et al., 1998a, p. 8). For instance, a securitization process in the societal sector would focus on issues of identity and cultural continuity.

Securitization involves rhetorical processes carried out by security actors, known as the Speech Act. The speech act refers to linguistic actions such as speeches or national media framing by security actors such as politicians or heads of state. Understanding the speech act is crucial in securitization, as it not only describes the reality of an issue but also shapes public perception of that issue.

To analyze a securitization process (speech act), three units must be identified: Referent Object: The entity perceived as threatened and possessing the legitimacy to survive. Security Actor: The actor initiating the securitization process,

constructing the narrative of the referent object facing an existential threat. Functional Actor: The actor influencing sectoral dynamics without being the referent object (Buzan et al., 1998a, pp. 35–36).

In certain sectors, such as the societal and political ones, Buzan and colleagues did not specify how functional actors are identified. To address this, Floyd (2021), in her work *Securitization and the Function of Functional Actors*, argues that the audience can be considered functional actors. While the Copenhagen School describes functional actors minimally, Floyd suggests that audiences can act as functional actors, influencing securitization processes without being security actors or threatening the referent object (Floyd, 2021, p. 10). For example, if a politician conducts a speech act directed at society, the audience can be categorized as functional actors because they have the capacity to affect the securitization process positively or negatively, especially in democratic contexts.

The success of securitization is not solely determined by security actors but also by supporting factors, which are divided into internal and external factors. Internal Factors includes the grammar of security employed by security actors in the speech act. Depending on the security sector being securitized, the grammar and tone of security will vary. In societal security for example, identity issues are frequently discussed; for environmental security, sustainability is the main topic; for political security, sovereignty is central, and so on.

External Factor are factors that are related to the position of the security actor conducting the speech act and the nature of the issue being framed as a threat. Security actors must possess authority (whether formal or informal) and frame an issue that can be collectively perceived as a threat by society. A speech act is more easily conducted when the framed issue is inherently threatening (e.g., military convoys, racial sentiments, or air pollution) and the securitizing actor is someone with power (Buzan et al., 1998b, pp. 32–33).

## METHOD & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The type of research conducted is descriptive research with a qualitative approach. The primary characteristic of descriptive research is that the researcher does not have control over the variables being studied and can only report the findings factually (Kothari & Gaurav, 2019, pp. 2–3). Descriptive research is appropriate for this study, which aims to explain the securitization of identity issues during the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, with variables that cannot be controlled, such as the security actors and the phenomenon of identity issue securitization during the conflict.

This research focuses on the speech act process concerning identity issues by analyzing the security actor of Azerbaijan, specifically the President of Azerbaijan during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, President Ilham Aliyev. The study seeks to understand and analyze the process of Azerbaijan's identity securitization and the chronology of identity securitization in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict of 2020, as carried out by the Azerbaijani government, particularly represented by President Ilham Aliyev in his speeches. The analysis was conducted using internet-based media, particularly the official website of the Azerbaijani presidency, [www.president.az](http://www.president.az), which provides President Ilham Aliyev's official speeches. The speeches analyzed were delivered between 2016 and 2020 and addressed issues regarding Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

To collect data on the Nagorno-Karabakh War, the researcher employed library research techniques, a method involving the collection of data from various literature sources relevant to the study (1999). Literature or library research is utilized by summarizing research findings on a specific topic. These summaries can come from research articles, conceptual articles, or theoretical contributions to the research topic.

To ensure the validity of the research data, the researcher applied the technique of data source triangulation. According to Patton (1999), triangulation in qualitative research refers to the use of various methods or data sources with the primary goal of developing a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. During the triangulation process, researchers use different methods, data, or theories from diverse sources to uncover new perspectives that support the initial findings of the study (Creswell, 2003, p. 251).

## DISCUSSION

### *Azerbaijan Identity*

Modern Azerbaijani identity is one that is shaped by the discourse of two ideological frameworks: Azerbaijanism and Turkism. Azerbaijanism is a nationalist ideology asserting that Azeris are an independent ethnic group residing in present-day Azerbaijan. Conversely, Turkism holds that Azeris are descendants of Turks and, therefore, ethnically Turkish. Despite initial conflicts and differing interpretations, these two identity discourses have significantly contributed to the development of the modern Azerbaijani identity, widely recognized by many Azerbaijani people as the "Azeri identity with Turkish origins" (Ergun, 2022, p. 819). This identity ideology has played a pivotal role in the nation-building process of modern Azerbaijan.



Throughout the Azerbaijani history, there have been two notable awakenings of Azerbaijani national identity. The first one is in 1905 that was triggered by the Tatar-Armenian War while the second one is in 1988, sparked by the early clashes of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War. Both events played critical roles in uniting the Muslim population of the South Caucasus into the Azeri nation that they are now before establishing the Azerbaijani state. The awakening in 1905 leaned towards the formation of an ethnic identity, while the 1988 awakening emphasized the establishment of a national identity and an independent Azerbaijani state.

The political discourse surrounding Azerbaijani identity advanced rapidly during the late Soviet era as tensions intensified between Armenians and Azeris over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Sumgait ethnic clashes in February 1988 catalyzed the rise of political organizations in Azerbaijan. By the end of 1988, Azerbaijan had around 40 civic and political organizations. Among these was the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF), which later evolved into a nationalist political party of the same name (Demirtepe & Laciner, 2004).

The formation of modern Azerbaijani identity, which was largely driven by the Nagorno-Karabakh discourse and anti-Armenian sentiments, proves that for Azerbaijanis Nagorno-Karabakh is not merely an issue of territorial sovereignty for Azerbaijan but a critical element of its national identity. The territorial integrity of Nagorno-Karabakh is perceived as a vulnerability by segments of Azerbaijani society, and the loss of this region is seen as a threat to their identity, particularly from their "enemy," Armenia. Consequently, in this study, the referent object used by Azerbaijani security actors is the Azerbaijani national identity.

The first Nagorno-Karabakh War was started as inter-ethnic clashes between villages in the Nagorno-Karabakh region between Azerbaijan military and Armenian-Karabakh militant. The conflict quickly escalated into a full-scale war when Armenia supplied weapons to Armenian-Karabakh militant groups in Nagorno-Karabakh, prompting a military response from Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union under the notorious Operation Ring. Although militarily successful, Operation Ring became politically detrimental to Azerbaijan due to its controversial nature where it resulted in numerous Armenian civilian casualties. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and as the consequences of Operation Ring, the newly established Russian Parliament, who is seeking for political support, chose to side with Armenia in the new phase of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, shifting the dynamics of the war (De Waal, 2013, pp. 115–117).

## ***Analysis of Components of Azerbaijani Identity Securitization***

### **Referent Object**

The referent object in securitization refers to entities considered threatened and possessing legitimacy for survival (Buzan et al., 1998b, p. 36). It can include states, nations, or identities. In the context of societal-sector securitization, the referent object is anything perceived by a significant group in a specific region as essential, where its endangerment is interpreted as a threat to the group's existence (Buzan et al., 1998b, p. 123).

Azerbaijan has framed Armenia as the principal enemy, positioning the Nagorno-Karabakh issue as an existential threat to its national identity and, by extension, the state's very existence. However, anti-Armenian sentiment cannot be exclusively attributed to the Azerbaijani government as it also stems from historical trauma due to prolonged conflict and disputes during the formation of both ethnic groups. The Armenian-Azeri antagonism has spanned for almost a century, from the Armenian-Tatar conflict in 1905 to the First Nagorno-Karabakh War in 1991. This historical backdrop has collectively fostered anti-Armenian sentiment among the Azerbaijani populace. The Azerbaijani government has acted as a facilitator of this sentiment by leveraging societal structures, such as mass media and schools, to reinforce the narrative (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2016; Kilit Aklar, 2005).

Securitization issues are inherently subjective; what one group perceives as an existential threat may not be viewed the same way by another. Therefore, framing an issue as a universally recognized threat necessitates a securitization process. This process involves speech acts, which connect the audience with the security actor, framing the issue as an existential threat that requires extraordinary measures to address.

The success of a securitization speech act is determined by two factors, which are internal factors and external factors. Both factors are closely tied to the security actor and the intrinsic nature of the security issue being securitized (Buzan et al., 1998b, pp. 30–31).

Internal Factors are factors that are tied to the security language used by the security actor. Depending on the security sector being addressed, the language and tone of security can vary. For societal security, issues of identity are frequently emphasized. For environmental security, sustainability becomes the primary focus, while political security often revolves around sovereignty, and so on. External Factors however are those related to the position of the security actor, who must



possess authority (whether formal or informal) and the inherent characteristics of the issue being framed as a threat. A speech act is more effectively executed when the issue being securitized is generally perceived as inherently threatening (e.g., military convoys, racism, or air pollution), and when the securitization is carried out by an individual or entity with significant power or influence (Buzan et al., 1998b, pp. 32–33).

### **Securitizing Actor**

During the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Azerbaijan's speech acts were frequently performed by Azerbaijani political elites such as the President himself, Ilham Aliyev. The year 2016 to 2020 was a critical period for President Aliyev in framing Armenia as Azerbaijan's enemy, particularly as conflicts between the two nations peaked in 2016 and escalated into a full-scale war in 2020. Aliyev addressed the Nagorno-Karabakh issue in various contexts, most of which were related to Azerbaijan's legitimate ownership of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia's alleged agenda on the international stage to undermine Azerbaijan. In a speech delivered at the opening of the Fourth Congress of World Azerbaijanis, as reported on the official website of the Azerbaijani presidency, Ilham Aliyev stated:

*“It is clear that Armenian Diaspora organizations were formed over decades. They have penetrated into various leading media organizations of the world and are represented there. The Armenians are behind the overwhelming majority of materials tarnishing Azerbaijan, distorting the realities of Azerbaijan and slandering on us.”(President of Azerbaijan, 2016a)*

In this speech, President Aliyev framed the Armenian diaspora worldwide as an international enemy of Azerbaijan, alongside Armenia itself. Aliyev's remarks about how international media had been influenced by the Armenian diaspora indicated his intent to make the Azerbaijani public skeptical of international media outlets reporting negatively about Azerbaijan. This speech was particularly significant as it was delivered to the Azerbaijani public.

Throughout 2016, many of President Ilham Aliyev's speeches referenced two issues: Armenia's reluctance to cooperate diplomatically and the Armenian diaspora's efforts to tarnish Azerbaijan's international image. Aliyev described the April clashes as provocation by Armenia, which for over 20 years had rejected diplomatic solutions in favor of military options. He also expressed his disappointment with the Minsk Group mediators, whom he deemed ineffective. This disappointment was conveyed in a formal speech during the Nowruz national holiday celebration in

March 2016. According to the official website of the Azerbaijani presidency, President Aliyev stated:

*“The Azerbaijani people were not particularly optimistic of the activity of the Minsk Group anyway. However, their actions in January this year completely undermined any signs of confidence. As you know, two resolutions were tabled at the Parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe. These resolutions were drawn up on the basis of in-depth analysis. A lot of work was done, and one resolution was adopted by a majority of votes.”(of Azerbaijan, 2016)*

In a meeting with Azerbaijan’s Security Council in April 2016, President Ilham Aliyev linked Armenia’s reluctance to cooperate as one of the reasons peace efforts could not succeed. This was evident in a speech accessible via the official Azerbaijani presidential website:

*“The main goal of Armenia is to keep the status quo unchanged. Unfortunately, the numerous statements by the heads of Minsk Group co-chair countries are having no effect on the Armenian authorities. These statements lie in the fact that the heads of the USA, Russia and France have repeatedly pointed out: the status quo is unacceptable, it should be changed and the issue should be resolved soon.”(Azerbaijan, 2016)*

In June and October 2016, President Aliyev delivered speeches addressing how the Armenian diaspora and Armenian lobby systematically sought to tarnish Azerbaijan’s image and position on the international stage. In a speech commemorating Azerbaijan’s 25th Independence Anniversary, President Ilham Aliyev stated: *“Armenia, using the capabilities of the Armenian lobby, conducted a smear campaign against us. We were deprived of the opportunity to respond and communicate reality to the world community. In other words, an end was put to international isolation and information siege.”* (President of Azerbaijan, 2016b).

By 2017, President Aliyev has delivered several speeches with anti-Armenian sentiment related to the April 2016 clashes. These speeches occurred on three separate occasions. The first was at the opening of a new military camp of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense in January 2017. As reported on the official Azerbaijani presidency website, Ilham Aliyev stated: *“The April battles are a major military victory for us. For many years, Armenia had been creating myths about its army and spring tales about its alleged invincibility. The April fighting showed whose army is actually invincible”*(President of Azerbaijan, 2017a).

The second occasion was during a meeting with the families of Azerbaijan's national heroes who had died in 2016, held on February 9. At this event, Ilham Aliyev remarked: *"After April, Armenia tried different ways to engage other countries in the problem. But all of their efforts were in vain and did not yield any fruit. The purpose of the latest provocation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border was precisely to engage the organization of which Armenia is a member in this affair"* (President of Azerbaijan, 2017b).

The third occasion was at a meeting with Azerbaijani soldiers commemorating the one-year anniversary of the April 2016 armed conflict. According to the official Azerbaijani presidency website, Ilham Aliyev described Armenia as an occupier: *"Defending our lands, the Azerbaijani army carried out a successful counteroffensive operation and dealt crushing blows to the enemy. As a result of the operation, thousands of hectares of Azerbaijani lands were liberated from the invaders."* (President of Azerbaijan, 2017c).

This framing persisted in President Ilham Aliyev's speeches, including in the two months leading up to the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. In a speech at the inauguration of a new military unit of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense on June 25, 2020, President Aliyev stated: *"Therefore, I am saying that our youth should know this history, our ancient history. They should know that the present-day Armenia was established on Azerbaijani lands. They should know the real names of place names on the map of the present-day Armenia."* (President of Azerbaijan, 2017a). By framing Armenia as Azerbaijan's enemy, President Aliyev not only succeeded in amplifying anti-Armenian sentiment among the Azerbaijani public but also effectively portrayed Armenia as a tangible threat to Azerbaijan, symbolized by its annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh.

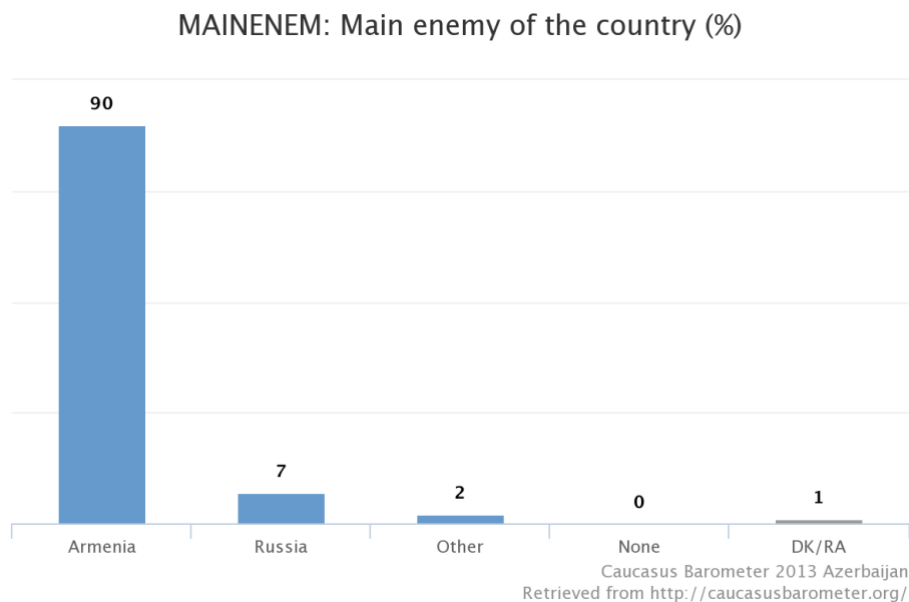
### **Functional Actor**

A functional actor is an actor that can significantly influence the dynamics of the securitization process without being either the referent object or the security actor in the process. Unlike other sectors of security, functional actors are not explicitly described by Buzan in the societal and political sectors. According to Floyd (2021), the audience can fulfill the role of a functional actor due to its ability to determine the success of a securitization process (Floyd, 2021). Therefore, in a democratic state like Azerbaijan, the role of the audience becomes highly significant in determining the success of the securitization of an issue, which leads to the conclusion that the Azerbaijani audience serves as the functional actor.

As an intersubjective process, the success of securitization heavily relies on the collective thinking of actors involved in the process. This means that threats,

vulnerabilities, and insecurities within a group do not arise naturally or objectively but are instead socially constructed based on objective facts and collectively accepted or believed (Buzan et al., 1998b, p. 57). This highlights the importance of consensus within a group in determining whether an issue is perceived as an existential threat.

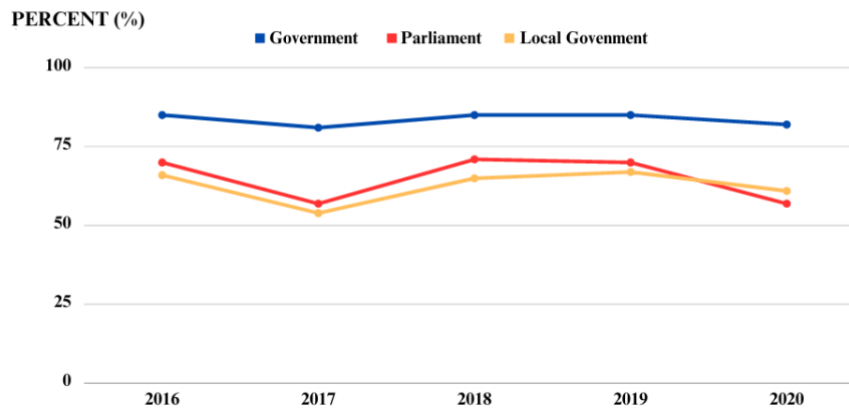
In a survey conducted in 2013 regarding which countries are considered enemies of Azerbaijan, approximately 90% of Azerbaijani respondents identified Armenia as Azerbaijan's main enemy, followed by Russia at 7%, and 2% who named other countries such as Iran, the United States, Turkey, and Israel. This is illustrated in the figure below:



**Figure 1.** Survey on Azerbaijan's Main Enemies  
Source: [caucasusbarometer.org](http://caucasusbarometer.org)

From the figure above, it is apparent that the majority of the Azerbaijani public views Armenia as the main threat to Azerbaijan. This also demonstrates that the Azerbaijani government's securitization of identity issues has been successful. This is further supported by the high level of public trust in Azerbaijan's government. In a 2016 annual survey report conducted by the European Union, it was found that approximately 85% of Azerbaijanis trusted their government, 70% trusted political parties, and 66% trusted local governments (Union, 2016).

## Public Trust in Azerbaijani Government 2016-2020



**Figure 2.** EU Survey on Public Trust in the Azerbaijani Government, 2016–2020  
Source: EU Annual Report on Azerbaijan (Visualized by the Researcher)

The chart shows that public trust in the Azerbaijani government remains high, averaging around 80%. This trust remained stable, except in 2017 and 2020. In securitizing an issue, the social aspect is vital in connecting the security actor and its audience. A successful securitization requires shared values that are mutually appreciated by both the security actor and its audience (Buzan et al., 1998b, p. 40). The high level of trust in the government and deeply rooted anti-Armenian sentiment within society create ideal conditions for the securitization of Azerbaijan's identity issues in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh war.

The success of this securitization can be observed in the public response in Azerbaijan, where massive demonstrations were held demanding the Azerbaijani government declare war on Armenia following armed clashes in July 2020 that resulted in the death of an Azerbaijani national hero, General Polad Hashimov. These demonstrations turned chaotic and unruly, with protesters chanting pro-war slogans and storming the Azerbaijani parliament building (Eurasianet, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict of 2020 stemmed from ethnic rivalries and territorial disputes over the contested region of "Nagorno-Karabakh." These two ethnic groups have clashed for over a century, from the Russian Empire's occupation era to modern times. Following the first Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 1994, the intensity of clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan was reduced to sporadic armed skirmishes over the period from 1994 to 2020.

During this time, Azerbaijan experienced significant development in its national identity discourse, driven by its defeat in the first Nagorno-Karabakh war. Anti-Armenian sentiment grew rapidly within Azerbaijani society after their loss in the 1994 war. This defeat occurred during the early years of the Republic of Azerbaijan's independence, a critical period for the formation of a new nation's identity. Consequently, this loss became a significant trauma for Azerbaijani society and intensified public animosity toward Armenia. As a result, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue became a crucial component of Azerbaijan's national identity, making it a perceived existential threat whenever the issue arose.

With deeply rooted anti-Armenian sentiment in society, the Azerbaijani government, as the securitizing actor, undertook a securitization process of the national identity issue, normalizing anti-Armenian sentiment through mass media and the education system. This is reflected in the third (2011), fourth (2016), and fifth (2023) reports by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), which highlighted the role of Azerbaijani politicians in spreading anti-Armenian sentiment. This trend is also evident in speeches by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, published on the official presidential website, where he frequently framed the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and portrayed Armenia as a major threat to Azerbaijan.

In the Copenhagen School's securitization theory, the success of a securitization process heavily depends on the audience's response to the referent object raised by the securitizing actor. In the context of this research, Azerbaijan's referent object is the nation's identity, while the securitizing actor is the Azerbaijani government. The securitization process in Azerbaijan can be considered successful, as evidenced by the audience's—i.e., Azerbaijani society's—response, which also acts as the functional actor. Azerbaijani society exhibits a high level of anti-Armenian sentiment, directly connected to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This response is demonstrated by the public demonstrations in July 2020, which ultimately catalyzed the onset of the second Nagorno-Karabakh war.



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