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From civic mobilization to armed struggle:
Tracing the roots of the Karabakh movement

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Abstract

Prior to the outbreak of the first Nagorno-Karabakh war in 1991, the South Caucasus region had been seeing a gradually increasing mass mobilization of ethnic Armenians, turning into a civil uprising known as the Karabakh movement. This paper examines the dynamics through which the civic movement evolved into an armed mobilization, consequently nailing down the groundwork of what is now known to be one of the most intractable conflicts in the post-Soviet region. To trace the processes that translated cross-ethnic relations into mass mobilization, the study builds upon qualitative primary data, coupled with an extensive examination of secondary evidence. The study identifies motivating factors such as economic, political, and socio-cultural horizontal inequalities across ethnic lines as the core drivers of collective grievances. Repressive state measures as well as the Soviet *glasnost* and *perestroika* policies are observed as enabling factors further boosting the legitimization of the civic movement claims. This paper subscribes to a context-bound approach of studying intractable conflicts, and by addressing the theoretical gap between data on objective inequality and data on perceived inequality, marries local knowledge of rather marginalized conflicts with the wider academic discourse.

Keywords: Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; ethno-political conflict; intractable conflict; mass mobilization; horizontal inequality; civic movement

1 Introduction

The Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict is the most prolonged ongoing conflict in post-Soviet Eurasia. In 1988, ethnic Armenians residing in NK demanded the transfer of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) from Soviet Azerbaijan to Armenia. The escalating tensions resulted in an outright war as the Soviet Union disintegrated. The hostilities ceased in 1994, with Armenian forces controlling NK and seven adjacent regions. Over a million people were displaced, with Azerbaijanis fleeing Armenia and NK, and the neighboring territories, while Armenians abandoned their homes in Azerbaijan. Despite this, intermittent violent incidents continued from 1994 until 2020, with attack drones, heavy

weaponry, and special operations forces posing a constant risk of reigniting the war. In April 2016, a four-day intense fight broke out at the line of contact, resulting in hundreds of casualties on both sides, foreshadowing the events to come.

With its 2020 large-scale violent escalation—the second NK war—and the still ongoing political tensions, the NK¹ conflict is known to have been deadly and intractable (Burg, 2005; Hopmann & Zartman, 2010), provoking cleavages between ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the last three decades. While many scholars have been concerned with the larger geopolitical, historical, and security aspects (e.g., Astvatsaturov & Babloyan, 2010; Kohlhagen, 2013; Ayunts, 2014; Perovic & Boskovska, 2018; Arzumanian, 2018; Mkrtichyan, 2019) of the conflict as well as the local memories, identities, and experiences of affected communities (e.g., Arutyunyan, 2006; Ayunts, et al., 2016; Ghahriyan & Atoyan, 2018; Smbatyan, 2018; Smbatyan et al., 2019), there has been little to no systematic scientific inquiry into the roots of this protracted conflict at group level.

This research paper contributes to this rather unexplored domain by retracing the outset of the conflict evinced by the 1988–1991 Karabakh movement, a collective action toward self-determination of ethnic Armenians then inhabiting NK. Specifically, the paper dives into the factors and conditions that would explain the split in cross-ethnic relations following (and despite) the long history of peaceful coexistence. Veering off the conventional and ideologically charged historiographic approaches pivoting on the restoration of historical justice, this study, instead, focuses on the horizontal relations between ordinary members of the two ethnic groups.

Being the first bottom-up mass mobilization in the Soviet Union since the 1920s (De Waal, 2013), the Karabakh movement² emerged in two epicenters—Stepanakert³ and Yerevan⁴—uniting citizens of ethnic Armenian descent around a struggle for independence. Although the NK conflict has long attracted empirical studies within different social science disciplines, the mere puzzle of why coexisting ethnic groups would turn against each other has seemingly not been explored at an in-depth level, essentially muting the voices of ordinary participants of the movement from scholarly analysis. Zooming in on

¹ Disclaimer: Throughout this work, I have used neutral and mutually acceptable names to refer to locations. However, some location names may be specific to the context and appear based on commonly accepted versions within the societal narrative being discussed. When using direct quotations, I have reproduced the exact location names articulated by the respondents for consistency and convenience purposes only. It is important to note that there is no intentional or unintentional political agenda conveyed, regardless of the ongoing political status of the locations mentioned.

² I acknowledge the vitality of background knowledge of the Karabakh movement, both within the context of the NK conflict, and wider geo-political, socio-economic, and historical contexts, to be able to fully grasp the causal mechanism explored in the paper. Given that such knowledge can be widely debatable and extremely multi-faceted, I have refrained from delving into the larger contextual frames of the case within the scope of this paper. To avoid potential simplification of and one-sided viewpoint on the studied case, I highly encourage further reading on the conflict from supplementary perspectives, including ones representing rather impartial (such as De Waal, 2013) as well as Azerbaijani perspectives. This should guide grasping a better sense of the results of this study, as well as facilitate the comprehension of other dimensions of the movement and the conflict not covered by this piece.

³ Stepanakert (same as Khankendi in Azerbaijani) was the capital of the unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh.

⁴ Yerevan is the capital of the Republic of Armenia.

the inter-ethnic ties of this ethnopolitical conflict at the communal level raises a number of perplexing yet essential questions that deserve in-depth exploration. The academic research has by and large seemingly overlooked the reasons why, after decades of peaceful coexistence with Azerbaijanis, ethnic Armenians would set out a civic movement. Why would a struggle for independence be preferable, and what advantages would self-determination allow, that were not achievable otherwise?

The study centers on inter-group relations and seeks to address the question of why political mass mobilization arises, particularly in the context of the Karabakh movement. Drawing on meso-level theory, which posits that inter-group inequalities can give rise to civil unrest, the research hypothesis suggests that perceived horizontal inequalities (HIs) among coexisting ethnic groups are the underlying driver of political mass mobilization. To test this, a qualitative inquiry is conducted using a deductive-process tracing approach, applied to the case of the NK movement. The theory of HIs, as presented in Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug (2013), is evaluated against the Karabakh movement. The study achieves the following scholarly objectives: (1) test and expand the explanatory potential of the theory on HIs; (2) augment our comprehension of the mechanism linking HI to mass mobilization by combining evidence on objective inequality with narratives of perceived and experienced inequality; (3) enrich existing scholarly insights into intractable ethnopolitical armed conflicts; and (4) enhance our understanding of the NK conflict through an in-depth examination of its origins based on accounts of people's lived experiences.

To trace back to the communal-level origins of this complex ethnopolitical conflict, I bring in an original comparative investigation of 11 semi-structured in-depth interviews with movement participants from Stepanakert and Yerevan, supplemented by an exhaustive review of over 120 secondary sources on the subject, providing relatively robust evidence supporting the posited connection between perceived HI and the genesis of political mass mobilization.

2 Theoretical and conceptual lenses

Scholars examining armed conflicts in recent years have increasingly emphasized the role of group-level inequalities in fueling such conflicts. These inequalities are commonly referred to as HIs, which represent economic, political, social, and cultural disparities between culturally defined groups (Stewart, 2005). Such inequalities have been present in human societies throughout history, including during agricultural and sedentary forms of coexistence (Malesevic, 2010), and remain a characteristic feature of contemporary social systems (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Malesevic (2010) argues that group-level inequalities with a long history are often the result of political domination and conflict. This conceptualization departs from the traditional focus on vertical inequalities between individuals and households, instead emphasizing the meso, inter-group level of agency. The theory of HI suggests that 'high levels of group-based economic and political deprivation make armed conflict more likely' (Hillesund, et al., 2018, p. 464).

Research has found evidence of a positive relationship between economic HI and conflict onset across countries (Østby, 2008a; 2008b) and within-country sub-regions

(Nepal et al., 2011; Vadlamannati, 2011; Gomes, 2015). Social HI, such as inequality in education, has also been found to be associated with conflict onset (Østby, 2008b; 2008a). Additionally, political HI, such as group-level exclusion from executive political power, has been linked to increased participation in armed conflict (Cederman et al., 2010; 2011; 2013; Cederman et al., 2015). The interplay between identity, motive, and opportunity is a crucial factor in creating supporting conditions for individuals to initiate or join violent collective action (Gurr, 1993; 2000; Østby, 2013). Alongside these three factors, language and religion are also important in increasing inter-group demarcations and the intensity of group identification, making the motivation for risking one's life in an armed confrontation more likely (Gurr, 1993; Østby, 2013). Strong group identification, coupled with perceptions of injustice or unfairness, can lead to collective motives and shared emotions about inequality, which, when combined with leadership, framing, and social networks, can promote successful recruitment (Tarrow, 2011; Cederman et al., 2013; Hillesund et al., 2018).

Despite the existence of a nuanced relationship between objective and perceived inequalities, commonly known as relative deprivation, the literature has primarily concentrated on objective inequalities as the cause of conflict and overlooked the significance of perceived inequality. However, some studies have explored the role of perceived HIs in the causal chain leading to conflict. For example, studies have found that the perception of unfair treatment of one's group by the state is associated with increased participation in demonstrations and support for political violence (Kirwin & Cho, 2009; Miodownik & Nir, 2016). The importance of people's evaluation of injustice and their tendency to assign blame to the other group or government has been emphasized in the broader literature on social movements and civil wars (Tarrow, 2011; Cederman et al., 2013), and this is particularly relevant to the current work. Overall, these insights highlight the importance of people's perceptions of their group's status compared to that of other groups in the relationship between inequality and armed conflict (Bahgat, et al., 2017).

According to Cederman et al. (2013), the formation of ethnonationalist wars is linked to the concept of relative deprivation, which arises when ethnic groups perceive themselves as being inherently different from others. While the politicization of HIs can lead to the establishment of collective grievances, the emergence of a large-scale armed struggle depends on the mobilization of the challenger group and the response of the state. Mobilizing structures, formed through social institutions and networks, play a critical role in transforming immaterial claims into actions. The state's response to the group's demands is also crucial, with states that regulate or abolish perceived economic and social injustices being less likely to become the target of political demands than those that are seen as causing or reproducing such injustices. If the state continues to exclude mobilized groups from power, violent outcomes become more probable, reinforcing the justifiability of violent and radical reorganization of mass mobilization (Tarrow, 1994; Goodwin, 1997; Cederman et al., 2013). This theoretical approach essentially serves as the basis of this research paper.

The causal link between group-level inequalities and within-state armed conflict is specifically outlined using the approach developed by Cederman et al. (2013), which investigates the empirical relationship between inequalities and civil war outbreak at the group

level (ibid., p. 35). To operationalize the original theoretical concepts and arrive at ‘pieces of data that provide information about context, process, or mechanism and contribute distinctive leverage in causal inference’ (Seawright & Collier, 2010, p. 318), a strategy for causal process observations (CPOs) is constructed. Table 1 presents the operationalization of the key theoretical concepts and visualizes the theorized claim regarding the association between HI and mass mobilization.

Table 1 Causal process observations of current inquiry

	IV	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	DV
Theory	Horizontal inequality →	Relative deprivation →	Collective grievance →	Joining the movement →	Mass mobilization
Operationalization	Economic, political, social, cultural	Did people assess their status as comparatively underprivileged?	Did people collectively legitimize their state as unfair?	Did people join the movement?	Political engagement of masses voicing a collective demand
Data	Secondary data (statistics, research & policy papers)	Primary data (in-depth interviews)	Primary data (in-depth interviews)	Primary data (in-depth interviews)	Secondary data (stats, research & policy papers)
Indicators	Morphological evidence of factual inequalities	Account evidence via Q3, Q4, Q5*	Account evidence via Q5, Q6, Q7	Account evidence via Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11	Historical evidence of mass mobilization

* Refer to Appendix 1 for questions used as indicator measurements.

I explore four possible causal steps from HI to mass mobilization. The first causal step is from HI to relative deprivation, observed through primary data expressed in the narratives of those who lived in Stepanakert or Yerevan during 1988–1991 and participated in the Karabakh movement. The second causal step is from relative deprivation to collective grievance, studied by looking at primary evidence collected through interviews on whether and how people collectively legitimized their state as unfair. The third causal step is from collective grievance to joining the movement, viewed in terms of citizens’ decision to actually join the movement, and is studied through primary evidence. The last causal step is from joining the movement to mass mobilization, which depicts emotional and structural factors that contribute to transforming the support and agency expressed by people into a mass movement and is studied through account evidence. These steps appear in a diverging intensity, sequence, and level of demarcation. Therefore, the causal process has been further investigated on the basis of the current framework as long as observed evidence does not offer clashing perspectives.

3 Methodology

The paper presents a qualitative inquiry, built upon a single-case study, designed as a deductive process tracing (Bennett & Checkel, 2015), utilizing a within-case comparison over time. The study tests the theorized causal link between HIs as an independent variable and mass mobilization of the Karabakh movement as a dependent variable. The Karabakh movement is considered a typical case that aligns with the proposed theory's 'regression line' (Gerring, 2008). This implies that both HIs and mass mobilization, the independent and dependent variables, respectively, were evident in this case. Consequently, this case study is assessing how well the theory can account for the case in terms of the portrayal of the causal mechanism, and whether an extension of this theory's explanatory scopes can possibly include other similar cases of political mass mobilizations that have eventually led to an armed conflict.

To strengthen the internal validity of the study, it observes two within-case sub-regional locations where the case was manifested most extensively. Those locations are Stepanakert and Yerevan. Stepanakert is a typical manifestation of the characteristics of the case, showcasing the direct experiences of HI in NK. In contrast, Yerevan is observed as an anomaly as it still showcases a large wave of mass mobilization during the same period despite being geographically beyond potential inter-group inequalities.

The study's primary temporal focus is between 1920–1991, including two time periods before and after 1988: 1920–1988 and 1988–1991. The latter period accounts for the Karabakh movement mass mobilization, and the two within-case sub-regional locations, Stepanakert and Yerevan, were strategically selected because they represent the primary epicenters of the Karabakh movement. It should be emphasized that the case of this study is still the Karabakh movement, and Stepanakert and Yerevan solely represent the main sites of the case manifestation and are not selected as sides of the comparison.

This study relies mostly on primary data collected through participant interviews. Due to the lack of sufficient secondary data available at the time of the research, the need for primary data was driven by the requirement for a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the contextualized situation and conflict realities during the Karabakh movement. Therefore, the interpretations of people who experienced the conflict and possess local knowledge are vital in answering the research question explored in this study. The method of in-depth interviews was used through the utilization of a semi-structured interview guide. The interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom, in the Armenian language, between March 25 to April 12, 2022.

A purposeful sampling strategy was applied for in-depth interviews. To select participants, two criteria were employed, namely participation experience and place of participation. Participation experience ensured that primary data was gathered from individuals who had direct involvement with the Karabakh movement. Place of participation was also crucial, as Stepanakert and Yerevan, were the primary centers of the movement, where most mass demonstrations occurred. Stepanakert was particularly significant since it experienced HI directly, while Yerevan represented a more indirect experience. Consequently, the study conducted in-depth interviews with ethnic Armenians who participated in the Karabakh movement in Stepanakert (NK) or Yerevan (Armenia) between 1988, the official formation of the movement, and 1991, the outbreak of the first NK war.

The sample of interview participants was additionally balanced by age group, gender, and level of participation. A total of 12 interviews were initially planned to be conducted; however, the data collection was concluded after the 11th interview, since data saturation was achieved then (see Table 2).

Table 2 Sample for in-depth interviews

Location	Stepanakert (5)		Yerevan (6)		11	Totals
Year of birth	1958–1970 (2)	<1958 (3)	1958–1970 (3)	<1958 (3)	1958–70 (5) <1958 (6)	
Gender	Man (2) Woman (0)	Man (1) Woman (2)	Man (2) Woman (1)	Man (1) Woman (2)	Man (6) Woman (5)	
Level of participation	Active (1) Moderate (1)	Active (2) Moderate (1)	Active (2) Moderate (1)	Active (1) Moderate (2)	Active (6) Moderate (5)	

Ethical considerations were also taken into account. The only identifying information collected during the fieldwork was the name and contact details of each respondent, which were used solely for scheduling interviews. As soon as the fieldwork was complete, the interviews were transcribed and anonymized, and direct quotations were used anonymously in the analysis. To ensure confidentiality and privacy, no third parties were given access to the data collected at any stage of the study. Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Yerevan State University.

In addition to primary data, this study has analyzed secondary data through desk research, including a systematic review of existing reliable data and research. The purpose of this was to understand what is already known about the research problem and to serve multiple objectives such as describing variables, producing a timeline of events, depicting causes, and verifying primary data. Document analysis was selected as the method of secondary data collection and analysis, where over 120 units of secondary material were reviewed systematically, including books, articles, reports, archival notes, and raw data. The collected materials served as a complement to primary data and were analyzed through several steps, including initial screening, filtering, systematization, and incorporation with respective citations.

4 Results

This section examines the events and processes leading up to the Karabakh movement from 1920–1988, as well as its establishment between 1988–1991. Instead of providing a comprehensive historical account, this section presents an in-depth thematic analysis of key factors that may have contributed to the emergence of the Karabakh movement, utilizing a combination of primary and secondary sources. The study draws on anonymized excerpts from in-depth interviews with movement participants. Although the study is

qualitative in nature, the analysis is structured in a way that may resemble a positivist paradigm due to the deductive theory testing process tracing design. Hence, observing this section within the methodological context it was written in is likely to benefit the enhanced comprehension of the paper.

A chronological approach is deemed insufficient due to the complexity of the subject matter; hence the findings are presented thematically across three segments: preceding the Karabakh movement, during the Karabakh movement, and a comparison between these two time periods. The first segment is a systematic analysis of the years leading up to 1988, combining factual evidence with morphological data. This approach involves frequently shifting back and forth between the years within this period, to lay down a historical context for the movement. The second segment delves into mass mobilization from 1988 to 1991, a critical period under scrutiny as it marked the inception and evolution of the Karabakh movement, centering the analysis on the repressive measures employed against the nascent movement and its political reactions to those measures. The third and final segment offers a comparative analysis of these two temporal period observations to evaluate the potential causal relationship between HI and mass mobilization over time, assessing the contextual meaning of the assumed causal story.

4.1 Karabakh movement antecedents: 1920–1988

4.1.1 Uncovering horizontal inequalities: ‘Pity you are Armenian’

The study found evidence of HIs experienced by ethnic Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) prior to 1988. The HIs were reported to have cultural/symbolic, economic, political, and social dimensions. Cultural and symbolic HI was the most frequently reported, with respondents recounting incidents of dehumanizing expressions, superiority messages, and subtle expressions of dislike based on ethnicity. Despite guarantees of rights for language and culture development and education in their native tongue, Armenian teachers were only allowed to study in Stepanakert or Baku, and not in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. In addition, schools in Azerbaijan taught ‘The History of Azerbaijan’ in Armenian, while Armenian schools in Azerbaijan were not permitted to teach ‘The History of the Armenians’ (Yamskov, 1991).

Economic HI was also reported, with perceived disparities in income levels, access to economic goods, and vocational opportunities across ethnic lines. The study also revealed accounts of political and social HI, including restrictions on mobility and unequal treatment by healthcare and educational institutions. The interviews with movement participants from Yerevan, Armenia, revealed that Armenians in Armenia experienced the HI vicariously through their NK counterparts (Quotations 1–3).

The key factor underlying all dimensions of HI was negative perceptions of the opposing ethnic group, indicating that ethnicity played a significant role in group identification. However, interviews conducted with participants of the movement in Yerevan, Armenia, reveal a somewhat indistinct yet striking portrayal of perceived disparities and pressures, primarily within socio-political and cultural/symbolic spheres. This phenome-

non is intriguing as it illustrates that Armenians in Armenia, who lacked direct exposure to these events, experienced them vicariously through the shared ethnic identity they held with their friends and colleagues from Nagorno-Karabakh, as conveyed through personal connections (Quotations 4–5).

According to Tchilingirian (1999), the underlying factor of all types of HI is the negative perceptions held toward the opposing ethnic group, thus emphasizing the continued significance of ethnicity as a basis for group identification. However, negative perceptions alone are not enough to generate ethnic conflict, as Yamskov (1991, p. 633) notes, ‘much more is required for conflict, i.e., negative perceptions are necessary, but not sufficient for ethnic conflict’.

The subsequent subsection outlines additional factors that contribute to the layering of conflict on top of ethnicity-based HI.

4.1.2 Relative deprivation forming collective grievance: The ‘insignificant others’

Empirical evidence reveals that the ethnic composition of the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) population underwent significant changes over time, particularly from the 1920s to the late 1980s, with a considerable rise in the number of ethnic Azerbaijanis and a gradual decrease in the comparative proportion of Armenians. The Azerbaijan Rural Census (1924) indicated that the population of the newly created NK Autonomous Oblast in 1921 was 131,500, consisting of 94.4 per cent Armenians and 5.6 per cent Azerbaijanis. Yamskov’s (1991) statistical data demonstrated that between 1921 and 1979, the number of Armenians declined from 124,100 to 123,000, while the number of Azerbaijanis increased almost fivefold from 7,400 to 37,000. In the 1970s, the Armenian population in NK remained relatively stable (120,800 in 1970 and 123,000 in 1979), while the Azerbaijani population continued to grow rapidly (27,200 in 1970 and 37,000 in 1979). By early 1987, the population of Nagorno-Karabakh was estimated to be 133,200 Armenians and 43,900 Azerbaijanis, which accounted for 74 and 24.4 per cent of the overall population, respectively (Starovoitova et al., 1988). Consequently, the Armenian population of NK increased by 8.3 per cent for the period of 1979–1987, while the population of Azerbaijanis increased by 18.9 per cent during the same period (*ibid.*)⁵

While numbers and percentages from historical records may contain methodological and accuracy-related limitations, what is critical to note is how significant ethno-demographic changes, particularly the rapidly increasing presence of Azerbaijanis in NK, were perceived by ethnic Armenians in the context of ongoing inter-ethnic tensions. As the interviews revealed, reoccurring relative deprivation, feelings of alienation, feelings of ‘insignificant others,’ and ‘foreigners’ were becoming more apparent and common among Armenians in NK (Quotation 6).

Based on both in-depth interviews and desk research, evidence suggests that grievances regarding experienced HIs have been present since the 1920s. Throughout the 1930s, 50s, 60s, and 80s, demonstrations, petitions, letters of complaint, and various other forms of political communication were utilized (Tchilingirian, 1999). However, these efforts received

⁵ Other examples of statistical perspectives include Bruk (1986), Mirzoyan (1988), and Sarkisyan (1992).

little attention or resulted in forceful measures from the Soviet authorities and former Azerbaijani SSR (Merridale & Ward, 1991). Scholars such as Libaridian (1988) and Khachatryan & Abrahamyan (2011) have mapped and documented several dozen of these incidents (Quotation 7).

The 1965 'Letter of the 13,' which received little attention, constituted the ultimate grievances of Armenians in NK. The letter detailed the Azerbaijani SSR's nationalist policy against the Armenian population and the systematic and endless violations of their interests—'The situation is intolerable. Discrimination is everywhere and in everything... Everything is happening behind the veil of friendship and brotherhood.'⁶ – It also highlighted the restrictions on rights and the destruction of the region's autonomy. Interestingly, the grievances established in the letter later became some of the cornerstones of the Karabakh movement argumentation in the late 1980s.

These socio-political processes, which arguably built upon each other by 1988, further exacerbated the majority-minority divide between ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis in NK to a degree where authorities, as noted by Kapuscinski (1985), could no longer 'put up with a nation that gets on its nerves; [and] the nation cannot tolerate an authority it has come to hate.'

It is important to highlight that, despite the relative deprivation experienced by Armenians in NK until the 1980s, this did not appear to have been a prominent feature in the perceptions of Armenian–Azerbaijani relations among the people of Yerevan. As the interviews indicate, the Karabakh issue did not become a part of the public narrative until the 1988 movement (Quotations 8–9).

These are only a few examples of interviewees who reported being unaware of the Karabakh issue at that time. Therefore, it is evident that the societal attitudes in Armenia and NK were fundamentally different in terms of motives up until the start of the movement. With the foundation for the movement laid by 1988, a new period (1988–1991) emerged as a crucial timeframe for the onset of one of the longest-standing conflicts in the South Caucasus region. The subsequent segment delves into this period in detail, examining the factors that further contributed to the emergence of the Karabakh movement.

4.2 Karabakh mass mobilization: 1988–1991

National movements that challenge the existing political order often face resistance from the authorities responsible for maintaining it. The protests on the Karabakh issue were also met with attempts to suppress and silence the goals of the movement through political detentions and violent repressive methods by both the Azerbaijani SSR and the Soviet Union. However, the movement's claims became legitimately and constitutionally in line with the declared doctrines of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, leading to parallel processes in Stepanakert and Yerevan (De Waal, 2013) (Quotation 10).

⁶ The full content of the letter can be found in Khachatryan and Abrahamyan (2011, pp. 39–45).

During the 1980s, political processes aimed at uniting NKAO with Armenian SSR were met with latent and later open repression from the authorities. Forcible displacements and cases of local violence were reported in NK, but the Sumgait pogroms marked a significant turning point (De Waal, 2013). The Sumgait events shrank the possible space for a peaceful solution, as they created a condition of 'nothing to lose' guided by feelings of revenge among ethnic Armenians, according to some interviewees (*ibid.*) (Quotations 11–12).

De Waal's (2013) quote depicting the Sumgait events illustrates the intensity of the situation, as angry young men sought to identify and harm Armenians. The events not only led to a sharp need for protection from Azerbaijani authorities but also a deep mistrust for the Gorbachev administration. The interviews conducted with participants revealed that the possible areas of dialogue between the movement and the authorities were replaced with a significant gap and a sense of insecurity, which undermined the chances of a peaceful resolution (Quotation 13).

In addition to Soviet curfews and restrictions on demonstrations, the authorities detained members of the already-established Karabakh Committee. These measures were intended to quell the movement, but instead fueled collective grievances, increasing people's feelings of injustice and motivating them to resist even more persistently (De Waal, 2013). The repressions served as 'sparks' that reignited the movement, which had been dormant for several decades, and Gorbachev's announced glasnost and perestroika provided an opportunity for a new phase of the struggle for Karabakh in 1988 (Tchilingirian, 1999, p. 444.) (Quotation 14).

The state's repressive measures initially silenced the Armenian movement but ultimately proved to be ineffective as the movement had already spread throughout Armenian societies in the period 1988–1989. With the implementation of curfews and detentions, the movement became less centralized, which allowed for more meso-level agency and proactive initiatives organized by various groups.

During this time, the mobilizing structure of the mass demonstrations changed in Yerevan, shifting from a solely NK-oriented narrow political movement to a collective celebration. Abrahamian's (1990; 1993) anthropological account describes mass mobilizations as an 'archaic festival' with ritualistic elements. The author notes,

The people were joined in a kind of united body, much like that of the medieval European carnival keenly characterised in a famous study of Michael Bakhtin (1965). This immense body, which probably amounted to a million people at the peak of the demonstrations (and this is in a city with a population of a million), was not created mechanically. It had a united spirit, a common thought and finally a common sense of ethnic self-consciousness. According to the statements of many participants, they had a wonderful feeling of being present everywhere, in every place occupied by that huge body of people. (Abrahamian, 1993, p. 101)

This phenomenon was also articulated quite commonly by the participants of in-depth interviews from Yerevan (Quotations 15–16).

The demonstrations brought different layers and groups of society to the same level and eliminated structural inequalities. The euphoria of crowds and 'collective effervescence' (Durkheim, 1995) laid crucial foundations for the institutionalization of the mass movement, linking the processes in Stepanakert and Yerevan.

Considering the preceding analysis, the critical question left to be addressed is what distinguishes the two observed periods, namely 1920–1988 and 1988–1991, and how do these distinctions contribute to answering the research question and furthering the implications for the theory? This question is addressed in the final segment of the analysis.

4.3 Comparative analysis and discussion

4.3.1 Causal relationship: Covariation, isolation, and temporal order

This study employs account data and morphological materials to examine the causal relationship between HIs (independent variable) and mass mobilization (dependent variable). Specifically, the study investigates whether a change in the manifestation of HI is covariant with the emergence of mass mobilization and whether such covariation demonstrates temporal order and isolation from other confounding factors. The results of the analysis suggest that for Observation I (years 1920–1988), the causal path from HI to collective grievance is detectable, as evidenced by a significant amount of data. However, no changes in the values of causal step 3 and the dependent variable have been identified for this period. In contrast, Observation II (years 1988–1991) exhibits variations in the values of both step 3 and the DV.

Table 3 shows a change in the IV covaries with a change in the DV across temporal observations. This over-time comparison also secures some extent of isolation through counterfactual reasoning, by cross-examining control (Observation I) and treated (Observation II) units.

Table 3 Covariation between HI and mass mobilization

	Horizontal inequality (IV) →	Relative deprivation (Step 1) →	Collective grievance (Step 2) →	Joining the movement (Step 3) →	Mass mobilization (DV)
Observation I. 1920–1988	Observed	Observed	Observed	Not observed	Not observed
Observation II. 1988–1991	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed	Observed

The fact that similar values are observed in the IV across the two observations when values in the DV vary, reduces the possibility of other confounding factors that could constitute a spurious relationship. Furthermore, the chronological order of events provides additional support for the causal relationship. The manifestation of IV occurs earlier than that of the DV, making a reverse-causal scenario practically nonviable.

4.3.2 Causal story: Mechanism linking HI to mass mobilization

The article addresses the question of why political mass mobilization emerged in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia only after 1988 despite HI existing since the 1920s. The study establishes the significance of the findings emphasizing the need to look closely into the mechanism linking HI to mass mobilization. Figure 1 illustrates the causal steps identified in the theoretical framework and the two key factors that emerged as decisive functions, namely state repression and the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* during Gorbachev's leadership.

State repression further fueled mobilization efforts instead of eliminating them. The violent repressive measures against mobilization initiatives in the 1980s became a motivating condition for the mobilization efforts to reignite after each phase of exposure to violent or restrictive deeds. Moreover, Gorbachev's policies created enabling conditions for the civic movement to legitimize its demands. *Glasnost* and *perestroika* provided an opportunity for the movement to claim its demands to be constitutional and politically acceptable. Both factors were crucial in making sense of the causal chain in the Karabakh movement.

As a result of empirical research, an interesting and key aspect emerged that is also demonstrated in Figure 1. The processes that were initially different in Yerevan and Stepanakert eventually merged into one political movement. The vicarious experience of collective grievance fed by HIs that the NK Armenians were exposed to play a fundamental role in terms of problem identification for Armenians of Armenia. This was met with Soviet state repressions and led to mass mobilization to follow the same purpose, like that among the branch of the movement going on in NK (Quotation 17).

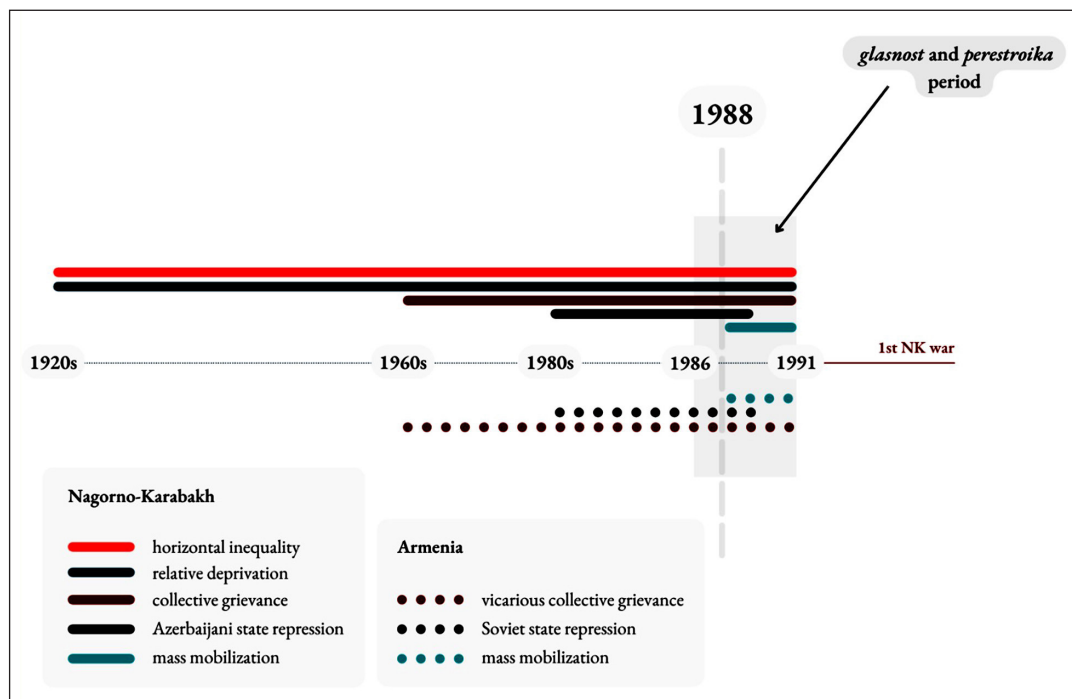


Figure 1 Illustrative roadmap from HI to mass mobilization in NK and Armenia

According to Forsberg (2014), when an ethnic group involved in armed conflict has kin members living in a nearby state, there is an increased possibility that the kin group in that state will also engage in armed conflict. Such ethnic bonds and similarities are more likely to be underscored when kin members nearby have the opportunity and willingness to mobilize for rebellions.

Table 4 matches the empirical findings in relation to both locations with the supporting conditions of mass mobilization from a joiner's perspective—identity, motive, and opportunity. The Table displays that HIs in NK were also viewed as a window of opportunity in terms of gaining independence from the Soviet state, which directed the two originally altering paths to amalgamate into one across locations.

The comparative analysis of empirical data suggests that perceived HIs between co-existing ethnic groups underlie the emergence and evolution of political mass mobilization. This analysis also answers the research question of why political mass mobilization emerges, establishing support both for the theorized causal mechanism and the causal relationship (covariation, temporal order, isolation) between the phenomena of interest. Despite methodological limitations, this study provides relatively strong evidence in support of this hypothesis.

Table 4 Supporting conditions for joining the Karabakh movement

	Stepanakert (NK)	Yerevan (Armenia)
Identity	Ethnic belonging (Armenianness)	
Motive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent HI • Protect from state violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent HI • Protect from state violence • Eliminate Soviet rule
Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Perestroika</i> and <i>glasnost</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Perestroika</i> and <i>glasnost</i> • Collective grievance in NK

5 Limitations

I do acknowledge that the study naturally comes with a number of methodological, theoretical, and empirical limitations, which are briefly reflected upon in the points below.

First, the study explores the Karabakh movement, a mass mobilization that emerged specifically among the Armenian populations of NK and Armenia and was framed and politicized specifically in the Armenian narrative. Studying the Armenian perspective is inherently dictated by the scope of the study. Solely due to this, and not because of any bias, the study may appear one-sided, since it does not draw on the Azerbaijani perspective on the matter. The latter falls beyond the scope of this examination, and rather belongs to a wider scholarship on the NK conflict. Nevertheless, future research could benefit from a balanced examination that includes then claims of the Azerbaijani side to the territory and the transnational status of Armenians having lived within the NK, providing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the conflict.

Second, the validity of the measurements is somewhat compromised since qualitative study with open-ended questions cannot allow for much standardization across interviews, even though the measurements have been based on a theory-driven operationalization. Data triangulation using desk research results has helped to partially address these limitations, and despite possible drawbacks, no instances of starkly divergent viewpoints have been found across methods. Nonetheless, the sample size of eleven participants in the primary data collection may pose a risk of overgeneralization, and the perspectives captured may primarily represent urban populations from Yerevan and Stepanakert, since these are the locations where the movement saw its highest extent of mobilization. Future research could benefit from a broader and more diverse sample to enhance the robustness and representativeness of the findings. Including participants from rural areas, especially from former NK, and various socio-economic backgrounds could provide a more comprehensive view of the mass mobilization process and its implications.

Third, external generalizability is another limitation here, as the study is a single-case process tracing that cannot provide valid external implications. Internal comparability across the temporal ranges should also come as a relative limitation, as the observations are timespans built around a single year, making comparisons across those observations asymmetrical. Additionally, the focus on a single historical and sociopolitical context limits the applicability of the findings to other regions and conflicts. Including a broader regional perspective, such as the post-USSR and Black Sea contexts, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by and large. This broader perspective would help in understanding how regional geopolitics and historical legacies shape local dynamics and contribute to the conflict's persistence and evolution.

Fourth, there is one theoretical limitation that should be noted, which is that the original theory by Cederman et al. (2013) is set to explain civil wars, while the 1st Nagorno-Karabakh war is not a civil war per se. Furthermore, driven by deductive theory testing design, the analysis might imply linearity, while mass mobilization in reality is a rather nonlinear process driven by multifaceted factors and contextual peculiarities. Moreover, theory-driven nature of the paper already assumes a rather channeled theoretical lens, rather limiting the room for other significant standalone theories and alternative explanations to come into play. There is also a need to address the international and regional dimensions of the conflict more thoroughly, which this paper does not aim to cover. The involvement of transnational actors and the broader geopolitical context could play critical roles in the conflict's dynamics and outcomes. Examining the roles of international organizations, neighboring states, and diaspora communities are beyond the scope of this piece, however, could provide valuable insights into the external influences on the conflict and its potential exits.

Fifth, and another pertinent limitation, is that which concerns the study's focus on historical periods, which may not fully capture the current state of NK. The region's status has significantly evolved, especially after the 2020 NK war, which altered political and social dynamics. This paper inherently refrains from drawing on this, since the current state of the affairs of the conflict was originally not deemed under the focus of the study, and hence, any retroactive meaning making of the current status quo through the lenses of historical evidence would in this case inevitably lead to interpretative biases and poten-

tially speculative argumentation. Moreover, given the fluidity and rapid developments of the conflict, any such attempts would likely lead any scholar into endless loops of interpretations, since the pace of the conflict's dynamics are rather incompatible with that of scholarly publishing. Nonetheless, future research could explore how these recent changes are arguably influenced by the historical traces of the mass mobilization processes and horizontal inequalities. Considering the present circumstances and how the findings contribute to understanding the ongoing situation in NK would provide more immediate and presently relevant insights.

Finally, while the study draws on existing theories of horizontal inequality (HI) and mass mobilization, there is an opportunity to integrate additional secondary literature and empirical studies that could provide a quantitative evaluation of HI in NK. This would help establish a stronger empirical foundation for the theoretical claims and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the conflict's underlying causes. Incorporating quantitative data on economic disparities, educational inequalities, and access to resources could complement the qualitative findings and offer a more holistic view of the HI's impact on mass mobilization. Additionally, incorporating further relevant literature on horizontal and vertical inequality and violent conflict could strengthen the theoretical framework and empirical support.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the scholarly contributions to studies in sociology of conflict and social science scholarship, in general, are not less significant, providing a deeper outlook on the NK conflict, as well as the aspects of the theory that have been put to test. Future research could pay attention to ensuring measurement validity and reliability and addressing external generalizability and comparability across temporal cases. In this, the valuable insights into understanding complex cases of armed mobilizations that this paper provides could serve as scholarly grounds for future scholarship.

6 Conclusion

Through a comparative analysis of primary and secondary data, this study aimed to test the hypothesis that the emergence and evolution of political mass mobilization were driven by perceived horizontal inequalities between coexisting ethnic groups, establishing a covariation between the phenomena of interest, as observed in the Karabakh movement case (both in Stepanakert and Yerevan sites of observation). There are a number of additional theoretical and empirical contributions that this paper makes to the sociological scholarship on peace and conflict, which, together with the limitations of this study, are discussed in this section. Several of such theoretical contributions include the confirmation of a causal relationship, to the extent that process tracing design can allow, between HI and mass mobilization, as well as the exploration of the causal mechanism between these two variables and the context-bound nature of the theory under test. The study also addresses a theoretical gap in linking objective inequality to perceived injustice and attitudinal support for violence. In sum, it will be fair to conclude that the meso-level analysis of inter-group relations can provide relevant insights into understanding complex manifestations of conflict, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Further research endeavors on this specific case, and other similar cases of ethnopolitical, intractable, and/or contex-

tually Soviet-related conflicts, could potentially contribute to improving the explanatory potential of the theory, and marrying local knowledge of less-discussed conflicts into a larger scholarly exchange.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. In-depth interview guide

Introduction and general settings

Hello. I am [Name, Surname]. First, I wanted to thank you for agreeing to talk to me today!

I am currently enrolled in the [Department] at [University]. I am conducting a study on the root causes of the emergence of the Karabakh movement. For this purpose, I am talking with people who have resided in Stepanakert/Yerevan upon and during the emergence of the movement. You have been recommended as an interviewee by _____, and I am genuinely interested in hearing your memories and experience about this topic.

I will be asking you some questions and will truly value if you could answer these clearly and honestly. The information you provide will be treated confidentially, so, no information disclosing your identity will appear anywhere. The interview is planned to last for approximately an hour, however, please, do not feel restricted by this, if you feel like you have more to share. Again, I appreciate your time and commitment to talk with me today.

Do you have any questions you would like to ask before we proceed?

Informed consent

Now let us, please, go through a few pieces of information important for me to communicate with you as part of your informed consent:

1. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. For this, you can feel free to ask any questions about the purpose and the nature of this study, in order to base your decision on a full awareness.
2. You can withdraw your participation at any time or refuse to answer any questions without consequences of any kind. If need be, within a week after the interview is complete, you can withdraw your consent over the already provide answers, too. In this case, all interview materials will be destroyed and no data from the interview will be part of the analysis.
3. You will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
4. If you consent, I would like to kindly ask for your permission to record the interview in order to not miss any important reflections of yours in the phase of data analysis. If you do not wish to be recorded, I will only take written notes.
5. As soon as we complete this interview, the recording (if applicable) will be transcribed in a way that does not contain any information that can help identify you. As soon as transcribed, the recording will be destroyed.
6. The anonymized transcript and the recording (until being destroyed), will be stored in a hard drive, only available to me.
7. Disguised extracts from your interview may be quoted in reports produced as part of this study. In any report on the results of this research, your identity and that of the people you speak about will remain confidential.
8. At any time during and after the interview you are free to contact me to seek further clarification and information (*relevant contact information*). If need be, you can also reach out my academic supervisor (*relevant contact information*).
9. I will gladly clarify any of the above-mentioned points, may you see the need.
10. I want to highlight that I personally, and my University, as well, take such ethical considerations very seriously, thus our conversation and its results will be treated very carefully and responsibly.

Main section

Let's begin. As I mentioned already, I am studying the emergence of the Karabakh movement, and I am particularly interested in your memories and experiences of those times. To best understand them, I want to ask you to help me visualize your experience through your eyes. So, please, try to imagine as if you are able to travel back in time, and figuratively go back to your life in 1980s. This is before even the Karabakh movement began. Please, take me with you as you travel back, and walk me through your experience, while I will ask a few specific questions.

1. Where were you born? Where does your family originate from?
2. What do you remember from 1980s? What was life like back then? Where were you living? With whom? What was your main occupation?

3. In the beginning of the 1980s, what did you know about Azerbaijan and the people living there? How did you obtain that knowledge? Did you have relatives, friends, or neighbors of Azerbaijani origin? And did any of your Armenian acquaintances live in Azerbaijan? Please, tell me a little bit about them.
4. What was the relationship between regular Armenians and Azerbaijanis like back then? What were the similarities and the differences between these groups, based on your memories?
5. How were ethnic Armenians of Karabakh being treated by Azerbaijanis? How were you and the people you knew feeling treated? What made you think/feel that way? Please, share some examples.
Probes (ask to specify, if not addressed already):
 - 5.1. Cultural inequalities: access and freedom to practice language, traditions, holidays, religious ceremonies etc.
 - 5.2. Political inequalities: access to the central decision-making power
 - 5.3. Economic inequalities: level of income and employment opportunities
 - 5.4. Social inequalities: access to education and other public goods improving social status
6. Try to remember the day when you very first time thought or realized that the relationship between Armenians and Azerbaijanis could worsen. What led you to that thought/realization? Can you recall the year or an event around it? Please, elaborate.
7. Can you, please, remember the day when you learned that there is a civic movement emerging? How did that information reach you? What were you thinking about it, what were your first reactions? What did you do after that?
8. There are several explanations that circulate about how and why the Karabakh movement emerged. Some say that it was only a result of instructions dictated top-down. Some others say that it was the demand of regular individual citizens that made the movement possible at all. What are your thoughts about this? How did the movement emerge after all?
9. What do you think motivated regular ethnic Armenians to decide to join a movement like that? What did people expect to achieve through it, that wouldn't be possible otherwise?
Probe (ask to specify, if not addressed already):
 - 9.1. And what would you say motivated you personally to join/support the movement?
10. Can you remember how the civic mobilization around the movement was happening? How would people in your city receive information about the movement? Who were active? Why? Where?
11. What do you think made it such a large mass mobilization? What were the contributing factors?
12. During the mobilization, what were your friends and neighbors thinking about the possibility of the war? Were you and people like you expecting that it could happen? Why? Can you bring examples?

13. Was it possible at all to keep the war from happening? What could have been done back then to avoid war? What would you personally have done differently?
14. When do you think Armenians and Azerbaijanis can coexist peacefully again? How do you imagine that possibility?
- This concludes our talk today. How are you feeling right now? Is there anything else you would like to share, before we close?

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

Appendix 2.

Direct quotations from interviews

Number as appearing in the text	Quotation and respondent details
1	In Karabakh, the salary has always been lower [...] even the best specialist in the construction sphere [was getting] 7-8 rubles, [while] in Aghdam (Azerbaijani town) up until 25-30 rubles. Of course, the workforce would go there... (<i>man, 67 years, movement participant from NK</i>)
2	We had a feeling that, you know, there was some sort of oppression, that there was some kind of deficiency of real life. For instance, we did not have some goods in our stores that they had in regions of Azerbaijan. There was this close-by city Fizuli; we would always drive there to [buy] a bottle of sunflower oil. (<i>woman, 75 years, movement participant from NK</i>)
3	To my recollection, all masons were Armenians, hairdressers were mostly Armenians, like this... In the sphere of handicraft work, Armenians were the majority. But again, coming across Armenians in the authorities – that was a bit problematic (ref. rare) already. (<i>man, 55 years, movement participant from NK</i>)
4	The pressure was mostly coming from the acknowledgment that ‘we (<i>ref. Armenians</i>) are the owners of this land, we are the majority, but the minority is the one ruling and dictating.’ There were many Karabakh Armenians working at our institute, and they would tell us that they were being oppressed in that it was hard for them to advance [career-wise], and take on some positions, but I haven’t been there myself, this is not my experience, it’s what we have heard from them... The first person [status-wise] of the regions and towns was always Azerbaijani, the second person – Armenian... But hardly the other way around. (<i>woman, 71 years, movement participant from Armenia</i>)
5	Someone [from NK] that I have been in touch with since childhood had a house there, when they were visiting us, they were telling [us] very subtly, but the main message was that ‘we, Armenians, are constantly tolerating certain problems created by Azerbaijanis.’ (<i>man, 58 years, movement participant from Armenia</i>)
6	... you know, Karabakh was feeling sort of alienated. Through word of mouth, it was getting heard that the people are under some kind of oppression. Yes. And that there was a need to get free of that oppression. Moral oppression, do you understand? (<i>woman, 75 years, movement participant from NK</i>)

Number as appearing in the text	Quotation and respondent details
7	When in July 1921 the decision of the Bureau was adopted and was decided that Karabakh becomes part of Azerbaijan, there were already people, who were expressing complaints reaching Moscow, then they would prosecute those people, imprison some, murder some others. For instance, on the road from Aghdam to Gandzak, they would kill them, as if they attempted to escape. It was Azerbaijan doing it, of course with the sponsorship of the Soviet rule. This kind of thing happened since 1921, yes. [...] For instance, before 1987, there were mass complaints in the 60s, too. People have resisted once in 1949, then in 1965... Those who were expressing political demands were being labeled as <i>dashnak</i> (ref. nationalist) or <i>antisovetchik</i> (ref. anti-Soviet). Such stigmatization was happening a lot in Karabakh. (<i>woman, 75 years, movement participant from NK</i>)
8	It was way later, only after the 1988 movement. Because when the '88 movement began, back then I was associating it with justice, and up until the 88, maybe even later, I was not viewing the Azerbaijanis (ref. their factor) in this, just like the 99 per cent of our people [in Yerevan], if not all of them. I was not seeing any problem from their (ref. Azerbaijani) perspective. (<i>man, 58 years, movement participant from Armenia</i>)
9	Well, it was only after the beginning of the movement. During the first days, we sort of weren't getting our minds on thinking or analyzing it. (<i>man, 68 years, movement participant from Armenia</i>)
10	The people wanted unification, unification. The single main thought was so that we could unify [with Armenia]. [Especially] that Gorbachev mentioned freedom and rights of nations [for self-determination]. And so, we took that peaceful road toward that. (<i>woman, 63 years, movement participant from NK</i>)
11	... but until Sumgait, no, it was a national movement, and after Sumgait, a [sense] of vengeance stirred. And even that wasn't the reason, but the fact that they (ref. authorities) didn't want to hear us. That was the problem. When we would do something, and then notice that Moscow doesn't respond adequately. After Sumgait, when it happened and it did so openly, [it meant] ' <i>here, you wanted an example, here's one for you.</i> ' And from then on, [we] stopped believing and trusting Gorbachev anymore. And because we were going for the demonstrations, and we knew that we are clean and what state media was talking about us on the contrary. But I am there, after all, right? I am seeing what's happening, but when I turn on the first [TV-]channel of Russia and I see ' <i>a group of nationalists</i> ' and other rubbish like that. (<i>man, 55 years, movement participant from Armenia</i>)
12	Azerbaijanis kept coming, and one could sense that some were sent from Baku on purpose. And on May 15, I believe, it was the first time that they demanded us to leave Shushi. (<i>man, 55 years, movement participant from NK</i>)
13	That neighbor of ours from the first floor would tell us that they (ref. Armenians in NK) would call her and say, ' <i>Ohh, they (ref. Azerbaijanis) have smashed and slaughtered us, they come in in the night and look for addresses where Armenians are living, they get in, and they kill people.</i> ' This was already widespread and was being heard and seen. (<i>woman, 61 years, movement participant from Armenia</i>)

Number as appearing in the text	Quotation and respondent details
14	First and foremost, it was the freedom of speech and acting, of being self-reliant as a human and as a citizen of a free country. That was the awareness that I had [...] and that because Gorbachev has announced <i>glasnost</i> , <i>perestroika</i> , now you have a much larger space (ref. opportunities), and you can at least explore it. (<i>man, 55 years, movement participant from Armenia</i>)
15	Oh, [we were] very excited, very [much so]. Every day with our whole collective, we would go to the [Freedom] Square and would stand there for a long time, demonstrations, continuous demonstrations, demonstrations... (<i>woman, 70 years, movement participant from Armenia</i>)
16	... I remember, I was there, when someone announced from the platform, ' <i>The thieves of the city of Yerevan are announcing that they are stopping the thefts from residences, dear people, be carefree...</i> ' It was an odd, unique, and, so to say, miracle-like thing, and that itself was already a magnet [pulling] you to join and know what is happening. [...] Of course, Karabakh as a topic was the core 'glue,' but to be honest, except for the small number of local Karabakh people who were there, no one [back then] really knew what Karabakh was, and what was happening there. (<i>man, 58 years, movement participant from Armenia</i>)
17	Our vectors were different, it's just that at some point those vectors overlapped. Two very important vectors overlapped. Overlapped at the right time, in the right place. The wish of the wide masses to make Karabakh part of Armenia and the wish of broad-minded ones to be independent and making own decisions. These two things merged. (<i>woman, 71 years, movement participant from Armenia</i>)