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# **The Role of Culture and Identity in Mediation Efforts in Nagorno- Karabakh Conflict**

**MSc Political Science: International  
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## **Introduction**

Mediation is perceived as one of the most effective and common management techniques of third-party intermediaries in armed conflicts (Clayton and Dorussen 2021; Frazier and Dixon 2006). It has been employed by ancient Greeks and Egyptians in their wars with one another as a means of conflict resolution (Feerick 2003, 229). Many rulers and emperors, such as Louis IX for example, became globally recognizable and renowned for having used mediation as a tool to mediate disputes so admirably (Feerick 2003, 229). In most cases, mediation occurs when conflicting parties give access to a third party, state, or organization, to resolve their misunderstandings and differences to avoid any further violent disputes (Clayton and Dorussen 2021, 152). The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh is a good example that showcases the substantial impact of mediation on the frequency of the conflict. During the first Nagorno-Karabakh war (1988-1994), which was fought between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the mediation process was run by an international organization called The Minsk Group. It was established in 1992 by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and its main goal was to ensure peaceful and long-lasting negotiation to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite its efforts, the OSCE was unable to bring the conflict to a successful resolution and, as a result, this led to the outbreak of the second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 (Hopmann 2013, 37). This time, however, mediation was taken over by the Russian Federation and Turkey. Despite the efforts of the Russian peacekeeping troops to provide safety and stability in the region, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2023 Baku announced a new offensive that targeted military installations and infrastructure. However, this time the conflict ended with a victory for the Azerbaijanis after the president of the Republic of Artsakh signed a decree which calls for all institutions and organizations in the region to dissolve. That all being said, the conflict in

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Nagorno-Karabakh demonstrates how different mediation strategies and different formations of mediators can bring different outcomes. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, the difference is in the identity and culture of the mediators.

This research begins by introducing the main arguments in the existing literature regarding peace settlements and negotiation in the broad political field and factors that contribute to conflict resolution. Second, the research question and the relevance of this study are thoroughly explained. Furthermore, theoretical, and conceptual frameworks are presented, followed by the methodology. Finally, the hypothesis and expected results are discussed.

### **Research question and relevance**

This paper will be guided by the following research question: *How have Armenia's and Azerbaijan's cultural ties to the mediators impacted the efforts and the relative success or failure of Russia and Turkey as mediators in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh war (27.09.2020-10.11.2020)?* Drawing on the existing literature, it is crucial to mention that scholars have not only failed to explain the relative success of single-party mediations in the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020 but also disregarded the implications culture and identity have had on negotiations and peaceful outcomes of the war. Thus, this research may contribute to the broader literature by providing a new perspective on this conflict that will help understand how in general terms successful mediation in regional conflicts is dependent on conflicting parties' cultural and historical ties to the regional actors. In other words, since armed conflicts have been on the rise in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, this paper might help understand the complexities and underlying reasons why and how mediators approach a certain conflict and attempt to resolve it. For example, Russia and Turkey are not the only

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leading political actors that have engaged in negotiation processes. China is another great power whose role in mediation has become very prominent in the last decade. Therefore, because the questions of culture and history and cultural understanding have broad implications and can be applied to almost any case study that involves diplomacy and conflict prevention, the arguments presented in this paper might contribute to the broader understanding of China's negotiation intervention in conflicts such as the ones in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Ukraine. Thus, exploring in depth the factors that have led to the prevention of violence in the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, will allow for a better understanding of the current dynamics of the post-Soviet region and mediators' strategies in general in conflicts in which cultural factors are relevant.

## **Literature review**

To begin with, this literature review will be structured in the following way: first, the fundamental principles and characteristics of mediation will be explained, followed by a review of the role of culture in mediation processes. Second, the literature review provides a thorough review of all relevant factors that a successful mediation outcome depends on. These include not only the nature of the mediators but also the nature of the conflicting parties. Third, findings in the literature that explain the relationship between the identity and culture of the mediators and the desired outcome of the conflict are discussed.

To begin with, a short review of the process of mediation and an explanation of how culture is evident in mediation methods will be provided. Mediation, in general, is a topic that has gained a lot of attention in recent years due to its secrecy and the difficulty of studying it properly. Mediation and conflict resolution scholars argue that culture is not the only

important factor that plays a role in peace settlements and ceasefires. For instance, according to Bercovitch, it is a complex and dynamic process that is contingent upon various factors such as the contextual settings, the nature of the mediators and the disputants involved, the scope and the depth of the issue, and the actual mediation process itself (Bercovitch 2009, 343). Böhmelt, for example, pays much attention to the nature of the mediators and the disputants involved and views this factor as decisive. He argues that if there is more than one hostile state mediator involved in the peace-making process, the history of conflict and lack of trust will be transferred to the ongoing efforts and thus negatively affect the mediation procedure (Böhmelt 2011, 861). What Böhmelt adds is that the way mediators interact, synchronize, collaborate, and integrate their activities and individual efforts into the larger peace process can say a lot about the outcome of mediation attempts (Böhmelt 2011, 862). This, in other words, makes any collective attempt to mediate in a war-prone to failure since success is solely dependent on various factors such as power dynamics, motivations of the mediators, and the relationship between the mediators and disputants, which are difficult to coordinate all at once. Therefore, based on Böhmelt's findings in the existing literature, it can be concluded that when mediator states and conflicting countries share friendly and cooperative ties, the mediation process is more effective are more effective in managing and solving conflicts.

To continue with, in terms of what has been studied on the topic of peace mediation, it is important to mention that third-party mediation can be divided into two categories. The first category focuses solely on state-based mediation attempts initiated by a particular group of states (Böhmelt 2011, Greig and Regan 2008). The second category involves mediation initiated by non-state actors such as IOs (Böhmelt 2011; Greig and Regan 2008). One

example that illustrates the mediation approach undertaken by non-state actors during an armed conflict is the war in Ethiopia and Eritrea, where the Organization of African Unity was the leading mediator (Frazier and Dixon 2006, 394). Overall, these two typologies of mediation both count as third-party mediation as they consist of multiple actors assisting in conflict resolution processes in a single entity. This comparison is important to make when describing the differences in efficacy between mediating states, coalition of states, and multilateral bodies in reaching a negotiated settlement (Frazier and Dixon 2006, 386). For instance, in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, these findings can be used as a basis to further explain why Russia and Turkey have been more successful as mediators than The OSCE Minsk Group.

In terms of determinants of successful mediation outcomes, Bercovitch et al. mentions that previous relations, identity, and characteristics of the mediator, relative power, intensity, and nature of the issue are the most important factors that can determine the likelihood of success of mediation (Bercovitch et al. 1991, 12). For example, the authors state that it is easier to mediate a dispute between friendly parties with a history of cooperation who have a lower degree of power disparity as there will be a higher mediation impact and interest to achieve peace (Bercovitch et al 1991, 11). Moreover, regarding the nature of the issue, no amount of mediation can prevent a dispute between parties who are fighting over territorial control or national security interests (Bercovitch et al. 1991, 14). This makes sovereignty and ideology disputes such as the Arab-Israeli war difficult to mediate (Bercovitch et al. 1991, 14).

Furthermore, according to Lazaro, it is worth mentioning that not only the nature of the mediators is essential in a mediation process (Lazaro 2003, 328). Parties' characteristics are

important for understanding international mediation and achieving effective mediation results (Lazaro 2003, 328). These characteristics largely refer to their level of power, their political regime, or previous relationships between the disputants (Lazaro 2003, 328). For instance, there is a higher chance for a successful mediation when between the disputant states there is less disparity in power and when both parties are equally politically weak (Lazaro 2003, 329). In terms of historical and cultural ties, Lazaro mentions that any previous conflicts between the conflicting parties might harm the efforts to settle the dispute (Lazaro 2003, 329). This is one of the most important factors that determine the outcome of mediation (Lazaro 2003, 329). According to Lazaro, peaceful cooperation between the parties is an incentive to seek a resolution to armed conflicts (Lazaro 2003, 329). Finally, cultural differences can also be considered an issue when mediation is undertaken because they make the conflict more complex (Lazaro 2003, 330; Bercovitch and Elgström 2001, 12-14). In this regard, mediation is considered a social process that is affected not only by the context of the conflict itself but also by the cultural settings and the nature of the mediators and the conflicting parties and their activities (Bercovitch and Elgström 2001, 13). However, although the nature of the parties, their level of power, their political regime, and their relationship play a significantly important role in determining the effectiveness and success of international mediation, Lazaro points out that not only the nature of the parties is essential in the mediation process (Lazaro 2003, 331). Therefore, the rest of the literature review will focus on the nature of the mediator and its impact on mediation outcomes.

First, to understand how mediators succeed in exerting influence, one must examine the various sources of power available to the mediators (Bercovitch and Houston 2000, 180).

One possible way to identify mediators' resources is to examine mediators' status and



relationship in the international system, and more specifically how the mediators relate to the conflicting parties (Bercovitch and Houston 2000, 181). Their ability to leverage depends on the type of relationship the mediators have established with the disputants (Bercovitch and Houston 2000, 181). It is way easier for mediators to achieve a degree of trust and acceptance when common history, values, and experiences allow for an ongoing alliance between the mediator and the parties to existing (Bercovitch and Houston 2000, 181).

Second, according to Block Jr. et al., “shared ID” is an important aspect that will increase the probability of seeking mediation (Block Jr. and Siegel 2011, 426). In other words, mediation can be an effective conflict resolution tool most likely when the disputants share cultural and religious commonalities with the mediator (Block Jr. and Siegel 2011, 427-428). When the shared identity in question is equally salient to both parties and is manifested and emphasized by the mediator, the chance for a successful conflict resolution is increased and this can lead to the implementation of an agreement (Block Jr. and Siegel 2011, 427). In contrast, any cleavages between the conflicting parties’ identities make it easy for each party to view the other through a “self-other dichotomy” that can hinder the mediation process and decrease the probability of negotiation (Block Jr. and Siegel 2011, 431).

Third, in terms of cultural affinity and historical linkages between the mediator and the disputants, Greig and Regan argue that these take the form of past colonial ties (Greig and Regan 2008, 763). They mention that religious affiliation is one of the most popular forms of historical links, especially if it is related to the Catholic Church (Greig and Regan 2008, 763). In addition, the authors also mention historical linkages to post-colonial establishments such as the Soviet Union or the British Empire as an important element that increases shared

interest between the parties and the mediator (Greig and Regan 2008, 763). Thus, any commitment or linkage to the people of a particular country creates an incentive for mediators to contribute to successful conflict resolution (Greig and Regan 2008, 763).

For example, Block Jr. and Siegel use the Beagle conflict of 1978 as an example to illustrate how shared identity and cultural commonalities between mediators and disputants can result in successful mediation (Block Jr., and Siegel 2011, 429). This conflict revolves around Argentina and Chile whose common interest in the islands of Picton, Lennox, and Nueva led to the emergence of an inter-state conflict (Block Jr. and Siegel 2011, 429). The conflict was mediated successfully by the Vatican and Pope John Paul II, who managed to appeal to the Christian sensibilities of both Argentina and Chile by using Catholicism as a shared religious identity and shifting the dialogue away from the territorial disagreements (Block Jr. and Siegel 2011, 429-431). Once again, this example shows that whenever possible mediators and third parties should always use their shared identities with both disputants to produce successful conflict resolutions.

Finally, what Carnevale and Choi add to the discussion of culture's role in mediation is that in international relations cultural ties are a determinant for a qualification to enter a conflict as a mediator (Carnevale and Choi 2000, 108). This is so because cultural affinity is considered a basis to help resolve armed conflicts and influence mediation processes (Carnevale and Choi 2000, 108). The authors indicate that even biased mediators, who favor one party more than the other in every aspect, can be successful and often more desirable (Carnevale and Choi 2000, 108). The reason for this lies in the favored party's will to preserve and strengthen its relationship with the mediator (Carnevale and Choi 2000, 108). Besides that, if the mediator

has resources, benefits, or rewards to provide, the favored party may advantage of the mediator's wealth, while the disfavored party can seek to earn such benefits by cooperating in the mediation process and attempting to improve its relationship with the mediator (Carnevale and Choi 2000, 108). Thus, cultural ties between the disputants and mediators play a positive role in mediation as they enhance mediators' acceptability by the parties and the belief that the mediators can achieve a successful outcome.

All in all, the existing literature provides an extensive amount of information on mediation and the role of identity and culture in mediation processes. The passage above has not only addressed the reasons why conflicting parties decide to rely on a third party to lead the mediation process, but also focuses on the important factors that a successful mediation outcome depends on. Based on what scholars have argued, it is perceived that multi-party mediations are the most effective in settling peace agreements (Frazier and Dixon 2006, 403). Moreover, the revised literature implies that cultural ties are crucial for the mediation to happen and be successful. As discussed above, not only cultural ties between the disputants but also linkages between the disputants and the mediators can play a positive role in the mediation of international disputes. However, the literature has failed to explain this argument considering the Nagorno-Karabakh war, where the two conflicting parties are formal members of the mediating organization, The Minsk Group, and a peaceful outcome has been hindered due to the outbreak of the Second War. Since Russia and Turkey were the main initiators of peace in the Second War, this research aims to explore the main reasons for this success by connecting theories to the case study and investigating the roles of these two great powers in the conflict.

## **Conceptual framework**

To conceptualize the term “mediation”, this paper will refer to definitions that have already been discussed in the existing literature. As already defined by Bercovitch, mediation is related to the process of conflict management, distinct from the parties’ negotiations, where the ones involved in the conflict seek assistance, reject, or accept offers of help from an outsider (Bercovitch 2009, 343). Mediation is perceived in conflict studies in general as a peace-making tool (Barbosa and Kuster 2009, 150). Whenever the mediation processes involve more than one of those parties that engage in assisting conflicting parties to facilitate a peace resolution, that is called a “multi-party mediation.” (Böhmelt 2011, 860).

Interestingly, Böhmelt dives a bit deeper into the operationalization process and introduces three forms in which mediation can unfold: 1) multiple parties intervening without any coordination, 2) a sequence of mediation attempts that involve more than one party, and, 3) a coalition formation of third parties that aim to represent a single interest (Böhmelt 2011, 860). Based on that, this thesis will define multi-party mediation as conflict resolution methods initiated by third-party states that act accordingly to achieve peace as this was the case during the mediation process organized by the Minsk Group.

Furthermore, it is of great significance that the concept of “peace” is conceptualized efficiently as this conflict is still ongoing and has not been resolved formally. Therefore, this paper will refer to Bercovitch and Simpson’s definitions of successful mediation which is an agreement reached with the help of third-party mediation and the implementation of this agreement which ensures that conflicting armies will refrain from returning to armed conflict (Bercovitch and Simpson 2010, 73).

In addition, we should not forget that the concept of “culture” is complex and multi-layered and can be described in many ways, therefore, we must conceptualize it effectively. Culture is, in fact, one of the most difficult concepts as it can refer to different aspects of life such as organizational, national, professional, and network cultures (Bercovitch and Elgström 2001, 5). Therefore, any attempt at precisely explaining and operationalizing the term might be too risky as there are too many definitions and understandings of the concepts that exist in the literature (Bercovitch and Elgström 2001, 5). Both anthropologists and political scientists have attempted to provide a deeper understanding of the concept, however, all attempts seem to be too vague to offer a precise explanation (Bercovitch and Elgström 2001, 5). Thus, dealing with such a broad term is difficult as it poses the problem of not knowing how to decide which factors to consider in the empirical analysis.

For the research, this paper will focus on the term “local culture” rather than “generic culture” as we are interested in the local cultures of the conflicting parties and their similarities with the cultures of the mediating countries (Bercovitch and Foulkes 2012, 27). In this sense, culture is defined as Hofstede has referred to it: as the “collective programming of the mind” that allows individuals to identify with a specific pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting (Bercovitch and Foulkes 2012, 27). More specifically, this notion of culture focuses on people’s tendency to group with individuals who come from the same professional, religious, historical, ethical, political, and class background (Bercovitch and Foulkes 2012, 29). The next section will introduce the theoretical framework.

## **Theoretical framework and hypotheses**

In this section, findings from the existing literature will be used to form a theoretical framework basis for the formulation of the hypotheses and the causal mechanism. There is no specific theory that links cultural identity to mediation outcomes. Nevertheless, Bercovitch and Elgström provide a good starting point arguing that the effectiveness of international mediators is certainly dependent on the cultural differences between the conflicting and mediating parties (Bercovitch and Elgström 2001, 19). According to the authors, cultural dimensions or cultural differences are an important part of the history of any conflict as they primarily define the ideological views and perceptions of the parties involved and set the stage for the negotiations to evolve (Bercovitch and Elgström 2001, 12). It is unrealistic to consider the mediators as unbiased agents who can fairly take part in any conflict, irrespective of its nature, context, and the parties involved (Bercovitch and Elgström 2002, 13). Thus, the mediation process and the way mediators behave during this process are dependent on the cultural settings (Bercovitch and Elgström 2001, 13). For instance, cultural differences between the parties involved in the conflict resolution process will make mediation more complex and difficult to sustain, while cultural similarities between the states involved will increase the likelihood of a positive outcome of the mediation (Bercovitch and Elgström 2001, 13).

Inman et al. find that the concept of culture is extremely useful in studies focused on conflict resolution as it “dictates the available conflict strategies”, meaning that states’ leaders are the ones to decide whether to take part in mediation which results in culture shaping the utility of the method and the reactions of the other mediators (Inman et al. 2014, 689). Therefore, the authors argue that conflicting parties that are culturally different from one another might experience difficulties in communication and emotional expression due to their divergences

in conflict style and norms (Inman et al. 2014, 690). Therefore, Inman et al. argue that in terms of how culture impacts mediation, the smaller the cultural distance, the better the opportunity for conflicting parties to accept mediation and foster conflict resolution (Inman et al. 2014, 690). On the other hand, the larger the cultural difference between conflicting parties, the smaller the incentive for disputants to collaborate and engage in mediation (Inman et al. 2014, 691).

In addition, according to Leng and Regan, when negotiating, conflicting parties which are from different social and political cultures are often faced with problems arising from misunderstandings caused by divergences in the bargaining style and the meanings attached to it (Leng and Regan 2003, 434-5). Differences in meanings attached to signals across cultures can lead to common misunderstandings of perceptions and preferences (Leng and Regan 2003, 434-5). For example, both authors base their argumentation on Huntington's thesis that differences in religion or political regime make it even more difficult for states to find a common ground for mediation (Leng and Regan 2003, 434-5). Furthermore, Leng and Regan go further and argue that mediation is a three-way process in which similarities or differences between the mediators' societal and political cultures and those of the disputants are an important aspect that might influence the extent to which mediation outcomes appear as effective (Leng and Regan 2003, 436). The reason for this derives from the assumption that in their interactions mediators and disputants are often prejudiced and have preconceived notions of what individuals from foreign cultures would be like (Leng and Regan 2003, 436). As a result, such expectations can have an impact on how the parties involved interpret each other's behavior (Leng and Regan 2003, 436). Thus, trust between mediators and disputants is ensured when they share more similar cultural attributes, as opposed to when they do not

(Leng and Regan 2003, 436). Therefore, it becomes obvious that mediation behavior and the likelihood of a successful outcome are contingent upon culture. Cultural differences reflect contradictions and diversity, while cultural similarities and having “culturally sensitive” mediators ensure an effective settlement of any conflict (Bercovitch and Elgström 2001, 19).

Thus, based on the theory explained above, the hypotheses are as follows:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Due to Russia’s and Turkey’s cultural ties with Armenia and Azerbaijan respectively, they have both appeared as successful mediators in their efforts to prevent the conflicting parties from returning to an armed conflict.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Due to Turkey’s controversial history with Armenia, Russia has appeared as a more successful mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Despite its controversial history with Armenia, Turkey has appeared as a more successful mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- **Hypothesis 4:** Despite being culturally tied to Azerbaijan and Armenia, Russia has failed in its role as a mediator in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

To provide more information regarding the hypotheses and the black causal box that leads to the successful outcome of the war, it is expected that the cultural and regional ties that Russia and Turkey have established with the conflicting parties, Azerbaijan and Armenia, are central to the prevention of violence during the conflict in 2020 for several reasons. First, the region of Caucasus is of great geopolitical importance to both Russia and Turkey. Russia, for instance, sees itself still as a “great power” and any minor instability in the Caucasus can provoke the awakening of its imperialist Soviet nostalgia. On the other hand, the Southern Caucasus has been important to Turkey’s foreign policy, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union due to the recent developments in the neighborhood. Second, Russia has been the main supplier of arms to Armenia, and so is Turkey to Azerbaijan. For instance, Russia has been selling weapons not only to Armenia but also to Azerbaijan and is the main military



support to Armenia (Gevorg and Li 2018, 7). Third, Russia and Armenia have been historically, linguistically, and religiously related as they have both been members of the Soviet Union. The Armenian community in Russia is the largest one in the world, followed by the ones in France and the United States (Gevord and Li 2018, 10). Similarly, Turkey is Azerbaijan's biggest ally due to their ethnic and linguistic Turkic ties despite the many difficulties along the way such as the first Nagorno-Karabakh war and the Kurdish issue. Furthermore, while the Turkish-Azeri kinship is central to this argument, energy also plays a significant role in establishing strong economic and political ties between the two closely related countries. However, there is one factor that makes Russia more influential in the conflict than Turkey, and this dates to the Armenian genocide which has led to the hostile relationship between both countries. In other words, while Russia has enjoyed great relations with Armenia, Turkey's negative relations with Armenia have resulted in the Turkish government being closer to Azerbaijan.

### **Methodology and data**

In this section, the methodology will be discussed. The independent variable mentioned in the research question above is *Azerbaijan's and Armenia's cultural ties to the mediators*. The dependent variable or, in other words, the outcome of interest is *the prevention of violence in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War*. Based on the research question, it can be said that the question invites a qualitative research method since the type of the research question is interested in *the causes of the effect*. Therefore, drawing on the formulation of the research question, it can be argued that there is an expected outcome that is easy to explore. This is, namely, the elimination of violence during the Second War in 2020. Since the research

question is focused on *the causes of effect*, the research method's main aim should be to effectively address the process that has led to the outcome.

To investigate what the link is between the independent variable, Azerbaijan's and Armenia's cultural ties to the mediators', and the dependent variable, the prevention of violence in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, it is of essential importance to guess what the black causality box entails and what is the causal mechanism that has resulted in the particular outcome. In this case, the mechanism can be outlined as several processes aiming to illustrate how the conflicting parties' cultural ties to the mediators, Russia and Turkey, are proven to be effective in preventing violence in an area of serious armed disputes, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The two main explanatory variables identified in this causal pathway are societal culture and political culture (Leng and Regan 2003, 438-9). This identification is crucial as it will provide a good reflection on the linkages among cultural traits of the mediators' and the disputants' social and political culture. The first step of the process, however, refers to societal culture, and more specifically with a focus on religion and shared history. As discussed by Leng and Regan, drawing on the debate of the clash of civilizations, it is logical to use these two categories as a starting point for the analysis of the influence of cultural similarities and differences on mediation outcomes since, as Huntington suggests, conflicts will continue to arise due to cultural and religious divergences rather than economic factors (Leng and Regan 2003, 439). Furthermore, this research will make use of political culture as a second explanatory variable that can unravel the causal mechanism. Since there are a lot of differences that occur across the various types of political regimes, it is essential to consider political culture as one of the causes that can influence the effectiveness of

mediation. If the mechanism holds, it is expected that factors such as religion, shared history, and a state's political culture will be decisive for the successful outcome of mediation.

On another note, since the concept of culture might sound too complex when not being described precisely enough, it is important to disentangle the complexity of culture into more recognizable and measurable dimensions. The following cultural variables will be utilized to offer the most precise and promising understanding in the assessment of cultural uniformity and diversity in mediation: religion, cultural aspects such as language recognition, presence of strong diaspora, level of shared history, and historical awareness and its influence on their diplomatic relations. These three components describe well the unique characteristics of any conflicting parties. Although these variables do not entirely provide a thorough explanation of what culture is, they will certainly permit this study to effectively measure the impact of culture on conflict resolution methods.

Regarding the data selection, this section will focus on the data that will be looked at and the ways this material will be obtained. To gather meaningful data for answering the research question, it is crucial to make use of comprehensive document analysis on the relationships of the mediators with the countries in war as it will provide valuable insights into the context of the phenomenon. Since organizational and institutional documents have been very important in qualitative research for a long time, this method will be of great significance for this research. In this paper, primary and secondary sources will be used as the main data sources. More specifically, to answer the research question most efficiently, this research will use journal articles, policy statements, policy memos, proposals, commentaries, manuscripts, and reports published in the last 30 years. The period of 30 years is a crucial point as it will allow

for a more thorough examination of documents that date back to the beginning and the end of the first Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This will provide more insights into the mediation dynamics of the conflict and the initial motivations or efforts of Russia and Turkey to mediate in the armed conflict. For this, digital libraries and catalogs, as well as government websites and archival collections related to the topic of mediation in Nagorno-Karabakh will be used. Having explained the methodological approach employed for the sake of this research, the next section will present the expected results.

## **Analysis**

In this section, we will focus on analyzing the collected data. This section will be divided into three sub-parts, each focusing on one of the abovementioned variables: religion, level of shared history and historical awareness, and type of state's political system.

### ***Religious and Cultural Affinity***

As already discussed in this research, religion is considered one of the most crucial factors when investigating the role of culture in conflict resolution. Since the beginning of the first Nagorno-Karabakh War in 1988, the dispute between both nations has been portrayed heavily, especially by the West as an ethnic conflict between "Christian Armenians" and "Muslim Azerbaijanis" (Tchilingirian 1998, 2). Despite Western media's characterization of the conflict as a "religious war", both conflicting sides have rejected such speculations and both the governments and religious leaders of the states have refrained from distinguishing it as such (Tchilingirian 1998, 2). However, despite official declarations, religious symbolism seems to be a crucial aspect of the conflict and the resolution methods.

In the process of negotiating a peaceful outcome of the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020, both Turkey and Russia stood out as the most influential leaders willing

to engage in the mediation process of the conflict. Turkey has been asserting its position in the international arena and is known for continuously providing support to Azerbaijan. Since the outbreak of the Azerbaijani-Armenian armed conflict in 2020, the Turkish government, more specifically Turkish President Erdogan, has declared multiple times on national television that Turkey is taking Azerbaijan's side in the conflict and will always do so (Khairunisa 2022, 249). Turkey's support to Azerbaijan constitutes not only providing infrastructure and weapons but also urging the rest of the world to support Azerbaijan in this two-sided conflict (Khairunisa 2022, 249). However, Turkey's foreign policy to continue to provide support to Azerbaijan raises an interesting question: Why does it continuously disagree with declaring a ceasefire and is so persistent in supporting Azerbaijan to win this territorial dispute?

Interestingly, as mentioned in much of the literature regarding Turkey's position in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict "Turkey and Azerbaijan are one nation but two states", Azerbaijan appears to be different from other countries and cannot be compared to its Turkic-speaking neighbors (Khairunisa 2022, 250). The reason why Turkey has provided its full support to its strategic partner Azerbaijan is their ethnic kin which obliges Turkey to protect Azerbaijanis (Yavuz and Huseynov 2020, 108). Here, this can be characterized as a question of "collective identity" that defines the countries' closeness (Khairunisa 2022, 250). In the previous sections, it has already been mentioned, that identity and similarities in cultural and religious values are the one thing that can strengthen relations and cooperation between countries. In the case of Azerbaijan and Turkey, the collective identity provides them with homogeneity (Khairunisa 2022, 251). This homogeneity comes from both countries being Islamic states and having a population with Turkic roots and ancestry as Azerbaijan is a

fellow Muslim country derived from the Sovereign Turkish Nation (Khairunisa 2022, 251). In addition, both countries' populations have embraced Islam as their main religion and are identified as countries with Muslim majority (Khairunisa 2022, 253). They are both often perceived as "one religious unit with two countries" due to their homogenous religious identity and brotherly relationship with each other (Khairunisa 2022, 253). Despite the turbulences in their relations during the first Nagorno-Karabakh war when Turkey was unable to provide full support to Azerbaijan, the two countries kept their Muslim brotherhood and even strengthened their unity (Abilov 2015, 35).

In addition, it is important to consider language as an important cultural factor that can influence the cultural ties between both states. In this regard, Azerbaijani and Turkish languages are very closely related as they originate from the Oghuz branch of the Turkic languages (Sagin-Simsek and König 2011, 316). Since they are very intelligible, communication between representatives from both nations can take place in their first language (Sagin-Simsek and König 2011, 316). Although Azerbaijan's historical background is deeply rooted in Iran's history, over time the country replaced the Iranian family of language with a dialect that is now known as the Azeri-Turkish language (Sagin-Simsek and König 2011, 318). Similarities in language cannot be disregarded due to its importance as a means for communicating values, feelings, beliefs, history, and forming group identity. Therefore, one can argue that similarities in the languages of both countries have contributed largely to the preservation of the "brotherly" cultural ties between the Azerbaijani and Turkish nations. Thus, it can be argued that the concept of collective identity and similarities in shared cultural and religious attributes can answer questions regarding Turkey's unconditional support of Azerbaijan during the Second Karabakh War. However, the data

collected is limited and does not provide enough information to discuss whether collective identity also affects Turkey's relationship with Armenia.

Having analyzed Turkey's and Azerbaijan's cultural ties, this section will move on to discussing Russia's ethnic relationship with Armenia and Azerbaijan by focusing once again on religion and societal culture. To begin with, Russia's and Azerbaijan's ties date back to the establishment of the Soviet Union, comprising a confederation of Eurasian countries, among them being Azerbaijan and Armenia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's objective was to establish strategic relations with Azerbaijan as the newly independent Azeri country could serve as a bridge in the region (Arslani 2010, 137). However, besides the potential economic and strategic geopolitical alliance that Russia was interested in, both countries do not share as many cultural attributes as expected. For example, religiously, both countries differentiate as Russia's majority of the population is Orthodox Christian and Azerbaijan's is Muslim. Therefore, although Russia's historical relationship with Islam is complex, this research will focus on the common practice of equating Russia with Orthodox Christianity and not juxtaposing it with Islam (Yemelianova 2017, 123). Thus, in terms of ethnic and religious ties, Russia and Azerbaijan do not enjoy a lot of similarities.

Finally, this section will delve more into the cultural similarities of Russia and Armenia and explore their ethnic and religious ties. In terms of religion, religious solidarity between both nations has driven Russo-Armenian relations in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries even closer together. Due to their early adoption of Christianity, in 301 for Armenians and 988 for Russians, the linkage between the Armenian Apostolic and the Russian Orthodox churches has remained strong. Both churches are part of the Orthodox Christianity. More specifically,

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Russia is under the Eastern Orthodox Branch, while Armenia is a member of the Oriental Orthodoxy. Despite being close in dogmatic and liturgical principles, these churches developed independently due to the rejection of the Chalcedonian Definition by the Oriental Orthodox Churches in 451 AD. That being said, the shared religion played both a unifying and a divisive role between Russia and Armenia.

The cultural and person-to-person relations between the two countries are an important factor that influences their bilateral relations (Minasyan 2013, 1). Due to the large and influential Armenian diaspora that resides in Russia, most Armenians have an excellent command of the Russian language (Minasyan 2013, 2). This might be because the Armenian diaspora has a long history in Russia and Armenians have one of the most influential presences in Moscow that dates to the year 1390 (Galkina 2006, 185). Many ethnic Armenians who migrate to Moscow are, in fact, residents of other regions of Russia and are considered Russian citizens (Galkina 2006, 185). The Armenian diaspora in Russia is in this regard very well and deeply integrated into Moscow society (Galkina 2006, 191). Although these large numbers of Armenians entering the Russian community were not that much included in the Moscow society administratively, culturally, or economically, they now enjoy a higher social status and have been recognized as an official member group of the diaspora (Galkina 2006, 191). Many of them are being hired at better jobs, their children acquire higher educations, and they establish better relations with the local population (Galkina 2006, 191). Because of this, their identity is slowly changing, and they begin to feel more like true Muscovites (Galkina 2006, 191). Based on all this, it can be argued that although they are extremely loyal to their ethnicity, Armenians in Russia are very well integrated and culturally embedded in the life of the regions they occupy in Russia. Otherwise stated, Armenians in Kuban not only contribute



to the preservation of their own culture but also have a higher degree of regional identity and have accepted the importance of the culture of the ethnic majority (Galyapina et al. 2021, 111).

In addition, to understand to what extent are Armenians culturally related to Russians, it is crucial to investigate the role of Putin's "soft power" and the importance of the Russian language in the Caucasus. First, the term "soft power" has been a part of Russian foreign policy for quite some time now. Its initial goal was to promote the Russian language but with time its scope has progressively expanded to arts and media (Mkhoyan 2017, 692). An important component of Russia's soft power is the concept of "Russkij mir" (Russian world) which was based on the Russian language as a "living space" for the large number of people in the Russian-speaking world (Mkhoyan 2017, 692). It is important to note that this community encompasses not only Russia itself and goes far beyond the federal borders (Mkhoyan 2017, 692). The main instruments of the Russian soft power regarding the promotion of the Russian language have been the established Russian institutions that aim to improve the position of the language in the "near abroad" (Mkhoyan 2017, 693). For example, such institutions are *Russkij Mir Foundation* or *Rossotrudnichestvo*. In recent years, the Russian language has lost its influence and significance, especially in Armenia. Despite both Russia and Armenia having strong historical, social, and economic ties, Russian is the second main language after Armenian (Mkhoyan 2017, 696). From being a mandatory language during the Soviet era, Russian has received a foreign language status in Armenia. Despite all that, Russian's position as a foreign language in schools is still a compulsory one, while in Azerbaijan the compulsory second language is English (Mkhoyan 2017, 697). It can be argued then that the presence of the Russian language in Armenia contributes to close

cooperation and stronger cultural ties, especially when compared to other post-Soviet country such as Azerbaijan. In addition, in Armenia, there is a stronger presence of Russian cultural and educational institutions as opposed to Azerbaijan (Mkhoyan 2017, 701). Thus, given the history of the Russo-Armenian relationship, there has been a positive evolution of the Russian language in Armenia. However, although the Russian government has succeeded in reaffirming the position of the Russian language, it has lost its dominance.

Overall, Russia and Armenia enjoy a large set of cultural similarities. Besides the religious affiliation of the countries with Orthodox Christianity, both Moscow and Yerevan share strong cultural ties that are based on the long-term existence and evolution of the Armenian diaspora in Russia, as well as Armenia's recognition of the Russian language as an important part of its culture and history.

### ***History***

This section of the analysis will continue by examining the historical linkages between the conflicting parties and the mediating countries. First, an analysis of Turkey's and Azerbaijan's historical ties will be provided by focusing on major historical events or decisions taken by the governments of the conflicting parties that can explain more about the relationship between the disputants and mediators in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. To begin with, besides Azerbaijan's and Turkey's consistent cultural policies, both Azerbaijan and Turkey have had a special emotional connection with one another, calling themselves "brethren" or "brothers" since they share a common language, the same religion, and the same ethnocultural values and traditions (Evoyan 2013, 35). It can be then argued that this is one of the reasons why soon after the Soviet Union collapsed, the Turkish-Azerbaijani cooperation

and brotherly relations developed and resulted in an overall prominent and sustainable dynamic. What strengthens the strong relationship between both countries even more is the process of self-identification that happened during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods and affected almost all Azerbaijanis (Souleimanov 2012, 75). The dilemma of Azerbaijanis was to either believe in what was called “Persianness” or in “Turkishness” (Souleimanov 2012, 75). The main difference between these two principles is that the first one revolved around the existence of Persian culture and Shi’i as the main religion for the Azerbaijani population that has been part of Persia for centuries (Souleimanov 2012, 75). Whereas the second one focused on the importance of language and the Anatolian (Ottoman) ethnic origin (Souleimanov 2012, 75). Since the primacy of language prevailed over time, Azerbaijanis began to associate themselves more often with Turkey and embraced their Turkic origins freely. In addition, because of their affiliation with their Turkish brothers and Turkey’s reciprocated support, Azerbaijanis were able to eliminate the Armenians in an armed conflict in 1918 which allowed them to lay the grounds for the newly independent Azerbaijani state (Souleimanov 2012, 80). All in all, Turkey’s and Azerbaijan’s strong historical ties date back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the people of Azerbaijan were faced with the difficult decision of choosing a source of self-identification that would later allow them to establish a stable statehood and close relation to their Turkic allies. Their relationship has persisted with the challenges of time and has proven that the shared culture and history are what makes them united and stronger together.

Furthermore, an analysis of Turkey’s historical relationship with Armenia will be provided in the following section. As a starting point, this research will continue with an analysis of a major historical event that affected both Turkey and Armenia and the efforts of both countries

to reconcile after it. First, the history between these countries dates to the Armenian genocide that happened in 1915 and targeted the Armenian minority in four segments: direct murder of Armenian men in the Ottoman military, killings of Armenian intellectuals and leaders, deportation of the Armenian population, and keeping hostage of the survived Armenians in the Syrian Desert (Theriault 2009, 83). The massacres continued up until the end of World War I in 1918 when Kemal Ataturk led a smaller second phase of the genocide against Armenians (Theriault 2009, 84). There is no doubt that the history of this tragic event has largely hindered the relationship between Turkey and Armenia. Nowadays, diplomatic relations between the two countries have been officially non-existent and from a historical point of view extremely hostile. The air and land borders between both countries have been closed since 1993, which fostered their complicated relationship. Turkey's narrative can be characterized by active campaigning that involves denials of systemic massacres and forced deportation of Armenians committed by the Ottoman Empire. Despite the recognition of the genocide by more than 30 independent governments, Turkey continues to dispute this tragic event and does not recognize it as genocide. Thus, as already mentioned once above, due to the hostile historical relationship, both countries do not enjoy any relations.

In the next part of the analysis, we will look at Russia's historical relationship with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Both countries have a very common history when it comes to Russia and the Soviet Union. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan are post-Soviet states but despite the commonality of being part of the Soviet Union from the 1920s, they have quite different historical ties to Russia. For this, Armenia's historical relationship with Russia will be discussed based on two major events, the Armenian genocide, and the Armenian Velvet Revolution. By focusing on these two events, it will be possible to explain how throughout

history their relationship developed. Regarding the Armenian genocide, it is interesting to note that it was not until 1965 that Moscow allowed Soviet Armenians to mark the anniversary of the massacres and refer to them as genocide (Lehmann 2015, 9). The demonstration that happened in Yerevan's central Lenin Square gathered a big crowd that called for the first time for the recognition of the genocide, which was a taboo subject in the Soviet Union (Lehmann 2015, 9). As a result, Armenians' national concerns and their identity as Soviet citizens were reaffirmed in the cityscape of Yerevan after 1965 as many monuments were built to show not only the new presence of the genocide in Armenia's public space but also to continue Armenia's affiliation with the Soviet Project (Lehmann 2015, 29). As of now, Russia continues to provide support to Armenia in terms of this matter and stands by Armenian genocide recognition. In a speech during a session at the State Duma in Moscow in April 2015, the ex-prime minister of Russia Dmitry Medvedev delivered a message to the Russian society, the international community, and its "brotherly" Armenia that such dramatic events should be remembered, mourned, and recognized so that they are never repeated. Thus, Russia's stance on this important historical burden of Armenia has always been aimed at reaffirming the recognition of the Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire. Although many observers predicted that Russo-Armenian relations would worsen amid the Velvet Revolution and the power handover in Armenia in 2018, Armenia's post-revolution foreign policy constitutes a continuation of the previous one, aimed at enhancing the ties with Russia that will be beneficial to Armenia's modernization and development (Iskandaryan 2019, 2-4).

Lastly, Russia's and Azerbaijan's historical ties seem to be more complicated because, in its historical course, Azerbaijan has always perceived Russia as an invader (Aslanli 2010, 137; Valiyev 2011, 133). Relations between both countries have experienced various ups and

downs throughout the modern history of both countries, from the closing of borders to accusations of supporting separatism (Valiyev 2011, 133). There are several stages in the history of both states that determine Russia's and Azerbaijan's diplomatic relations. One of them is Yeltsin's presidency which turned relations between the two states from neutral and balanced to near hostile because of Russia's continued support to Armenia and Russia's pressure on Azerbaijan to join the Collective Security Treaty Organization (Valiyev 2011, 134). Although Aliyev's presidency contributed to a change in the Azerbaijani public which was biased and held negative stereotypes towards Russia, the outbreak of the Georgia-Russian war presented a critical stage in both countries' relations (Gül 2008, 58; Valiyev 2011, 134). This war generated new challenges and instabilities because Baku viewed Moscow's actions as a violation of international law (Valiyev 2011, 134). Based on this, it can be argued that Azerbaijan is not so dependent on Russia's external powers nor influenced by their historical commonalities. Azerbaijan's and Russia's diplomatic relations are balanced and neutral, aimed at maintaining stability and prosperity in the region.

## **Discussion**

Having analyzed both the cultural and the historical ties between the disputants and the mediators in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it can be concluded that for Hypothesis 1 the results do not explicitly prove that both Russia and Turkey have succeeded as mediators in the conflict. This is because both mediators do not enjoy excellent cultural relationships with the conflicting parties. While Turkey and Azerbaijan are culturally very related, Turkey's cultural ties with Armenia are non-existent due to differences in religion, customs, and language. Similarly, in the case of Russia, its relationship on a cultural level with Armenia is higher than with Azerbaijan, and the reason for this is Russia's cultural similarities with

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Armenia in terms of Christianity and possession and perseverance of the Russian language. However, when comparing Russia and Turkey based on their cultural interactions with the disputants, Turkey appears as a more successful and effective mediator in the conflict because of its almost similar Turkic background and the same religion that it shares with Azerbaijan. In this regard, Armenia and Russia face some differences in their religion as it does not originate from the same Orthodox Branch.

Moving on to Hypothesis 2, despite Turkey's hostile relationship with Armenia, Russia's position as a mediator still cannot be perceived as successful since its cultural ties with Azerbaijan are non-existent. Besides that, Russia's historical and diplomatic relationship with both Armenia and Azerbaijan has proven to be neutral and balanced, and even near hostile at times, based on the analysis above. Therefore, despite its influence as a great power, Russia's role as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be described as satisfactory but nowhere near successful which makes Hypothesis 4 correct.

In terms of Hypothesis 3, based on the analysis, it seems like Turkey has appeared as a more successful mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict than Russia. For instance, despite its hostile cultural and historical relationship with Armenia due to the Armenian genocide in 1915, the Turkish government provides a solid basis as an exceptional ally and "brotherly" country because of its efforts to maintain its ties with Azerbaijan on all levels. Turkey has not only proven to be more culturally related to Azerbaijan than Russia but its history of providing support to Azerbaijan in difficult historical events has manifested into good diplomatic and political relations. In addition, despite its unfriendly and unpleasant relations with Armenia, in recent years, both countries have been suggested and attempted to find a

way back to each other and reconcile (Hill, Krisci, and Moffatt 2015, 137). One example of such an attempt is the meeting in Ankara in 2014, where Turkish bureaucrats and Armenian intellectuals and diplomats gathered to discuss a future opening of the borders and a potential reconciliation (Hill, Krisci, and Moffatt 2015, 137). Thus, it can be argued that Turkey has been a more successful mediator in Nagorno-Karabakh, while Russia has failed in its efforts to mediate the conflict.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, having reviewed the existing literature and explained the main reasoning behind the theoretical framework, this research addresses the importance culture and identity play in negotiation processes in armed conflict and suggests that being culturally related to the mediators, increases the chances for the conflicting parties to agree upon a resolution. By employing a qualitative research method to analyze the causal mechanism that has led to the outcome of preventing violence in Nagorno-Karabakh, this paper has attempted to test the three hypotheses and provide a thorough explanation as to how impactful culture is for conflict resolution, more specifically for providing a solution for the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The analysis illustrated that Russia did not do as well as expected as a mediator in the conflict mainly due to its neutral diplomatic and cultural relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia. As a result, based on the strong cultural, historical, and diplomatic bond between Azerbaijani and Turkish people, Turkey appeared as a more successful mediator in the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh. Finally, this research is of great importance to the field of mediation and peacekeeping as it will provide a general understanding of the role of cultural ties in preventing violent disputes.



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