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Armenia-Turkey border opening: what determines the attitude of Armenians?

Aleksandr Grigoryan^{a,b}, Knar Khachatryan^{ib a} and Vahram Ter-Matevosyan^{ib c}

^aManoogian Simone College of Business and Economics, American University of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia; ^bCERGE-EI, Prague, Czech Republic; ^cCollege of Humanities and Social Sciences, American University of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia

ABSTRACT

In spite of all previous efforts, the land border between Armenia and Turkey remains closed. Being one of the last reminders of the Cold War era, it significantly hinders the development of Armenia and eastern regions of Turkey. However, a closed border is more than a physical obstacle, as it also shapes the worldview and perceptions of the respective societies. Using the recent survey on “Public Opinion Poll: The Ways for Normalization of Armenian-Turkish Relations”, we identify the determinants of respondents’ attitudes towards the opening of the border. Among other results, we find that more awareness of the current Armenian-Turkish relationship increases the likelihood of the approval of the border. However, when selecting those respondents, who are either loyal to or approve the opening of the border, the awareness of the protocols’ content decreases the likelihood of the approval of the opening border. Our findings are supported by the contact theory which we use as a conceptual framework.

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Introduction

Located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Armenia and Turkey are two neighbouring countries that share a 311-km of land border. In December 1991, Turkey recognized Armenia’s independence but refused to establish diplomatic relations. In spite of non-existent diplomatic relations and closed borders, as well as no direct or official trade with Turkey, currently, there is a significant ongoing shadow trade between the two countries, primarily in the form of consumer products imported from Turkey via Georgia (see e.g. Jrbashyan et al. 2005). There are also regular direct flights and buses operating between Yerevan and Istanbul via Georgia, with Armenian citizens obtaining Turkish visas on the spot upon landing.

While there are numerous estimations as to the potential economic and social impacts of the Armenian-Turkish border,¹ opening the border is generally seen as vitally important, not only for the stability of Armenian-Turkish bilateral relations, but also for the region as a whole. For instance, Valigholizadeh, Zaki, and Barani (2013) explore the political and economic consequences of normalization of Turkey–Armenia relationships and

show that expansion of such ties would benefit Ankara, only if the national interests of other regional states are taken into account. This means that in the normalization process Turkey needs to take into consideration the interests of other regional states, in order not to damage its interests and its relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Turkey and Azerbaijan have imposed a blockade on Armenia, and hence the opening of the border is likely to be more vital for latter.² While economic benefits from the opening Armenian-Turkish border are easy to recognize – it is economically beneficial for the societies on both sides of the border, it may come at a higher cost for the Armenian society. For instance, one of the expected economic benefits for Armenia of having open borders is improved access to overseas market and reduced dependency and costs regarding Georgian transit. The immediate benefit for Armenian businesses will be profiting from the access to Turkish port of Trabzon and to several Mediterranean ones.³ Non-economic costs extend to Turkey's resistance towards recognition of the Armenian Genocide and its unconditional support to Azerbaijan with regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In this context, the objective of this study is to explain the determinants of Armenian citizens' attitude toward the border opening. To our knowledge, so far there is only one scholarly study (Ohanyan 2007) which systematically looks at the attitude of Armenians concerning the question on opening Armenian-Turkish borders. In our study we build on the existing evidence and aim at filling the gap in the literature by exploring determinants of public attitude/perception toward opening the borders. To the best of our knowledge, this is a pioneering study that explores the determinants of Armenian citizens' attitude toward the border opening by building on contact theory literature (Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Pettigrew et al. 2011). Another important contribution of this study is that we use an enriched dataset of "Public Opinion Poll: The Ways for Normalization of Armenian-Turkish Relations" survey and estimate an econometric model to explore the attitude determinants. Using the same dataset Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRRC)-Armenia (2015) conducts a similar analysis in the bivariate (cross-tabulation) context. Some of our hypotheses have their counterparts in CRRRC-Armenia (2015). In this study, we take a step further and test these hypotheses in the multivariate (regression) context, in which the relationship is interpreted as causal.

Perception of the population thus may be conditioned by twofold effects, positive: related to economic gains, free movement of people, services, and goods, and negative: conditioned by the Turkey's attitude towards (i) the Armenian Genocide recognition and (ii) the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Our model, estimated by linear (ordinary least square, OLS) and non-linear (probit) methods allows us to identify the partial impacts on economic and non-economic factors on the respondents' attitude towards the opening the border. Though the Armenian government requested the no-pre-conditions approach in the Armenia-Turkey 2009 Protocols, respondents still form expectations about Turkey's policies concerning the issues. Our enriched dataset allows us to construct variables for economic and non-economic factors determining respondents' attitudes towards the relevance of opening the border. Importantly, we will quantify the impacts of the factors and will be able to derive an ultimate statement on which factors (economic and non-economics) are more dominant for the Armenian society.⁴ From the public perspective, we shed light on evidence whether the Armenian Government's intentions to open the border have been consistent with societal preferences.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. We lay down the context in the second section. The third section reviews the literature relevant for research and derives hypotheses. Method and data are described in the fourth section. The estimation strategy and the output are in the fifth section. We summarize the main findings in the conclusion.

Setting the context

Armenia is a relatively small country both in terms of its population size, land mass and economy. In 2016, Armenia's total GDP was 10.8 billion USD compared to 850.5 billion USD for Turkey. Armenia's GNI per capita in PPP in 2010 was around 8,550 USD, almost three times lower than Turkey's (WDI 2014).⁵ Despite closed borders and strained relations, business contacts were established between the two nations in the early phase of Armenia's independence. Over the past decades the volume of trade has steadily increased. According to the National Statistical Service of Armenia, Armenian imports from Turkey in 2015 amounted to 134 million USD, while exports to Turkey were around 2.37 million USD in value. In 2015 Turkey was Armenia's 7th largest import partner and its share of total trade turnover in Armenia was 4.1 percent. Turkish exports include various mechanical and electrical appliances and machinery, as well as textiles, clothes, fruit and vegetables, steel and iron products, furniture. Turkey mainly imports minerals, fuel, oil, iron, steel, machinery, plastic, and plastic products. However, the cross-border trade flows are poorly managed and uncoordinated.

Even prior to the Soviet disintegration, Turkey was able to establish contacts with all three South Caucasian countries. Turkish officials started to visit the region already in 1990. In 1991, such visits became more frequent, which quite often were accompanied by business meetings among Turkish and South Caucasian republics and entrepreneurs, including Armenians. In December 1991 Turkey recognized Armenia's independence, however, it refused to establish diplomatic relations and open the border with Armenia. The Turkish government has initially proposed three preconditions to open the border and establish diplomatic relations, which were related mainly to the historical and political disputes between two nations (that is, Armenia should not pursue international recognition of the Armenian Genocide, Armenia should recognize the existing borders between Armenia and Turkey, Armenian Diaspora should stop "damaging" international reputation of Turkey). In 1990–1991, the conflict in Karabakh was not in its active stage and Turkey paid scant attention to it. It was only in 1993 that the Karabakh factored into calculus when the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh went beyond the borders of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, the territorial unit within Soviet Azerbaijan. Contrary to the established views, the Republic of Turkey did not close the border with Armenia in April 1993 as a result of the military operation in Kelbajar. In fact, the border between Turkey and Armenia was never open in the first place; instead, the border gates were open on demand and only for transferring the humanitarian aid (mainly wheat delivery) to Armenia and for the operation of the weekly Kars-Gyumri train, which had been crossing the Turkish-Armenian border since the days of the Soviet Union. Additionally, between 1993 and 2002, some officials were able to travel through the border gates, which again implies that the border was never legally open and its two crossing points (the rail link between Kars and Gyumri and the Markara/Alican road bridge over the

Araxes River, southwest of Yerevan) were accessible when parties agreed to use them for short-term objectives.

For the past decades, the Armenian and Turkish governments explored a number of initiatives to end the deadlock and establish diplomatic relations. In February-March 1993, after months of negotiations, the parties drafted a short document on the establishment of diplomatic relations. However, the conflict escalation and violent clashes in Karabakh in April ended the process, and Turkey discontinued negotiations with Armenia. After coming to power in November 2002, the Justice and Development Party and its two foreign ministers, Yaşar Yakış and Abdullah Gül, have initially shared positive attitudes towards establishing diplomatic relations with Armenia and opening the border. The Armenian foreign minister Oskanyan had a few meetings with Gül which helped the parties to clarify their positions on different questions (Hakobyan 2012). In April 2005, Turkish PM Erdoğan and Armenian President Kocharyan exchanged letters on the possible ways of normalizing relations which, however, bore no results. The most recent efforts to normalize the relations were initiated in 2008 which led to the signing of Zurich protocols in October 2009 (Philips 2012). Two protocols (“The Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey” and “the Protocol on the Development of Bilateral Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey”) aimed at not only establishing diplomatic relations and opening the border, but also laying a groundwork for reconciliation. By signing the protocols, the parties were hopeful that within a short period of time the legislatures of both countries would ratify the documents and they could start the process. The rapprochement was initiated against the backdrop of Turkey’s new foreign policy activism and was therefore widely praised for contributing to Turkey’s new regional image (Görgülü 2012). However, soon after signing the protocols, it became obvious that the fundamental differences between the parties evident in the months before the Zurich ceremony had not disappeared (Göksel 2012). Turkey has started to reiterate its previous positions on the Karabakh conflict as a precondition to ratify the protocols, which was against the spirit of the negotiated documents. After “the reasonable timeframe”, which was mentioned in the protocols passed, the Armenian president decided to suspend the process of ratification in April 2010. The next turning point was in February 2015 when the president of Armenia decided to revoke the ratification process and called the protocols back from the parliament’s agenda. Armenia’s decision to withdraw from the protocol ratification process entirely in March 2018 was the final step in the ten-year long initiative. During the past ten years, the international community has continuously reminded Turkey about the importance of ratifying the protocols without preconditions, however, no tangible progress was observed. In addition to various efforts to establish diplomatic relations, since the early 2000s the civil societies of both countries have been also engaged in several initiatives (Punsmann 2015). Between 2001 and 2018, a great number of Track Two diplomacy initiatives have been carried out by NGOs with the support of the US government, the EU and the EU countries. The most well-known ones were the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission, Support to Armenia-Turkey Rapprochement, Support to the Armenia-Turkey Normalization Process and the Armenia-Turkey Dialogue Group.

The year 2015, which marked the centennial of the Armenian Genocide, was thought to serve as a turning point for two nations. On 30 August 2014, the Armenian Foreign

Minister was present at President's Erdoğan's inauguration ceremony in Ankara in order to extend to him Serzh Sargsyan's invitation to visit Armenia on April 24 and pay tribute to the victims of the genocide. Instead of giving a clear answer to the invitation, months later the Turkish president himself sent an invitation to Serzh Sargsyan (among other leaders of 102 countries) to be present at Gallipoli commemoration events which marked the 100th anniversary of the victory of the Ottoman army over the Allied powers in the battle of Gallipoli in Çanakkale (HurriyetDailyNews, 15.01. 2015).⁶ In January 2015, the Armenian government, along with the representative of Karabakh authorities and Diaspora institutions, issued the "Pan-Armenian Declaration on the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide".⁷ It elaborated on the past achievements of the Genocide recognition process and laid the ground for future work. Turkey perceived the declaration as yet another blow to bilateral relations. The event organized in Gallipoli on the same day as the Armenian Genocide – April 24 – set a new benchmark in the Turkish denialism. Erdogan's invitation to Sargsyan and rescheduling of Gallipoli events have exacerbated Armenian distrust in Turkey's intentions (Hill, Kirişçi, and Moffatt 2015).

Hence, the fruitless process of "football diplomacy" did not change the status quo, as Turkey keeps its border with Armenia hermetically sealed. Moreover, the situation became more strained and complex as the governments became increasingly distrustful of one another's agendas, intentions and policy preferences. Diplomatic communications between Turkey and Armenia have effectively broken down, with no hopeful perspectives in sight. As a result, the relations between two countries have only deteriorated. The lack of understanding on many key questions has effectively diminished any trace of the minimal trust developed during the "football diplomacy".

Under these circumstances, unofficial contacts between people remain the only option to sustain a minimum of communication between two societies. Citizens of Armenia and Turkey began to travel to one another's countries once the border checkpoints were opened in 1992. Although the Margara/Alican and Akhurik/Akyaka border crossings were open only occasionally, they allowed many Armenians to travel to Turkey and establish initial business contacts in the early 1990s. As a result, since then more Armenians have travelled to and stayed in Turkey than has been the case in the opposite direction. Some Armenians settled in Turkey, mainly in Istanbul, others became labour migrants, while some moved to Turkey with families. However, given the nature of differences between Turkey and Armenia on a range of historical problems, the contacts established by ordinary people were not sufficient to pave the way for official, "track one" diplomacy.

Expectations on international community support could be seen as another important benefit. The European Union (EU) emerged as an important trading partner for the two countries. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) Action Plan for Armenia comprises priority areas one of which is "Enhanced efforts in the field of regional cooperation".⁸ This is monitored by the European Commission. As long as the country meets conditions expressed in the Action Plan it receives financial assistance. In this respect, an open border with Turkey can be seen as an important step towards a cooperative cross-border engagement, which can result in an increased financial assistance in the medium-term. Turkish businesses are also facing extra costs in exporting their product to Armenia. An open border is claimed to be economically a logical step to engage a new level of trade between both countries.

Literature review

Closed borders are considered to be costly for economic transactions as they add barriers to trade and limit the free exchange of goods, labour and skills. In the contemporary global economy, labour, capital and production are decoupled from their territorial basis by forming “borderless economy” (Ohmae 1995). From a geopolitical point of view, identification of geographical dimension allows the assessment of practical policies pursued by governments in the region (Dadandish 2007, 77–78). The modern geopolitics favours international cooperation and peace by emphasizing and concentrating on evolution of the political world as a system surrounded by different scales, i.e. from local to national and to transnational level and a reciprocal spatial action and political process at all levels (national, regional and international) creates and molds an international geopolitical system (Cohen 1994, 17).

Existing research mostly addresses the question of Armenia-Turkey conflict from economic and political perspectives for both countries, and the evidence is mixed with both positive and negative outcomes resulting from open borders (Freinkman, Polyakov, and Revenco 2004; Baghranyan 2012; Göksel 2012; Punsmann 2015; to name a few). To the best of our knowledge, the only scholarly article that tackles the Armenia-Turkey relationship taking into consideration people’s attitude among other factors is of Ohanyan (2007). In her detailed case study of Armenia’s cross-border engagement with Turkey, Ohanyan (2007) investigates the roles of the state, the market and civil society in Armenia as they relate to the development of a cross-border region with Turkey using constant comparative method. The author explores propensity towards Turkish-Armenian cross-border engagement from the Armenian side through two dimensions: attitudes/willingness of engagement and capacities of cross-border engagement by the public and private sectors and civil society inside Armenia. Ohanyan argues that the development of cross-border engagement of is a unique instrument for developing countries to globalize their economies. This leads to market size expansion by making the given countries attractive to transnational companies.

In our study we focus primarily on exploring determinants of Armenian citizens’ attitude toward the border opening. We build on contact theory literature (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Pettigrew et al. 2011) that stipulates that cross-border interaction, communication and exchange improve citizen relations across borders. In his study Pettigrew (1998) argues that both individual differences and societal norms shape intergroup contact effects. He advances a longitudinal reformulation of the intergroup contact hypothesis and provides direction for a reformulation of Allport’s (1954) hypothesis. The author concludes that societies suffering intergroup conflict both restrict and undercut intergroup contact. Contact theory has been used in a number of conflict resolution and peacemaking studies (for instance, Kelman 2005; Bekerman 2007). Focusing on the Palestinian–Israeli case, Bekerman (2007) reviews the reified concepts of self and identity, the history of schooling and its practices, and the coming into being of the political organization of nation-state through the lenses of intergroup contact theory. In that context the author suggests alternative educational options that can strengthen the potential of intergroup encounters to support co-existence and reconciliation efforts. Again on the Israeli–Palestinian case Kelman (2005) discusses the ways in which interactive problem solving (a form of unofficial diplomacy) attempts to deal with the dilemma of building trust among

enemies. The author argues that conflict parties cannot enter into a peace process without some degree of mutual trust, but they cannot build trust without entering into a peace process. The study provides five concepts that can be useful in international conflict resolution. Those concepts are built on different forms of interpersonal and intergroup interactions.

Hypotheses

According to contact theory, societies may differ in their cultures, norms and religion, but they can learn to live with these differences, and the intergroup prejudice is reduced. Such examples include the Dutch-Belgian-German Euro-region Meuse-Rhin (Kepka and Murphy 2002), the Upper Rhine Valley (Eder and Sandtner 2002) and the Franco-Spanish border region (Häkli 2002). Cooperation experiences in these regions suggest that cross-border interaction improves citizen relations across borders. The Dutch-German border region is a particular case in the literature to show good neighbourly relations between Germany, the wartime aggressor, and the Netherlands. The Dutch-German cross-border cooperation “has not only brought economic development to the region but has gone some way to ‘deepen’ integration between the states, thereby breaking down the distrust between the two nations” (Grix and Knowles 2002, 155). Based on the above theoretical consideration, we claim that *stronger awareness of the current Armenian-Turkish relationship among Armenians increases the likelihood of the approval of the opening the border*. Awareness, on the other hand, does not affect the approval of the opening the border without preconditions.

Next, in this context we look at the awareness of protocols. If better awareness increases the likelihood of the approval, which is the objective of the government, then corresponding public policies should be designed and implemented aimed at increasing awareness. What if one of the awareness measures, for instance awareness of protocols, decreases the probability of the approval of the opening the border? This will imply that information in protocols are not aligned with preferences of the public and bring distortions to the public opinion on the approval of the opening the border. Thus, we expect that *awareness of protocols affects neither the approval of the opening the border, nor awareness of the opening the border without preconditions*.

In existing research on what makes people connect across national borders and what factors hinder friendly relations cross-border contacts between border populations are presented as an avenue towards improved perceptions and good neighbourly relations (Henrikson 2000; Newman 2003). This evidence suggests that cross-border interaction improves citizen relations across borders. This is in line with the contact theory literature (Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Pettigrew et al. 2011) and enables us to claim that *Armenians who have been in Turkey are more likely to approve the opening of the border*. Also, we expect that *the use of Turkish products increases the likelihood of approval of the opening the border*.

Existing research provides evidence of restricted intergroup contact in societies that suffer intergroup conflict (Pettigrew 1998). This allows us to formulate the following claim: *Armenians with an ancestor who suffered in the Armenian Genocide are less likely to approve the opening of the border*. If the hypothesis will not be rejected, the suggested interpretation is that approval of the opening the border is perceived to be at

the expense of the Genocide recognition, otherwise, the descendants of those who suffered in the Genocide would not be particularly sensitive to the approval.

The effects of education on tolerance, namely political tolerance, are strong (Bobo and Licari 1989; Golebiowska 1995). We believe that more education leads toward an inclination to be open to other societies, different values, and norms, to exchange and interact. In our context, we expect that *Armenians with higher level of education are more likely to approve the opening of the border in general and without preconditions (for those who are not against the opening the border)*. In the long run, if education level of the Armenians will be significantly higher, the approval rate for the opening the border will be affected respectively.

Methodology

Our data is drawn from the database “Public Opinion Poll: The Ways for Normalization of Armenian-Turkish Relations”, conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRCC) – Armenia in 13–25 December 2014. The survey, representative for the population of Armenia, was conducted among 1164 households.⁹ The questionnaire included 5 sections, each of them targeting a distinct aspect of Armenian-Turkish relations: (i) overall awareness of Armenian-Turkish relations, (ii) regulation of Armenian-Turkish relations, (iii) attitudes towards Turkey, (iv) recognition of the Armenian Genocide and commemoration behaviour, (v) Armenia-Turkey rapprochement.

The dataset addresses a large set of issues in connection with the normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations. In the last decade, two other datasets have been collected addressing issues regarding the Armenian-Turkish relationship: Armenian Center for National and International Studies (ACNIS) in 2005¹⁰ and Caucasus Barometer Dataset (2009–2013). The analytical report by ACNIS, entitled “The Armenian Genocide: 90 Years and Waiting,” involves polling questions that are related only to the Armenian Genocide. The Caucasus Barometer (CB) is an annual survey with a more general dataset and involves several socio-economic dimensions for the three South Caucasian countries. In particular, it involves a limited number of questions for Armenians concerning the Armenia-Turkey relationship.

We conduct a formal regression analysis, in order to identify the impact of selected variables on the approval of the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border. We construct two dependent variables, and for each variable, we estimate linear (ordinary least squares) and non-linear (probit) regression models. In order to describe the extent of co-movement between the variables we study we run a correlation analysis (Appendix 1).

In one case the dependent variable is constructed from the question “To what extent do you approve of opening the border between Armenia and Turkey?” There are 5 possible validated answers for the question; 1 = “Absolutely disapprove”, 2 = “Rather disapprove”, 3 = “Neither approve nor disapprove”, 4 = “Rather approve”, 5 = “Approve”. For the linear regression, we use the ordinal variable with values 1, ..., 5. For the non-linear (probit) model, we create a dummy variable, which is 1, if a respondent either “Rather approves”, or “Approves”, otherwise the variables takes value zero.

The second dependent variable utilizes the question “To what extent do you approve of opening the Armenian-Turkish border without any preconditions?” Only respondents, who answer the previous question “Neither approve nor disapprove”, “Rather approve”

or “Approve”, are asked the second question. For the latter, the range of possible answers are the same, from 1 = “Absolutely disapprove” to 5 = “Approve”. We construct the variables for the linear and non-linear models following the methodology applied in the first case. The filtering rule is important – *those who disapprove the opening of the border, are not eligible to the second question*. In fact, the nested structure of the questions excludes the possibility that someone disapproving the opening of the border without precondition also disapproves the opening of the border in general.

The second question is important in the context of the Zurich protocols discussed in Section 1. Signing the protocols without preconditions particularly implied that normalization of the bilateral relations and the opening of the border could not be interrelated to the Armenians’ claim on the Genocide recognition by Turkey. The protocols, if eventually ratified by the countries’ parliaments and approved by the presidents, would also exclude that Turkey can claim from Armenia to return several districts, surrounding Nagorno Karabakh to Azerbaijan, as a precondition to open the border. We will see that there are certain differences between approval of the opening the border and approval of the opening the border without preconditions, when exploring the determinants of and their impacts on these measures.

Finally, we run regression models for respondents who are not aware of the protocols and for respondents who are at least familiar with the protocols. While the awareness of the protocols enters the above regression models as a distinct variable, it is interesting to explore whether the approval of the opening the border (without precondition) is explained by the same set of variables differently, when shifting from respondents who do not know anything about the protocols to the respondents who have at least minimum knowledge.

Along with awareness about current Armenia-Turkey relationship and awareness on the protocol, our independent variables include experience in Turkey, use of Turkish products, whether or not respondents have ancestors who suffered in Genocide, whether a respondent lives in boarder-line regions with Turkey, education, gender, family income, age, household size, the main source of information on the Armenian-Turkish relationship, whether the respondent trusts opinion of scholars in Armenia and their acquaintances.

Data description

While there are 51 questions, from which one can construct many more variables, we restrict our attention to a subset of variables relevant for our regression model. We report descriptive statistics for these variables in [Table 1](#).

The large difference in the number of observations between Approval and Approval without preconditions (and corresponding dummies) is due to the selection rule for the respondents in the second question. *Only respondents who approved the opening of the border have been asked the question on the approval without preconditions*. Another, more general source of variation in number of observations is that valid responses slightly differ from one variable to another. For trust measures (the last two rows in [Table 1](#)), we report high rates of non-valid responses, around 12 percent.

It is interesting to observe the mean difference between Awareness of the current Armenian-Turkish relationship and Awareness of the protocols. The two variables have the

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for selected variables.

Variable name	Number of observations	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Approval	1143	3.116	1.404	1	5
Approval (dummy variable)	1143	0.516	0.500	0	1
Approval without precondition	729	3.336	1.417	1	5
Approval without precondition (dummy)	729	0.534	0.499	0	1
Awareness of current Arm-Turk relationship	1161	1.497	0.784	0	3
Protocol awareness	1106	0.514	0.702	0	3
Experience in Turkey	1164	0.061	0.239	0	1
Use Turkish products	1149	0.802	0.399	0	1
Ancestor suffered in Genocide	1140	0.540	0.499	0	1
Marz bordered with Turkey	1164	0.269	0.444	0	1
Education	1163	2.666	0.979	1	4
Female	1164	1.658	0.475	1	2
Family income	1151	2.378	0.982	1	5
Age group	1164	2.626	1.120	1	4
Household size	1164	2.894	1.350	1	8
Information from TV	1162	2.664	0.595	1	3
Trust opinion of scientists in Armenia	1032	3.903	1.157	1	5
Trust opinion of relatives	1042	3.699	1.205	1	5

same scale, and possible answers to assigned values are compatible, from 0 = “Absolutely not aware” to 3 = “Well aware”.¹¹ The mean of the awareness of the current relationship is almost three times as high, as that of the awareness of the protocols, while the standard deviation is very close. The formal paired mean test rejects the hypothesis that the two means are equal. Only 6 percent of respondents have been in Turkey, while 80 percent use Turkish products. More than half of respondents (54 percent) have at least one ancestor who suffered during the Genocide. Around 27 percent of respondents live in provinces (marzes) bordering Turkey. These four variables, together with individual and household characteristics are exogenous by construction and will have an important role in capturing the portion of variation in the dependent variables, which is perception driven.

Correlation analysis

We plot correlation table in Appendix 1. *P*-values are reported with correlation coefficients, reflecting the precision of the correlation magnitude. The correlation coefficients in the first column are of primary interest. We observe significant association (at most 5 percent significance level) between Approval of the opening the border with Awareness of current relationship (correlation coefficient, ρ , is 0.11), Experience in Turkey ($\rho = 0.06$), Using Turkish product ($\rho = 0.15$), Education ($\rho = 0.07$), Information from TV ($\rho = 0.08$), Trust opinion of scientists in Armenia ($\rho = 0.07$) and Trust opinion of relatives ($\rho = -0.08$). The second column provides correlation between Approval of the opening of the border without preconditions (Approval WP), selecting those respondents who are not against the opening the border. Generally, there is strong correlation between the two Approval indicators ($\rho = 0.2$), suggesting that those who approve the opening of the border strongly, are more likely to approve the opening without preconditions too. While the possible values of the former variable are limited to 3, 4 and 5, the values for the latter variables (Approval WP) are in the range 1, ... ,5. There are only two variables

significantly correlated with the variable Approval without preconditions; these are Education ($\rho = 0.12$) and Trust opinion of scholars in Armenia (0.13).

Overall, our correlation analysis suggests that selected variables have the potential to explain approval of the opening of the border both status based (such as individual and household characteristics) and perception based. Approval of the opening border without preconditions, on the other hand, does not pattern strong correlation with variables in the same list.

Estimation strategy and results

The major contribution of our paper is to retrieve the net impact of identified characteristics and test hypotheses formally. CRRC-Armenia (2015) conducts a similar analysis in the bivariate (cross-tabulation) context. Some of our hypotheses have their counterparts in CRRC-Armenia's (2015), stated as key findings. With the regression analysis, we take a step further and explore whether two-variable association survives in the context of multivariate analysis, in which the relationship is interpreted as causal.

We have two dependent variables, (i) approval of the opening of the border and (ii) approval of the opening of the border without preconditions. For each dependent variable, we estimate linear (ordinary least squares) and non-linear (probit) models.

The linear model takes the following form:

$$Y_i = a_0 + a_1X_{1,i} + \dots + a_kX_{k,i} + \varepsilon_i,$$

where Y_i is the response on the Approval of the opening the border from the i -th respondent, X_1, \dots, X_k is the list of explanatory variables and ε_i is the error term.

In the probit model, we estimate the likelihood of at least the “weak form” of Approval, “Neither approve nor disapprove”, “Rather approve” or “Approve”. For the second outcome variable, Approval of the opening the border without precondition, we select only those respondents, who did not reject approval. While running two alternative models with the same list of covariates, we want to verify to what extent the output remains robust to the different model structures. We elaborate on the technical details in Appendix 2.

Table 2 reports regression results. The first two columns are the regression output for the dependent variable *Approval of the opening the border*. Our finding is that the awareness of the current Armenian-Turkish relationship shapes respondents' attitude towards the approval of the opening the border. A higher awareness of the current Armenian-Turkish relationship increases the likelihood of the approval of the border. Linear and non-linear models yield almost identical results. One stage higher awareness increases the approval by around 25 percent which is a significantly large impact.

Controlling for awareness of current Armenian-Turkish relationship and the remaining variables, the awareness of the protocols decreases the likelihood of the approval of the border. This is one of the key findings of the paper as it sheds light on the relevance of the protocols in the context of the opening the Armenian-Turkish border. Correlation analysis indicated no relationship between protocols' awareness and the approval of the opening the border. When estimating the model without awareness of current Armenian-Turkish relationship (otherwise the same), the coefficient magnitude of the protocols' awareness is about -0.10 , close to 10 percent significance level. Omitting awareness of the

Table 2. Regression results.

Variables	Approval of the opening the border		Approval of the opening the border without preconditions			
	OLS	Probit	OLS	Probit	No awareness of protocols	Awareness of protocols
Awareness of current Arm-Turk relationship	0.273*** (0.0711)	0.245*** (0.0662)	0.00977 (0.0965)	0.0337 (0.0870)	0.0575 (0.116)	-0.0257 (0.132)
Protocol awareness	-0.180*** (0.0678)	-0.169*** (0.0651)	-0.124* (0.0991)	-0.154* (0.0884)		
Experience in Turkey	0.501*** (0.188)	0.468** (0.192)	-0.0807 (0.268)	-0.0442 (0.218)	-0.379 (0.377)	-0.0169 (0.273)
Use Turkish products	0.529*** (0.134)	0.427*** (0.121)	-0.0322 (0.174)	-0.0472 (0.164)	0.116 (0.233)	-0.158 (0.227)
Ancestor suffered in Genocide	-0.258*** (0.0961)	-0.154* (0.0894)	0.0363 (0.119)	0.0180 (0.111)	-0.228 (0.155)	0.293* (0.160)
Marz bordered with Turkey	0.0803 (0.111)	0.0320 (0.101)	0.184 (0.131)	0.133 (0.125)	0.297* (0.167)	-0.0979 (0.182)
Education	0.0692 (0.0525)	0.0128 (0.0481)	0.242*** (0.0662)	0.212*** (0.0612)	0.201** (0.0846)	0.189** (0.0870)
Female	-0.121 (0.101)	-0.0587 (0.0927)	-0.228* (0.127)	-0.223* (0.118)	-0.0371 (0.166)	-0.371** (0.164)
Family income	-0.00202 (0.0506)	0.00966 (0.0479)	-0.0746 (0.0652)	-0.0790 (0.0584)	-0.125 (0.0767)	-0.0853 (0.0889)
Age	0.0636 (0.0460)	0.0621 (0.0431)	0.130** (0.0589)	0.0693 (0.0539)	0.0331 (0.0743)	0.00755 (0.0782)
Household Size (number of adults)	0.0250 (0.0364)	0.0292 (0.0343)	0.104** (0.0479)	0.0764* (0.0439)	0.108* (0.0570)	0.0311 (0.0671)
Info_TV	-0.00516 (0.0982)	0.117 (0.0909)	-0.00998 (0.127)	0.105 (0.127)	0.156 (0.167)	0.0833 (0.211)
Trust opinion of scientists in Armenia	0.116*** (0.0440)	0.0701 (0.0429)	0.204*** (0.0582)	0.182*** (0.0544)	0.180** (0.0727)	0.185** (0.0838)
Trust opinion of relatives	-0.186*** (0.0407)	-0.122*** (0.0396)	-0.144*** (0.0542)	-0.103** (0.0503)	-0.0579 (0.0661)	-0.168** (0.0788)
Constant	2.432*** (0.394)	-0.951*** (0.367)	2.357*** (0.531)	-0.939* (0.503)	-1.486** (0.654)	-0.0871 (0.852)
Observations	873	873	556	556	309	268
R-squared	0.080		0.069			

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

current relationship introduces an upward bias in both correlations between the two awareness measures and between awareness of current relationship and the outcome variable. Now, for a given level of awareness about the current relationship, an increasing awareness of protocols for a typical Armenian reduces the intention to approve the opening the border (columns 1 and 2, Table 2). That is, the content of the protocols did not contribute the approval of the opening the border. Interestingly, awareness of protocols is significant at 10 percent level in the probit model of the approval of the opening the border without preconditions (column 4 in Table 2), suggesting that even for those who are particularly positive towards opening the border, awareness of the protocols distort the intention to approve by 12–15 percent, depending on the model specification.

Our data confirms that (i) Armenians who have been in Turkey are more likely to approve the opening of the border, (ii) The use of Turkish products increases the likelihood of approval of the opening the border and (iii) Armenians with an ancestor who suffered in the Genocide are less likely to approve the opening of the border. Though the percentage of Armenians who happened to be in Turkey is small (6 percent), the factor may shape a significant fraction of the approval. There is a strong policy implication

for both countries: if Armenian and Turkish governments agree to open the border and they need to get stronger approval among Armenians for this, policies towards facilitating travels and business trips can help.

We observe a particularly high magnitude of the coefficient for the Use of Turkish product as a means of cross-border interaction. This level of loyalty towards Turkey and perhaps Turkish society can however be compromised by more attractiveness (price competitive) of Turkish product. The economic perspective of the opening the border is primarily captured by this variable, as we do not have any other covariate in that context.¹²

The next finding is that education has no impact on the approval of the opening the border, but it has on the approval without preconditions. The third and fourth columns in Table 2 report regression results for all respondents (who approved the opening the border), while in the last two columns we estimate the same model for those who are not aware of protocols (5th column) and for those who are aware (6th column). In all four cases, education has a positive impact on the opening of the border without preconditions.

Furthermore, we test whether there is any association between the origin/provenance of the information and the attitude. We check whether (i) *Armenians, who trust opinion of scholars more (related to the Armenian-Turkish relations), are more eager to approve the opening of the border.* Policy implication is to invest more in studies on the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border. Also, we test whether *Armenians who trust opinions of acquaintances (related to Armenian-Turkish relationship), are less likely to approve the opening of the border.* Our results show that Armenians who trust opinion of experts and scholars (related to the Armenian-Turkish relationship), are more eager to approve the opening of the border. Investing more in studies on the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border can change Armenians' attitude towards the issue. Contrary to this, Armenians trusting opinions of their acquaintances more, are less likely to approve the opening of the border. Interestingly enough, scientific and informal information sources affect the attitude towards the opening the border oppositely.

Finally, we look at the spatial factor to test whether the attitude varies when citizens originate from borderline marzes. Aggregation of regions is very high (there are only 10 marzes in the country) and it limits the precision of the hypothesis test. We find that that the spatial dimension of households' settlement has no role in shaping attitudes towards opening the border. In almost all specification, households' location does not condition the approval of the opening the border. There is 10 percent significance in the model "approval without preconditions", for those who are not aware of protocols (5th column). But once respondents learn about the protocols, spatial proximity to Turkey plays no role in shaping approval without preconditions.

Conclusion

Over many years Armenia-Turkey conflict has been in the centre of attention of international organizations, respective countries' governments, policymakers and scholars. Existing evidence reveals geopolitical, economics, and social benefits as well as anticipated costs the opening of the closed border would entail.

In this paper, we study the determinants of Armenian's attitudes related to opening the Armenian-Turkish border by using cross-section data from 2015 collected by CRRC-Armenia. We explore the determinants through the lenses of intergroup contact

theory. It is stipulated in the contact theory literature (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Pettigrew et al. 2011) that information can have a beneficial influence on people's perceptions. Building on the existing evidence that intergroup interactions, cross-border communication and exchange enhance regional cooperation (Eder and Sandtner 2002; Häkli 2002; Kepka and Murphy 2002) and conflict resolution (Kelman 2005; Bekerman 2007) this study explores a number of dimensions related to Armenian's attitude to opening the border. In particular, we look at the general awareness, awareness about Protocols, visits to Turkey and consumption of Turkish products, level of education and trust to information sources.

Our finding is that, among Armenians, better awareness of the current Armenian-Turkish relationship increases the chance of the approval of the border. The estimated impact is significantly large. Nevertheless, when controlling for the knowledge of current Armenian-Turkish relationship, the awareness of the protocols' content decreases the likelihood of the approval of the opening border. This is one of the central findings of the paper and reveals the relevance of the protocols in the context of the border opening. Interestingly, awareness of protocols is significant at the margin in explaining the approval of the opening the border without preconditions, suggesting that even for those who are rather positive on the opening of the border, protocols' awareness deprives intentions to approve the opening.

Armenians who consume Turkish products are more likely to approve the opening of the border. In our model, this is the variable capturing the economic incentive for the opening the border. Education has no influence on the approval of the opening the border, but it has a positive impact on the approval without preconditions. Armenians who trust scholars' opinion (related to the Armenian-Turkish relationship), are more eager to approve the opening of the border. Policy lesson is that investing in Armenian-Turkish relationship studies can be instrumental in shaping views on the opening of the border. We also find that households' location does not matter for the attitude towards the opening of the border.

This research draws implications for the Armenian government, policymakers and other involved parties in this conflict resolution. The central finding, which is *protocols generally did not contribute to the approval of the opening the border*, suggests that Armenian policy makers should make more efforts to embed societal preferences in future agreements, aimed at normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relationship.

Future research in this direction can be to assess the impact size of the opening the border on the Armenian economy and security.¹³ In our model, approval of the opening the border is a dependent variable and reflects respondents' perceptions on the "net benefit" from the opening the border. Nevertheless, we do not have explanatory variables, which capture respondents' perceptions on economic benefits and security concerns. Economic benefit is merely captured by the indicator variable on the use of the Turkish products entering the model as an explanatory variable.

Notes

1. According to Polyakov (2001), opening the Armenia-Turkey and Armenia-Azerbaijan borders would increase Armenian exports by 200 percent and GDP by 30 percent. Another paper developed by AEPLAC experts suggests much less impact: 17.7 percent increase in exports and 2.7 percent – in GDP (see Jrbashyan et al. 2005).

2. Freinkman, Polyakov, and Revenco (2004) study Armenia's trade performance in 1995–2002 in the context of closed borders. Their main finding is that Armenia has been lagging in its export development relative to most CIS countries, and that this under-performance should be primarily attributed to the effect of closed borders with its neighbours. According to De Waal (2010), in case the border with Turkey will open, import for Armenian citizens will be cheaper and the volume will increase by 13 percent in the next 5 years. Transportation costs will be cut by 20 percent, and Armenia will benefit from sharing a border with a country, which is in the customs union with the European Union in non-agricultural products.
3. Mediterranean seaports are of greater interest for Armenia than those of the Black Sea. The Black Sea ports do not allow the use of ocean container carriers. Thus, the cost of freight forwarding from Poti to Marseille is 700–800 USD per container, and from Beirut to Marseille is 100 USD, since in the latter case ocean ships are used, that have a large capacity and therefore a low cargo transportation cost price (CSERA 2009, 67).
4. We generalize the result for the society as the sample is countrywide representative.
5. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/18237>
6. “Turkey invites Armenian president to 100th anniversary of Gallipoli War”; <http://goo.gl/ctvHwk>
7. “Pan-Armenian Declaration on the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide”, <http://goo.gl/hm3oj4>
8. European Commission (2011, 8).
9. The sampling method is the multistage cluster sampling with preliminary stratification by urban/rural areas and by administrative regions (marz). The details on sampling methodology and the demographics of the data can be found in Annex 2, CRRC-Armenia (2015).
10. Armenian Center for National and International Studies (ACNIS), has conducted Public Opinion Poll among 1900 citizens from Yerevan and all Armenia about the Armenian Genocide. Summary statistics can be found in <http://acnis.am/old/pr/genocide/Socio13eng.pdf>.
11. For the question “How aware are you of the current Armenian-Turkish relations?”, possible answers are 0 = “Absolutely unaware”, 1 = “Not very aware”, 2 = “Fairly aware” and 3 = “Well aware”. For the question “You are probably aware of the fact that in 2009 Armenia and Turkey signed the Armenian-Turkish protocols. How well are you aware of the content of these protocols?”, the possible answers 0 = “I am not aware of the content at all”, 1 = “I have learnt of the content from other”, 2 = “I have read parts of the protocols” and 3 = “I have read all the protocols”.
12. We abstained from including a variable that ties respondents' perceptions with the expected economic benefits if the border will be opened. The selected variable “Use Turkish product” is action based, and reflects revealed preferences.
13. A general perception is that opening the border will bring economic benefits, but may harm security of Armenia so that the two factors lack in complementarity.

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ORCID

Knar Khachatryan  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0910-9224>

Vahram Ter-Matevosyan  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2212-0391>

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Appendix 1. Correlation table.

	Approval	Approval WP	Awareness of current rel.	Protocol awareness	Experience in Turkey	Use Turkish products	Ancestor suffered in Genocide	Marz bordered with Turkey	Education	Female	Family income	Age group	Household size	Info from TV	Trust opinion of scholars	Trust opinion of acquaintances
Approval	1															
Approval WP	0.2088	1														
Awareness of current rel.	0.1146	0.0172	1													
Protocol awareness	-0.0288	-0.0211	0.3412	1												
Experience in Turkey	0.0594	-0.0043	0.0492	0.1362	1											
Use Turkish products	0.1465	0.0518	0.0229	-0.0107	0.0264	1										
Ancestor suffered in Genocide	-0.0503	0.0535	0.0762	0.0832	-0.0207	0.0084	1									
Marz bordered with Turkey	0.0323	0.0592	0.1239	-0.0335	-0.0169	0.0114	0.1651	1								
Education	0.0675	0.1243	0.1735	0.1703	0.0835	0.1514	0.0391	-0.0866	1							
Female	-0.032	-0.0366	-0.1013	-0.14	-0.013	0.0341	-0.0081	-0.0693	0.0504	1						
Family income	0.037	-0.0368	0.1017	0.1106	0.0482	0.1106	-0.0227	0.0288	0.2296	-0.0329	1					
Age group	0.0242	0.0592	0.0911	0.0416	0.0466	-0.1903	0.073	-0.0156	-0.1739	-0.0028	-0.2583	1				
Household size	-0.0072	0.0593	0.0046	-0.0507	-0.0466	0.1159	0.0157	0.0863	-0.0279	-0.0484	0.2104	-0.2293	1			
Info from TV	0.0817	0.0601	0.4077	0.1122	0.0054	0.0633	0.0502	0.1174	0.0577	0.0267	0.0976	0.0804	0.0703	1		
Trust opinion of scholars	0.0733	0.1268	0.1605	0.0471	0.0065	0.0776	0.0999	0.1143	0.0024	0.0391	0.0747	0.0453	0.0235	0.2106	1	
Trust opinions of acquaintances	-0.0852	-0.0307	0.144	0.074	0.0375	0.0342	0.0682	0.0688	-0.0214	-0.0329	0.0797	0.0938	0.0264	0.1168	0.417	1
	0.0064	0.4335	0	0.0199	0.227	0.2732	0.029	0.0264	0.4896	0.2886	0.0105	0.0024	0.395	0.0002	0	

Appendix 2. Probit model.

For the probit model, the outcome (dummy) variable is constructed as follows:

$$Y_i^* = 0, \text{ if Approval} = 1, 2; Y_i^* = 1, \text{ if Approval} > 2.$$

The probit model then takes the form of:

$$Prob(Y_i^* = 1) = F(a_0 + a_1X_{1,i} + \dots + a_kX_{k,i}),$$

where $F(\cdot)$ is the cumulative normal distribution function. For the second outcome variable, Approval of the opening the border without precondition, linear and non-linear models are the following:

$$A_i|(Y_i^* = 1) = a_0 + a_1X_{1,i} + \dots + a_kX_{k,i} + \varepsilon_i,$$

$$Prob(A_i^* = 1|Y_i^* = 1) = F(a_0 + a_1X_{1,i} + \dots + a_kX_{k,i}),$$

where the term after “|” is the condition that only respondents who did not reject approval are selected.

For estimation, we use the statistical software STATA. In all models, errors are robust to heteroscedasticity.