

Current State of Activism in Armenia

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Abstract

Looking at past events in Armenia when the people came together with a specific demand for change, this paper will try to conclude what the state of activism is currently in Armenia (how active the people are and their willingness to volunteer their time [sometimes more] for a specific cause). We look at three events which are: I) Electric Yerevan, II) Daredevils of Sassoun, III) Military Deferment Law. By implementing the research conducted by other scholars, along with our survey and a close study of the events, we can make an assumption as of how active the people are. The survey consists 85 students from the American University of Armenia with a range of answers regarding how each movement affected them and how they reacted to each. In short, the outcome was promising. We can see that there is a slight increase in the moral of the people from one activism to the next, where those who for their entire life thought participating would be a waste of time, started to take part in the protest themselves thus improving the stance of activism amongst the people.

Introduction

It comes from nature that whenever a creature feels threatened, they will react in any way possible in order to abolish the threat. It is not necessary for it to be a major threat, a mild discomfort will easily have the same outcome. When it is on a national level, when the people of the nation feel that their own government has made a decision which either undermines their whole cultural background, or believe that the decisions being made are not in the best interest of the people, then they will react. Keeping this in mind we should also clarify that it is the duty of every citizen in any country to try and help better the place they live. However when the very same citizens who vote and partake in gatherings and volunteer work feel as if their voices are not being heard, is when they take the extra step to make their voices heard. This is what is known as social activism.

Social activism may come in many forms and sizes however the main concept still remains, that it is what the people do aside from the norms in order to try and bring about change. Activism ranges from being something simple as making posters, to tweeting (which will have a snowball effect), all the way to marching down the streets in a protest or even a revolution.

What motivates the people to protest varies depending on the situation which they face and how they perceive the future to be. Some believe that a peaceful way is the only way to go whilst there are others who believe that suffering the consequences of physical violence is the best way in order to achieve what they want; it is the only way to bring about true change.

In order for any type of activism to be a successful one, the people must be united, work together for a specific purpose, and most importantly be motivated throughout their protest. Sounds simple however more often than not those participating will eventually stop

protesting simply due to the fact that lost hope and were convinced that their actions would be futile.

These all vary from country to country, it is all dependant on the current situation of the people and the mentality of the community. This paper will mainly focus on Armenia, and how the people view act of social activism, whether they believe that it is possible to make a change, how much the people believe in their own government, and to what extent are the people willing to go in order to achieve their goals.

In order to understand the state of activism in Armenia, we will first look at past events, the background of them and how they turned out. Later we will conduct a survey asking the people to state in their opinions whether or not any were successful or not, to elaborate their answers and just overall their thoughts about them. Then we will analyze the answers and include it along with the analysis of the events in order to have an idea of what the people think about activism in Armenia.

Literature Review

Activism is the act of bringing about political or societal change. Activism comes in many different forms, however they all tend to have a common theme, a sense of community. Authors such as Duncan, Żukowski and Kosicki, Kirshner, and Dornschneider focus on the different aspects of activism such as the mentality behind the students who participate and those who do so, on an individual and on a collective level. Achieving their desired goal is the aim of the activists, however the bigger outcome is the societal changes which come after their acts and how the mentality change also affects future activists.

Sense of Connectivity

Throughout history countless revolutions and acts of activism have occurred, enough to be studied to find the connections which the activists have, what drives them to do so, the different methods taken in order to achieve their goals, which ones worked best and what they achieved. In their book, “Poles' Self-Identifications and Their Influence on Social Activism” (pg. 45-64), Tomasz Żukowski and Piotr Kosicki (2009) study the correlation between those who have a strong bond with their nation (Poland), and those who do not. They came to the conclusion that national identity and religion intertwined. In their surveys, they have found out that from the older generation of Polish adults (65 years and above), the vast majority identify strongly with their nation while also having a strong bond with the Church, the others also identify with their nation however less with the religion. Things appear to be different, however, when it comes to the younger generation of Poles. Almost half of the youth who took part in the survey (46%) stated that their bond with both the nation and the church are far weaker, even non existence for some. In order to be more certain of their correlation, Tomasz Żukowski and Piotr Kosicki studied the connection of the people with their nation and their workplace, instead of the church. With the new generation this proved to be of more use as the younger generations of Polish adults tend to associate their nation with their well-being. Those who proved to have the strongest bond with their nations were business owners, entrepreneurs and farmers/farm owners. Next were the regular employees who, although showed less interest, still had a strong correlation. The majority of the people started basing their national bond with their education, health and economy, along with their workplace environment. These studies have proven that in order to encourage activism within the country, the people need to have an organization which they identify with; whether it be religion or workplace, if the people feel a sense of togetherness in anything regarding the country, then they will be more prone to fight for it.

Collective vs. Individual

In order to have a better understanding of why some people, students in particular, tend to be active while others do not, Lauren E. Duncan studies the psychology of the students in order to find out. Her main focus is to find out how to encourage collective activism, and to do so she tries to tackle this from two different perspectives; the individual differences and the collective. She noted that there has been some research done on the individual level before her by Haan & Smith 'Block' (1973) and how they found out that those who come from a middle/upper-middle class with a higher level of cognitive flexibility tend to be more active in student movements. Lauren argues that these findings, although relevant, did not seem to answer the right questions, they did not explain why these differences in personality characteristics are associated with collective activism.

The second study she claims to have been insufficient was conducted by Guerin and Miller (1980). This study focuses on the collective and how the individual puts the needs of the group ahead of the individual; It is when everyone tends to reject rationalization of relative positioning and embrace a collective solution to a group problem. Lauren stated that this paper did not test the association between group consciousness and collective action, while ignoring the 'large individual differences' between the personalities and life experiences of members of the group. These are the main factors, she claims, which can tell us why some people develop group consciousness while others do not. She explains in detail about how the personality and the life experiences of a person directly influence the group consciousness which motivate collective action, lastly how the life experiences will affect the behaviour of the collective group.

Cause of Engagement

Lauren here breaks down the psychology of activism, however in order for any type of social movement to work, there needs to be organization. Some work, however often times they do not, the main factor being that they were not well organized or simply lacked the motivation needed to do so. Ben Kirshner starts his chapter about ‘Millennial Youth and the Fight for Opportunity’ (pg. 53-82) by describing what had happened in Soweto, a town in South Africa, in 1976. The government tried to make the language of Afrikaans the obligatory language where everything the schools taught will be taught in that language. The issue was however that the people knew very little of the language, to make matters worse the language of Afrikaans was viewed as one of oppression. In order to fight against the apartheid, the students of schools started marching down the streets where they would be brutally beaten or shot. When they were not in public, they would throw the books which were only written in Afrikaans out of the window and threaten the headmasters if they would try to enforce the language. The deaths and beating which was brought upon the students only brought them closer thus making them a stronger unit. The organizations started when they would gather during school time to help one another with the language, this led to them to decide to take a stand. Eventually they were victorious, and to quote Kirshner “The events of June 16 fueled further uprisings and student strikes throughout South Africa and led to an international outcry against the apartheid regime.” This act of revolution was a successful one due to its efficiency, motivation and a clear vision of the end goal. Kirshner goes on to explain that in the United States there is a huge separation regarding the youth with their involvement in politics, in particular those who come from a lesser stable economic background, poor education, poor living standards, and if they are people of color. By having these separations amongst the youth, when it comes to bringing about actual change, it will

be difficult to gather everyone into a group with one goal. The organization will not be as smooth as the one described in the Soweto movement.

Violent Vs. Nonviolent

One of the important points to note is that in order for an activism to properly work, the people need to be united with their ideology and what their desired end to be. For instance, if midway of a protest half the people decide to take up arms since “non-violent protests are not working” then the organization will lose its stance thus causing its downfall. In order to understand what motivates violent and nonviolent activists, Dr. Dornschneider in her book ‘A Computational Analysis of Violent and Nonviolent Activism’ (2006) conducted interviews and other field works. She discovered that those who tend to lean towards violent activism and those who do not, are quite similar. She also discovered that there is no significant evidence to point out that one's religion is the cause of aggression but rather their stance towards the state environment. Keeping this in mind, she did stated that the main aspect which dictates the people to be violent or nonviolent is their desired outcome, she then goes on to list four main points which do so. Violent protests are determined whether the people view the state as I) Aggressive, II) Continuation of aggression, III) whether they are prepared for physical punishment, IV) If they want to change the state as a whole. Nonviolent on the other hand view the issue as being I) Economic deprivation, II) Being impossible to change the state aggression, III) Do not want to suffer the consequences of physical punishment, IV) Want to keep the state structure; target specific aspects.

Traditional Vs. Modern

Although the traditional form of activism (marching down the street, boycott, protests) seem as the only way to truly bring about change, since the times have changed so have the methods. Joshua Atkinson, in his book ‘In Journey into Social Activism: Qualitative

Approaches' (2017, pg. 173-196), talks about how the newer generations started using unorthodox means in order to get their messages across. One example is the one where an Alternative Media, *Adbusters*, was used. It was a time where the people started randomly vandalizing different billboards across the city, photograph their works then share them with *Adbusters*. At first glance this may seem like a short-sighted plan with no outcome, it did however work well in their favour. With more and more activists joining in by vandalizing billboards and sharing their works, they became part of a bigger narrative where a collective of people who probably never met, shared one story. The message was clear, it was about how the American culture is seen differently by different classes and how the United States has now become a corporation rather than a country.

Methodology

The capstone beings with the background of each of the events in detail to give information to the reader. I looked at the events held in the past decade such as the Military Deferment Law, Daredevils of Sassoun (Sasna tsrer), and Electric Yerevan. Before getting into detail and beginning to analyze I need to both have information about the events while also having read analytic reports from scholars about either similar events or acts of activism in general, this will make the process of analyzing much easier.

By studying these cases I shall look at the methods used to reach their desired goals and whether or not the people managed to reach their desired outcomes. The purpose of this paper is to try and understand the state of activism amongst the people, in order to do so I shall conduct a survey with the youth (more specifically university students). The questions will try to find out what motivated the people to participate, how did the issue impact them, if they worried about the protests getting dangerous, did they study the issue before protesting,

how well they know, did they join out of peer pressure or driven by the self. I will conduct a content analysis and study the qualitative data.

These questions will be asked in order to have an understanding of where the people stand regarding making a change in their country. The main strategy of spreading it will be via social networks (Facebook, Whatsapp) since I would be able to reach a vast majority in a shorter amount of way. My main targets are university students and by posting it on the official Facebook pages of universities I would be able to limit those filling in the survey.

The information gathered will be used in order to compare the research done from other scholars with the Armenian population.

Findings

Section I Electric Yerevan

In the summer of 2015, the price of the electric bill was about to hike up by 17% in Yerevan, Armenia. The 17% increase meant 7 Drams per Kilowatt/hour; this is the equivalent of 0.01 USD. Although this may not seem as much, considering the economic state of Armenia, this does have a toll on the people. This protest had undertaken several names such as “Revolution of socket”, “ElectroMaidan”, “EnergoMaidan” however the one it is most commonly known for is “#ElectricYerevan.” The two names “ElectroMaidan” and “EnergoMaidan” are puns on the name of the protest taken place a year before this one in Ukraine called “EuroMaidan.” “EuroMaidan” was when the people of Ukraine were protesting against the government’s decision to suspend the signing of an association agreement with the European Union, instead choosing closer ties to Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union. The electricity in Armenia is mainly controlled by a Russian company however not Russia itself, with the Euromaidan being a protest directly against Russia, the Armenian people did not want to be associated with the Ukrainian protest. The people did not

wish to replicate what had happened in the EuroMaidan, this is why they were angered when the Russian media was calling it “a new Maidan” in their news channels (Hromadske International. 2015, Demytrie, R. 2015).

Those who participated in #ElectricYerevan were between the ages of 17 to 35 and the majority were part of Armenia’s emerging middle class. This being said, the main the reason why they participated, albeit they could afford the increase of price, was motivated due to the way the country was being run at the time. In the end of the protest, the government agreed to change the providers, changing from Inter-RAO, a purely Russian company; Chairman: Igor Sechins, to Tashir Group, a Russian-based Armenian company; run by Samvel Karapetyan (Restart 'Electric Yerevan' Protest, 2015).

On the 17th of June, 2015, the protests started to rise, however it mainly started to take form on the 20th of June during the “high voltage rally” when activists decided to have a sit-in strike. Once the strike was over, a group of civil activists declared yet another sit-in which will take place in the Republic Square; this was accompanied by thousands of people. By doing so, the people now have had a sense of community among themselves as activists, and have decided to take the protest down to the Presidential Palace, where they marched down Baghramyan Avenue, blocking the street and continued the sit-in protest there. On June 23rd, over 200 of the peaceful protesters were detained from the center of Baghramyan Avenue, many of whom were journalists. During which the police used water cannons to subdue the citizens, this action has hospitalized 25 people and in turn had the opposite effect of what was intended; the water cannon action has triggered a much larger wave of protests. Yerevan was not the only city to protest, after these events other Armenian cities such as Gyumri, Vanadzor, Martuni, Spitak, and Ashtarak also started to take part (Restart 'Electric Yerevan' Protest).

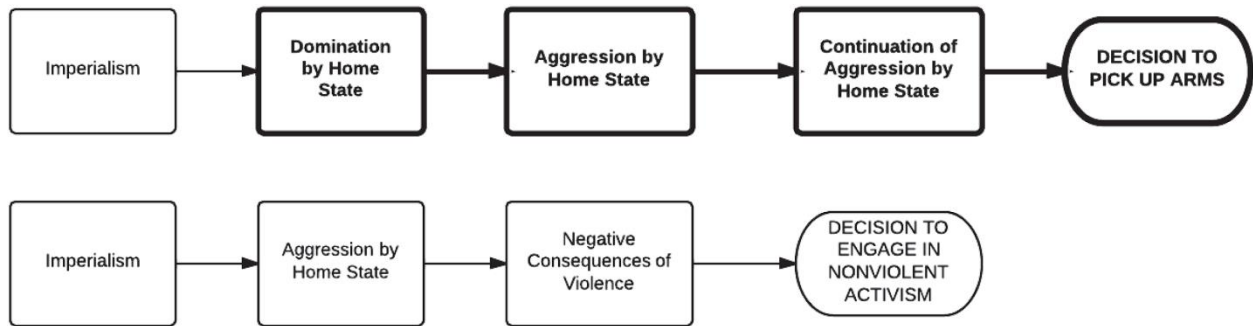
On the 16th of July, Andreas Ghukasyan and others have created the new movement called “Rise up, Armenia” which is a 72-hour sit-in in Baghramyan Street. On the 21st of July Andreas and the other creators have been apprehended by Police and sentenced to two months of jail however were released on the same day due to the people protesting for their release. Eventually the people slowly stopped attending the rallies due to the minor agreements which the government announced.



Photograph: PHOTOLURE News Agency/Demotix/Corbis

Section II Analysis

People united in the streets, protesting for two months non-stop in a non violent manner even after the law enforcement began to get physical (using water cannons and detaining protesters), this was the way the people of Armenia protested the increase of the electric bill. But why was that? According to Dornschneider research on violent vs. nonviolent activists, there are a few factors we need to look at and analyze in order to have a better understanding of what causes the individuals to become violent. The figure below is a simplified version of the calculation done to know the outcome of the activism (Dornschneider, S. 2016).



The model is designed in MATLAB (Duncan, L. 1999), which stands for matrix laboratory. MATLAB is a numerical computing environment and programming language developed in the late 1970s. It has about one million users in academia and industry worldwide.

Dornschneider found in his research that people tend to not make a decision or take action based on neutral or positive beliefs of the State; when the people believe that the State supports the people, they will not take initiative. The people who participated in #ElectricYerevan did believe that the government was not on their side, yet they protested in a non violent manner. This may have to do with the notion that those who tend to be non violent are usually protesting against economic deprivation, lack of education or environmental strains; for this case it is more related to the economic deprivation. With all this being taken into account, according to the chart the people will often times turn to violence when the government retaliates with physical contact. However a major factor which dictates the final approach of the protesters is how they envision the end result to be, what their goal is and how they identify the problem to be. Dornschneider wrote that another main factor for violent activists was due to the constant aggression from the State, this is not the case in Armenia, mainly Yerevan, so the incentive for a violent protest is not called for here (however we will see that in Sasna Tsrer the people did end up violent). What was the difference? In Sasna Tsrer, the people who took part in it were veterans from the Karabakh War from 1991 to 1994; they were people of war and were accustomed to violence so to

speak. The people from #ElectricYerevan on the other hand, were civilians, and although they might have been willing to go the extra mile to bring about change, their mentality was different. It all goes down to what the people believe will have a better outcome, suffer physically with hopes to make change or that by doing so will only make matters worse, #ElectricYerevan people chose the latter.

But what was the main factor which connected the people, to march down the street and blockade the presidential street for days on end and receive some physical harassment from the police? According to Żukowski, T., & Kosicki, P. (2009), those who identify themselves with an organization or any form of group such as religion or even their work environment, are more likely to be active when it comes to their nation or their people. This conclusion was made after a survey conducted with the Poles and discovered that those who identified with the church are more likely to be an active citizen (Żukowski, T., & Kosicki, P. 2009). The people of Armenia are known to be particularly religious (or at least make a strong connection with being Armenian and being a Christian, this is due to them being the first to adopt Christianity as a nation and thus has made a strong correlation between the nation and the religion). Those who have a strong connection with their family are also more likely to be active when it comes to their nation, this a positive note for Armenia since the people tend to be very family oriented and also have a strong sense of community; the idea of being on good terms with their neighbors is a moral obligation (at least being idiomatic with one another).

From the survey we see that the people leaned more towards #ElectricYerevan being a success with 33.3% saying it was an effective movement against 11.1% who said it was not with the majority of 55.6% being in between who chose somewhat. When asked to elaborate their answers we see why they chose somewhat. The most common answer was that although

there was not a direct change (regarding the price change) the people did stand united and, best put it in the original quotation: “It gave rise to activism.”

Many people claim it to be a victory since it united the people, these are the ones who put “somewhat” since they did not achieve their intended goal. Some said that “It made it clear that there is civic activism and consciousness in Armenia” “The youth and all the protesters showed that they CAN” and “It rose social conscience.”

Those who chose “yes” said that since the provider has switched from a Russian company to an Armenian one, some simply put “We reached what we wanted.” With these being said, the majority claimed that it was a success since it had an effect on the tariff, united the people and proved to the government that the people will stand up if needed be: “Government took actions!” “It made the high courts think twice before they act” “People got what they wanted and showed that we are one whole body, organism that can stand for their rights.” or as one participant put it: “I think it not only served to its initial cause, but also showed the real power and social responsibility the people have. Like a declaration of ownership of the country by its citizens.”

Although only 9.7% put “no” they provided strong answers as to why they believe so. Some simply said “It didn't achieve its purpose” and “We didn't really achieve any real results” while others gave a more detailed answer claiming that the Russian gov. promised to provide Armenia with Iskander-E weapons, some of the organizers started to lower the tone of the protest and it was “sold.” Some claimed that it got “It was commercialized and lost its meaning over time” while others claimed that it was all a ruse in order for the “...government of Armenia to get dividends from Russia.” With these being said we must also mention that the main reason the people think it was not an effective protest was due to the lack of leadership, the people did not have someone to look up to and follow, someone to trust and rely on.

Section III Daredevils of Sassoun

At the break of dawn of July 17, 2016, a group of armed men stormed a police station in Yerevan, taking nine hostages and resulting in one casualty. The armed men called themselves the "Daredevils of Sassoun" (Սասնա Ծռեր *Sasna Tsrer*) after the 8th century armenian epic. The motivation behind the gunmen were as follows: They demanded the release of opposition leader Jirair Sefilian (who was also a Karabakh war veteran), the resignation of the president Serzh Sargsyan, and the immediate halt of any potential talks ceding territory from the liberated territories of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) to Azerbaijan.

On the day of the invasion, one policeman was killed, two were injured and nine were taken hostage. Following negotiations, two policemen, Yerevan's deputy police chief and national deputy police chief, were set free and FaceBook was shut down in the city of Yerevan for the entirety of the day. On July 19, residents of Sari Tagh, a neighborhood located adjacent to the Erebuni police station have a confrontation with police over suspended utilities in their neighborhood. Some police officers sustain minor injuries, dozens of civilians are arrested. Thousands gather near the Erebuni compound every day in a show of support to the armed men. Initially, Alec Yenikomshian, a member of Founding Parliament along with others tried to lead the 'movement.' Then Member of Parliament Nikol Pashinyan, tried to take the leadership of the growing crowds and attempts to negotiate with the Sasna Tsrer and security forces (*Daredevils of Sassoun: A Timeline*). On the 22nd of July, President Serzh Sargsyan addressed the nation and said "I urge the armed people, who have occupied the territory of the police headquarters, to show restraint and not endanger the lives of others with their reckless behaviours. Hostages must be released," whilst adding that the armed men must surrender their weapons. In the same day, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation condemned the acts of the Sasna Tsrer by stating "The A.R.F.-Dashnaksutyun seeks the

settlement of the current situation exclusively by peaceful means, considers new bloodshed as unacceptable, demands professionalism from law enforcing agencies, demands that the rights and dignity of law-abiding citizens be respected, and strongly condemns non-political methods and extremist thinking." On the 23rd, the remainder of the hostages were released as part of the deal for the police officers to let the media in, during which 40 different media representatives had been taken to a safe zone where they conducted interviews and live coverage of the scenes (even though they were not allowed to be live during the entirety of their time there). On the 25th, they had set yet another car on fire, police spokesman Ashot Aharonian this was the third vehicle in the past two days. The reason behind such actions are perhaps due to their statement of how "the police department has become evil for the people and enjoy lavish lifestyles with the use of unnecessary military equipment for policing." Pavlik Manukyan said during the conference.

July 27, four Medics were sent into the police station to care for one of the armed men who was injured in the leg during the crossfire on the first day. The medical personnel were later held hostage only for two of them to eventually be released on the same day. The largest of the protests thus far have moved towards Sari Tagh to get closer to the compound on the 29th of July. Riot police were introduced to the matter and together with security forces started using excessive forces against the protesters and target journalists covering the event, this resulted in over 160 protesters to be arrested in that single night, with 26 officially charged and dozens injured and taken to hospitals, including several media representatives. On the 30th of July, the police had offered an ultimatum, where the armed men would either release the remainder of the hostages and vacate the building, or prepare for a full on police assault (Caucasus Barometer 2017). The Sasna Tsrer chose the later and opened fire and shot down yet another police officer. The armed men eventually threw down their weapons and surrendered in order to not spill any more blood. They said ""We will continue our struggle

from prison. We believe that we have achieved our goal: we became the spark that allowed people to rise up and it makes no sense to spill blood." A statement by the NSS, on the other hand, reads: "Armenia security forces have forced the members of the armed group to lay down their weapons and surrender. Twenty terrorists are detained; the territory of the police station is freed from terrorists." By the end of the two-week siege, three police officers are dead, the members of the Sasna Tsrer are behind bars, and a country is left polarized.

Section IV Analysis

When the people feel that their voices are not being heard by the government, they will eventually decide to protest either in a peaceful or violent manner. Things tend to escalate depending on the situation especially when the people have a negative point of view of the government and believe that it is corrupt, then things might not end well. This was the case with the Daredevils of Sassoun, when a group of four Karabakh war veterans decided to take up arms and storm a police station resulting in some casualties. The movement could be viewed from two points: I) It was a Civic Protest. II) It was an act of terror.

Being viewed as a Civic Protest, the people will be more prone to joining and supporting it, which is what the people of Sari Tagh did. The reason why it can be viewed as a Civic Protest is due to the fact of those who conducted the movement were regular civilians whose demands were to stop the government from making a specific decision (which is the regular motive for any protest) and the resignation of the president of the time (which could also be considered a political movement). When asked what they think about the movement (in regards of it being successful or not), only 11.6% believe it to be successful since "Big countries [such as] Russia" were now more cautious with their decision of giving some regions of NKG to Azerbaijan. They also stated that other countries have realized that the "Armenians are ready to fight for their lands." If the event is to be analyzed from this

perspective then it goes to show that the people of Armenia are highly concerned with their country, even to the point of picking up arms in order to bring about change, risking everything they have for what they believe in.

The actions of the Daredevils of Sassoun could also be seen as an act of terrorism, it is important to mention this claim as it has the potential to eliminate the idea of the movement being an act of Activism. The reasoning behind this theory is due to the fact of them literally attacking a police station, having a standoff, injuring some with some casualties. The Daredevils of Sassoun broke the law with such acts including the targeting of the president at the time thus making it a national threat. When asked whether or not it was a successful movement, 44.9% said “No” with some giving mild answers such as “Nobody knew what was going on” and “The idea was good but it was too disorganized” to more harsher answers such as “It was an act of terrorism”. Some had strong points saying that the Daredevils had created a group of people who “cheered the death of the policeman” while another person said that since the Daredevils ended up in jail with “the worst possible conditions” plus the death of a policeman among the injured ones makes it a failed attempt: not only the event itself but also as an act of civil activism.

Whether this movement was seen as an act of terrorism or not, it did influence the mentality of the people in regards of bringing change. With each movement, the people were being more and more convinced that there is hope for change, thus making more people participate in future movements.

Section V Military Deferment Law

On November 15, 2017, the Armenian government has passed a new law which has resulted in a large scale protest among the students, many of which were women and those who have already served in the military; in other words, the new bill does not affect them.

These protests start every morning from the Yerevan State University then they march down to Baghramyan street, where the national assembly is located (Khachatrian, M. 2017). Aside from the marches, a small group of students have announced a hunger strike.

The new law significantly altered the practice which allowed young men to defer their two year mandatory military service if they enter a university until they graduate. The bill will require the men to sign an agreement with the Defense Ministry in order to postpone their service. So far it is still the same however the main difference being that now they will have to serve for three years and under the conditions and location provided by the Ministry.

This new bill is part of a broader program which intends to integrate the Armenian military into society. Officials claim that this step is a necessary one, especially in a country such as Armenia where it is mandatory for the male citizens to serve. This especially is the case since Armenia is at a longstanding conflict with its neighboring country Azerbaijan. This may be the case however those opposing the new bill are doing so out of the worry that this bill will only militarize the country even more. Armenia is the third most militarized country in the world right behind Israel and Singapore.

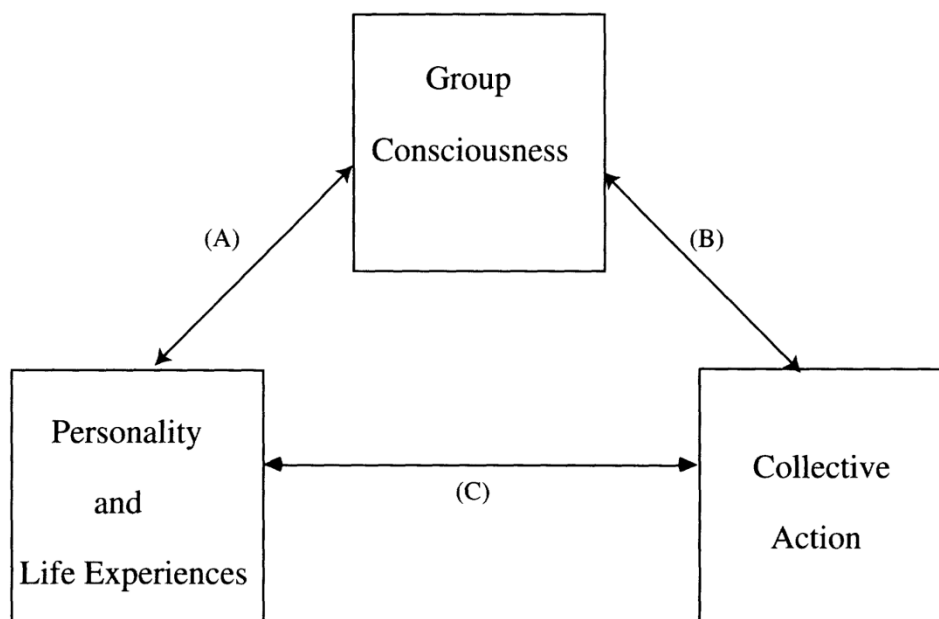
From the five hunger strike protesters, four had already finished their military service. The one organizing the hunger strike, Davit Petrosyan, named the strike “For Developing Science” and their main concern with the new bill is that it will slow down the development of science in Armenia (Helix Consulting LLC., Declare Hunger Strike). The argument against the protesters is, to quote one of the professors at the Yerevan State University: “The Armenian youth are conducting a demonstration in order not to serve in the army,” Marat Grigoryan and Davit Petrosyan responded by saying that he understands that there are students who use it in order to not serve in the military, however it is more of a matter of justice and fairness than anything else.

Protesters, which consists mainly of students, begun to enter the classrooms of their university in order to gather more protesters. This has worked well until the universities began locking the doors to the classrooms and university from the inside. This meant that the protesters could not gather more students to join however it also meant that those students who went to a regular class could not get out and neither were the teachers and other staff members. After a week of protesting, the leading student activist David Petrosyan said the protest will have a break in order to prepare for the roundtable meeting with deputy parliament speaker Eduard Sharmazanov "This roundtable discussion will be attended by all stakeholders, including scientists, scholars, and lecturers named by these students," Sharmazanov said. "Both the issue of draft deferments and various other issues of concern to students will be discussed. All that will be public and transparent."

Armenia's Defense Ministry says the law would close a loophole which allowed the avoidance of the draft while also reducing the corruption among military and university officials. Critics on the other hand argue that the bill would prevent many students from pursuing a higher degree thus stunting Armenia's academic and scientific advancement. Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan met with the protest leaders for the roundtable discussion along with Minister of Defense Vigen Sargsyan, who initiated the reform, and the Minister of Education Levon Mkrtychyan. The PM defended the proposed measure and suggested the students write an amendment to the law once it is passed. The government's decided to take such measures due to the lack of population in Armenia and the need for increased security on its borders with Azerbaijan (Parliament of Armenia Adopts Draft Law on Military Service, RFE/RL. 2017). This was the reasoning behind the government's action however it did not fit in well with the people as they were looking at the matter not from the militaries point of view, but rather from the progressive side; the side which will advance the country.

Section VI Analysis

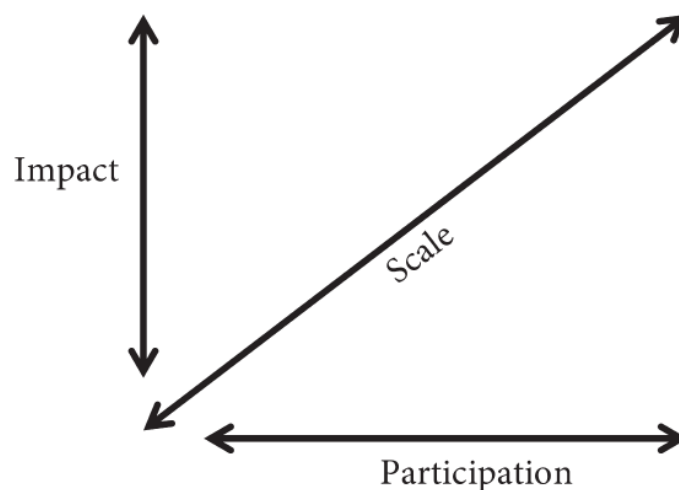
Lauren E. Duncan looks at the motivation behind both individual acts of activism, and the collective. She breaks this down by forming a graph with three boxes; with each box being tied to the other two (see the graph below). The model hypothesizes that personality and life experiences contribute to group consciousness and that group consciousness, in turn, motivates collective action. The graph also suggests that personality and life experiences can directly affect behavioral outcomes. In this schematic diagram, group consciousness is thought to give psychological meaning to intrapersonal variables, resulting in participation in collective act.



The arrows in the model are bi-directional, meaning that there is the possibility of a reverse effect. This means that there is the possibility that Group Consciousness and Collective Actions may have an effect on Personality and Life Experiences; that collective actions can affect interpersonal variables via group consciousness (Duncan, L. 1999). It is possible for this to take into effect based on the context of the social movement. To use this graph into practice, we may look at the example of “The Military Deferment Law” which was

mainly conducted by students. The people knew that the new bill will not only affect their education but also the countries future, thus causing them to take to the streets in protest. In this example the life experiences of the people will change, according to the graph this will be the cause of a “Collective Action.” When individual lives are affected by the source, according to the model, the people will go directly from “Personality and Life Experiences” to “Collective Action” (C). The cause of the protest, in the beginning, was more of a ‘reactionary’ one rather than a well thought out plan which has formulated over the course of sometime however later on changed into a more organized and collective one with the student lead protest properly named “For Developing science.”

We can see the shift from every person being wary about the new bill since it disrupts one’s life plan, if they had any, into something greater, an organized protest lead by the youth aimed for the betterment of the nation. Ben Kirshner, in his essay, talks about how the millennial youth are capable to bring about change to their country. Ben used a graph articulated by Ethan Zuckerman to help and explain how to measure the intensity of the civic activism among.



If we integrate the Military Deferment Law protest into this graph, we can try and understand the status of civic activism amongst the youth. We first need to look at the scale of the situation. At first glance it might seem that it influences the life the individual male at

the age of 18, however it affects the whole country on a larger scale, it retards the development of the nation as it will heavily impact the education of the people. Next we focus on participation. The protest was not a simple one which ended in a couple of days but rather, students from different universities gathered at the Yerevan State University every day to march to the National Assembly for one full week, they took the risk and skipped the very classes in order to try and insure that the classes will remain in the future. Lastly we look at the impact the people had in regards of new bill. The majority of the people in the survey (55.7%) said that it was not a successful movement as the bill was eventually passed however the remaining 54.3% were split from people choosing “somewhat” (32.9%) and “yes” (11.4%). Both those who answered “somewhat” and “yes” gave the same response, they believe that the movement could be considered a success due to the fact that it showed the youth can come together to work towards a specific goal, the unity proved to the people that they can, if it needs be, work together to achieve a certain goal and this in turn has raised the overall moral of the citizens.

Section VII Current Events

The former president Serzh Sargsyan has become the Prime Minister in the year 2018, the people were not pleased with this decision. Nikol Pashinyan, a member of parliament, has lead the people into a Velvet Revolution which has lasted for more than three weeks. Initially the people blocked the French Square and stayed for two night however starting Monday, the people began closing the main streets such as Mashtots and Baghramyan (the Parliamentary street). As the weeks passed by, more and more people started to take part and although there were no official clashes with police, many were being detained and kept for a few hours some for a whole day. Some began to worry that it might take a dangerous turn as the police

threatened to use force, especially after a few concussion grenades were used. However that did not stop the people.

The majority of the youth in the country have only known one person in power and since the power has changed from the president to the prime minister, they did not want it to continue. Blockading the streets became more and more encouraged and public property was being used as well such as benches and Garbage cans. Large rallies were being held in the Republic Square after 6 o'clock every day with a stage and music being played. Eventually Serzh Sargsyan has stepped down from being Prime Minister and Nikol Pashinyan was elected.

Throughout the course of the decade, the moral of the people has increased, there was hope for change. With each movement people began to feel protesting does lead to good results, that coming together for one goal may yield the results they were looking for. Although each movement may not seem successful at the time, they did however bring a brighter light to how the people view social activism.

Conclusion

For over a decade, the people of Armenia were very pessimistic about the country's well being. They genuinely believed that there is no hope for the country in the near future as they were very skeptical about their government however in the past decade the people have been standing their ground and trying to bring change and took matters into their own hands to make the government enforce it. With each activism the people were getting more encouraged that there might actually be hope thus attracting more people. Little by little, taking part in social events has grew in popularity and the idea of being an active citizen has become more and more popular.

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Appendices

Survey

The objective of the survey was to see how the people felt about each movement mentioned and their thoughts about each one. Most of the questions were multiple choice in order to get an exact answer, however some were optional and completely left for the viewer to answer as their answers varied greatly. The survey questions are the following:

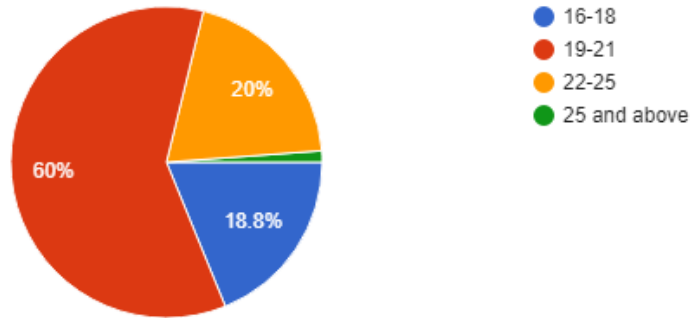
1. Gender?
2. Age?
3. Do you consider yourself an activist? (1-5)
4. Did you partake in any of the following events? (list mentioned above) (if not, why?)
5. Why did you participate? (for the cause/country, friends, family)
6. Do you think Electric Yerevan effective? (why or why not)
7. Did the issue affect you personally? (Yes or No)
8. Do you think Dasadul (military deferment law) was effective? (why or why not)
9. Did the issue affect you personally? (Yes or No)
10. Do you think Daredevils of Sassoun was effective? (why or why not)
11. Did the issue affect you personally? (Yes or No)
12. Were you worried that the protests would have a dangerous turn? (Yes or No)
13. How did you find out about the events?
14. Did you study the issue before taking part? (Yes or No)

The survey was conducted online via the official FaceBook pages of the American University of Armenia (AUA) and was purely targeted at the university students. 85 students from different faculty and years have responded.

Results

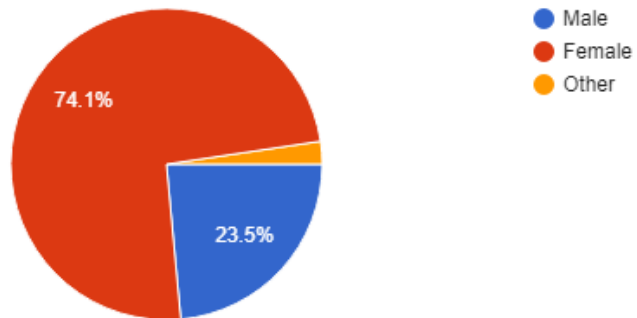
Age?

85 responses



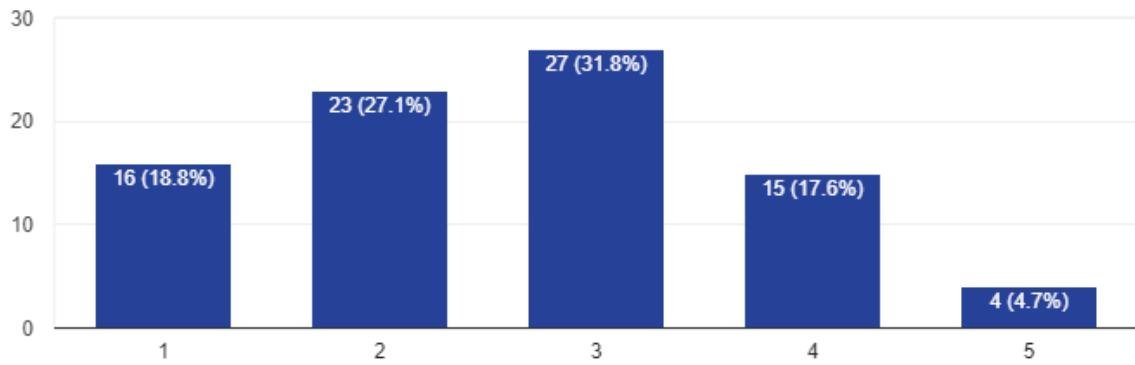
Gender?

85 responses



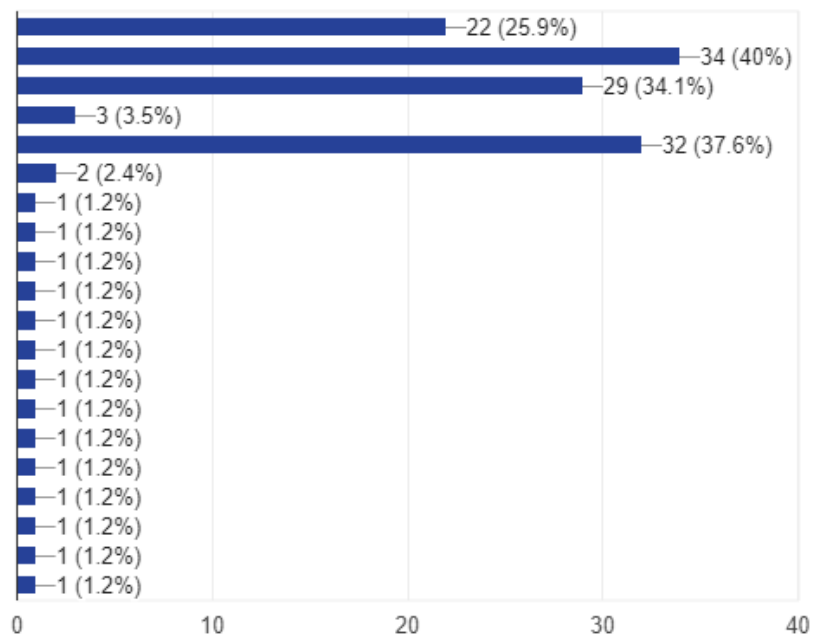
Do you consider yourself a social activist?

85 responses



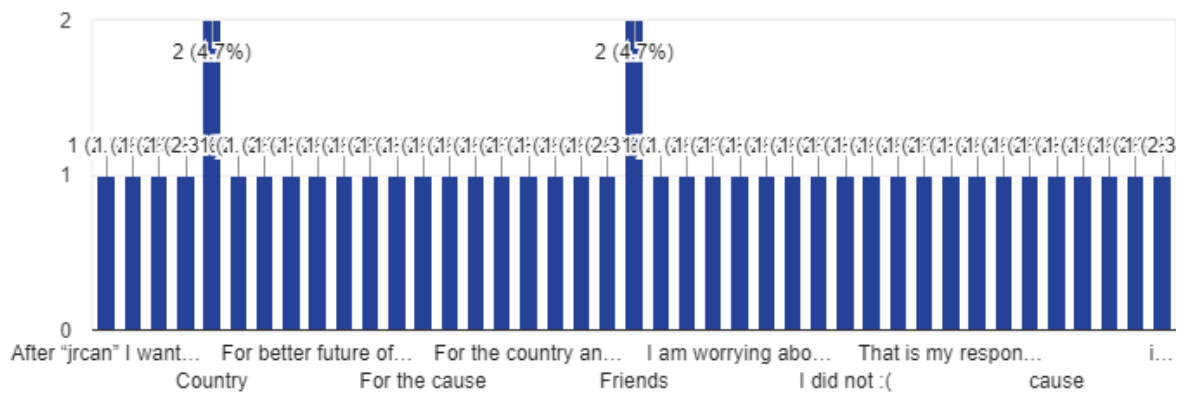
Which of the following events did you take part in?

85 responses



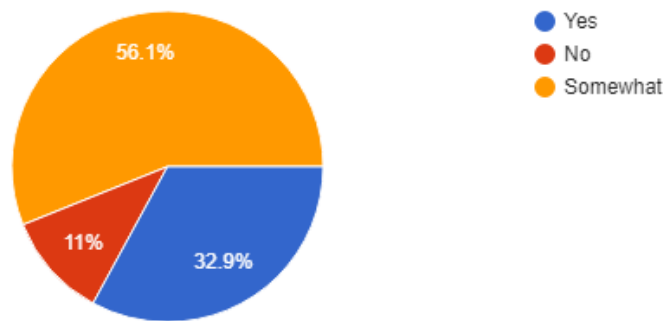
Why did you participate? (ex. for the cause/country, friends, family)

43 responses



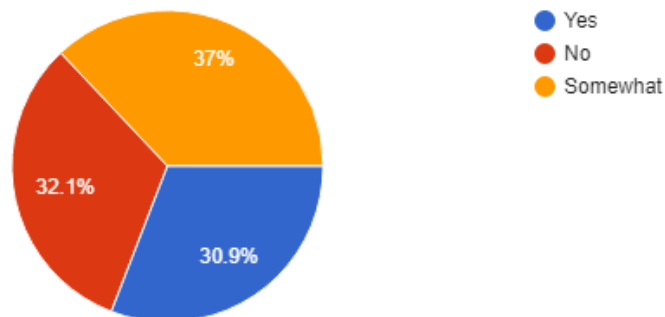
Do you think Electric Yerevan was an effective movement?

82 responses



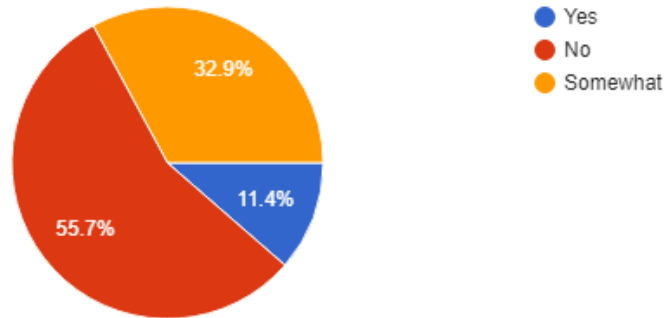
Did the issue affect you personally?

81 responses



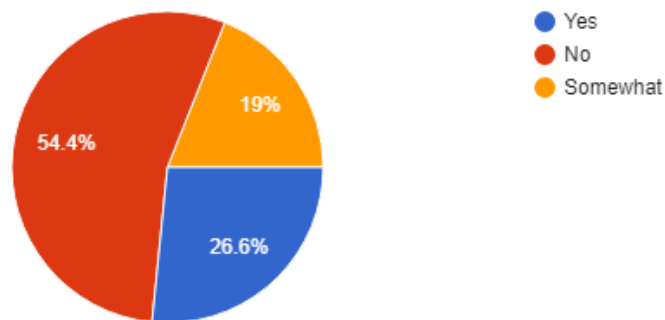
Do you think the Military Deferment Law movement was an effective movement?

79 responses



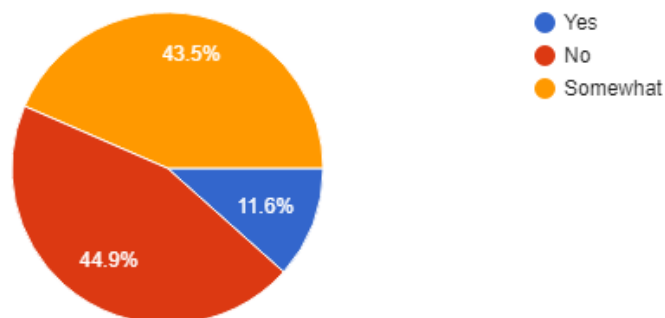
Did the issue affect you personally?

79 responses



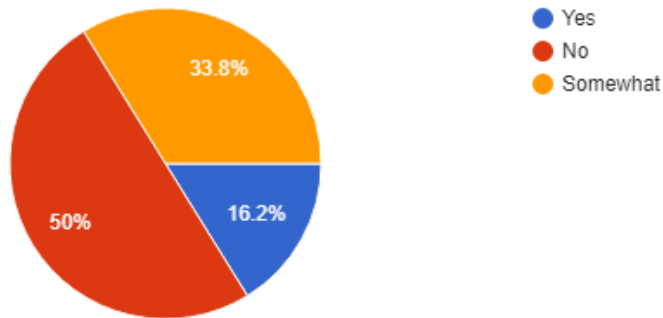
Do you think Daredevils of Sassoun was an effective movement?

69 responses



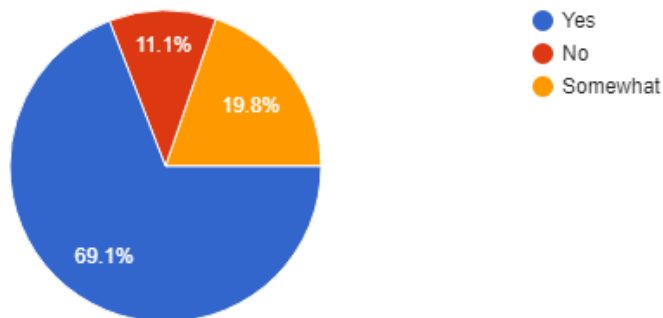
Did the issue affect you personally?

68 responses



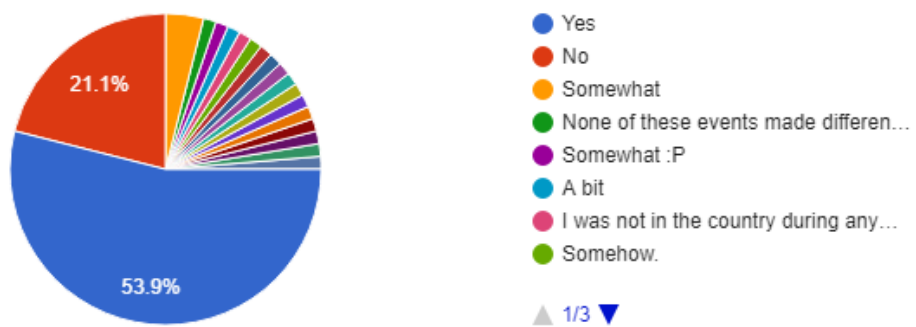
Were you worried that the protests would have a dangerous turnout?

81 responses



Did you study the issues before taking part?

76 responses



When asked about how they found out about the events, they answered:

51 social media.

24 word of mouth.

10 news.

Conclusion

We could not have made a clear hypothesis as to what their responses were however their answers proved to be promising. Although many students felt that all the movements were pointless with no good result, the vast majority believe that they were somewhat successful (with minor changes but overall positive). The results prove to be promising when it comes to how the youth views activism in their country. We can conclude that the state of activism is on the incline.