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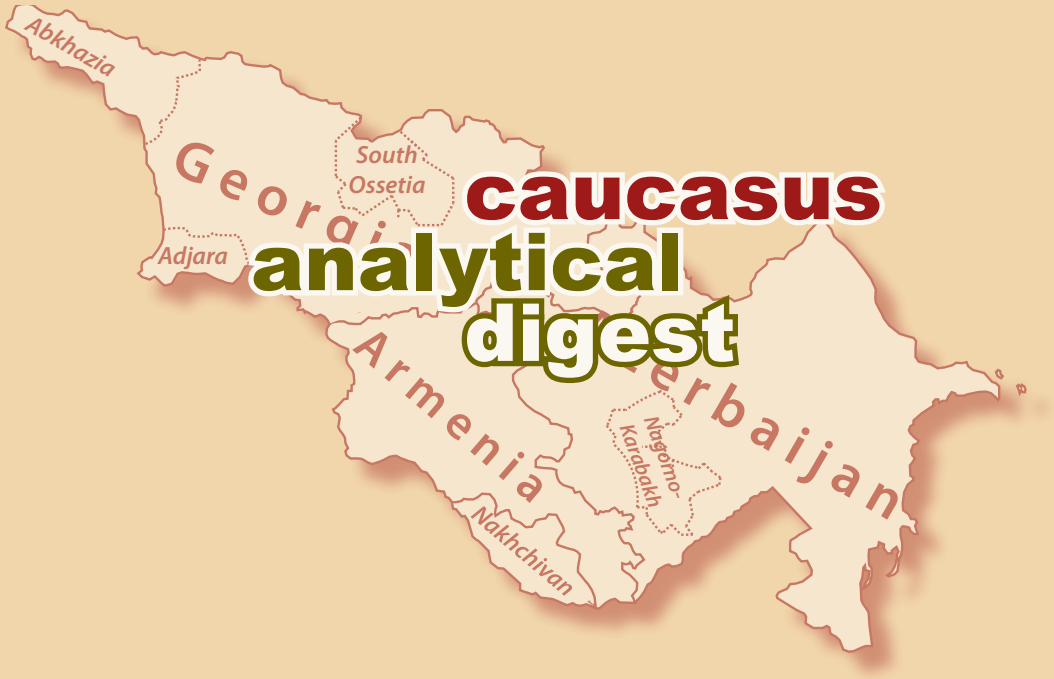

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PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ARMENIA

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Armenian Elections: Technology vs. Ideology

By Alexander Iskandaryan, Yerevan

Abstract

International observers evaluated Armenia's May 6, 2012 parliamentary election as competitive, vibrant and generally peaceful, with a campaign characterized by freedom of speech, assembly and media. The results highlighted important trends and challenges in the country's development: Armenia's two major catch-all parties succeeded using non-ideological methods—mostly economic incentives and counterincentives—winning over 80% of the vote between them. While signaling an ideological void which needs to be filled, this outcome may also point toward the emergence of a two-party system, and a more open—if still elitist—political competition.

The Background

The May 6, 2012 parliamentary election in Armenia was quite unusual in terms of its results as well as the way the campaign and election day unfolded. It will take a while before we can fully understand the role played by this election in Armenia's modern history; at this stage, we can just evaluate the trends signaled by the election and the context in which it took place.

The Armenian parliament has 131 seats, of which 90 are filled by a proportional vote based on party lists, and 41 by a majority vote in single-mandate constituencies. Eight political parties and one political bloc, the Armenian National Congress (ANC), registered to take part (the threshold for a bloc to enter parliament is set at 7% and for a party at 5%).

The number of competing parties was already unusual, since in the previous parliamentary election, which took place in 2007, 22 political entities registered, and in the one before that, in 2002, there were 16; both times, most contestants fell far short of the threshold. In 2012 for the first time, there were only three outsiders in the campaign, taking advantage of the election publicity to promote their specific causes, and they won a combined 2.02% of the vote. The small number of outsiders may be seen as a sign that Armenia's political party system is gradually maturing; the fact that the Communist Party is one of them makes Armenia different from many post-Soviet republics, where communists still enjoy high degrees of popularity.

The Results

The layout of the new parliament reflects Armenia's political realities, with the ruling party well ahead of its opponents. 70 seats in the new parliament went to the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (RPA), with the incumbent president Serzh Sargsyan holding the first position on its list. The Republicans won almost half of the proportional vote and more than two-thirds of the single-mandate constituencies, ending up with a slight majority of the seats in the new parliament.

The rest of the seats were divided among a host of competitors: 36 seats (28 proportional+8 single-mandate) went to the Prosperous Armenia Party, 7 (all proportional) went to the Armenian National Congress, 6 (5+1) to Rule of Law Country, and 5 each (all proportional) to Dashnaktsutyun and the Heritage Party; the latter had several Free Democrats on its list. The remaining two seats were won in single-mandate constituencies by candidates who were not formally affiliated with or supported by a political party or bloc.

Given this election's record turnout of 1.57 million voters, representing over 62% of the electorate, the Republican Party set a record with 664,400 votes, or 44.02% of the proportional vote. It broke the 1999 record set by the highly popular Unity Bloc led by Karen Demirchyan and Vazgen Sargsyan, which won over 448,000 votes, equivalent to 41.67% of the total in 1999, when 1.1 million people voted. In fact, the runner-up also broke that record, if by a tiny margin: the Prosperous Armenia Party came in second in the 2012 election, getting over 454,000 votes, which was just over 30%.

The Players

Beyond the two major parties, the other four winners won just enough votes to edge past the threshold: three parties scored 5–6% each, and the bloc, 7%. Prior to and during the campaign, experts expressed doubts about some of these parties' chances to enter the parliament, but in the end, all the genuine contenders were elected. Notably, for some of them, this was an achievement, and for others, a downgrade. For example, Heritage had six seats in the old parliament and took five in the new one. A small and not very consolidated party, it had to make a genuine effort to preserve its presence in Armenian politics, and only succeeded by means of an aggressive and expensive campaign. As for Dashnaktsutyun, it held 13 seats in the 2007 parliament, but seemed to rest on its laurels, running a low-key campaign and barely making it into the new legislature, mainly by virtue of its traditional electorate and its image as Armenia's oldest party.

Few experts expected Rule of Law Country to win entry into the parliament this time. This one-man party seemed to be on hold since 2007, when it won 6 mandates and joined a coalition. The party is known largely for its young charismatic leader who currently heads the President's Security Council. However, just a couple of months prior to the 2012 election, Rule of Law Country deployed substantial funds and a variety of campaign advisers to turn itself into a spoiler of sorts, apparently as a safeguard for the Republicans, and scrounged just enough votes to get past the threshold. Indirectly, this proves that the Republicans were not as sure of winning the majority as they wanted everyone to believe.

The only bloc in the competition, the Armenian National Congress, was one of the disappointments of this election. Assembled from a number of parties, most of them tiny, the Congress is led by Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan. It has been around since 2008, when its leader stood in the presidential election as the incumbent president's main competitor, winning over three times the number of votes that the ANC got this time: 21.5% against 7.08% (though it is a bit of a stretch to compare the parliamentary elections to the presidential voting, especially in a country with strongly personalized politics). Apparently, time worked against the ANC, which stood behind the mass post-election rallies in March 2008, operated as an extraparliamentary opposition for four years, and got caught up in this outsider routine. Its 2012 campaign was certainly much less intense than expected.

The Consequences

The overall result is that the big parties got bigger and the small parties got smaller. The two largest parties combined now have over 80% of the seats in parliament. It is too early to judge if Armenia is moving towards a two-party system, but this seems to be a trend, especially if we look at the nature of the campaign and what the two winners represent.

For the first time in Armenia's history, this election won generally positive assessments from international observers, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE ODIRH), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and the International Expert Center for Electoral Systems (ICES). For the first time in ten years, all Central Electoral Commission members signed its final protocol without reservations. Of course, some cases of fraud were observed, and many more alleged, as is the tradition in Armenia. It is, however, clear that ballot stuffing or vote count manipulation were not significantly instrumental in this election. The action was elsewhere.

As noted in the detailed statement made by the OSCE ODIHR, this campaign was characterized by freedom of assembly, speech and media. For the first time ever, all parties had ample opportunity to address the voters. Once this happened, it turned out they had little to say. The campaigns were almost non-ideological unless we count anti-corruption rhetoric; the promises made by parties were vague and all boiled down to handing out more money. One of the parties even vowed to lower taxes and increase welfare packages at the same time without explaining where the funds would come from. On the whole, the contest was about campaign technique rather than ideology. The true currency on the market was paternalism: apparently, it sells well in the existing political culture, and certainly better than ideology.

Both major parties in the Armenian parliament represent elite groups. With almost no ideology to speak of, they are catch-all parties, a phenomenon becoming typical in the modern world. The main competition in this election was not between them and the opposition, but between the two of them. In fact, the two were in coalition prior to the election, and it was in their interest that small parties entered the parliament so that the de-facto monopolized legislature would have an appearance of fragmentation. Meanwhile, the two allies fought hard with each other, using the same set of tools: what the OSCE politely called "gifts" and the opposition referred to as "bribery." There was also what everyone called "abuse of administrative resources." The bribery was about cash, sometimes disguised as charity, with companies affiliated with parties handing out jars of jam to voters or giving tractors to rural communities. As to administrative resources, they were apparently used to get out the vote among employees of schools, hospitals, companies owned by party members, and so on.

Such practices are common in many post-Soviet countries. What makes this election special was that these tools were not used by one party but by at least two. Typically, in one village school teachers would be bribed, promised raises or threatened with layoffs by the Republicans, while workers at the local factory would get the same treatment from Prosperous Armenia, and in the neighboring village, Prosperous Armenia would target the school and the Republicans, the farmers. What intellectuals from the capital were saying on TV had very little relevance to the game. The huge sums of money spent by the contestants on "gifts" are the best proof that election day fraud was not on the agenda, otherwise the tractors would have been a total waste. The two leading parties were fighting hard for the

votes, in many cases simply buying them up or bullying people into giving them away. As the results show, large numbers of Armenians cooperated with this strategy.

The situation in Armenia is reminiscent of post-World War II Italy, in which socialist parties were trying to play on the ideological field and losing, whereas the Christian Democrats were achieving success using non-ideological methods very similar to those used in this election, i.e. economic incentives and counterincentives.

Prospects and Challenges

For the first time since the mid-nineties, all of Armenia's significant political forces are now represented in the parliament. In all probability, this will also be the first time since 1995 that election day is not followed by mass protests. The Armenian National Congress gathered its supporters in Freedom Square two days after the election; its leaders promised to contest the results in the Constitutional Court but said they would take the mandates anyway, unlike what they did following the Yerevan city mayor election in 2009.

According to political tradition, the ruling party will certainly forge a coalition despite having more than half the seats. For the first time, the parliament will become the scene for a competition between opposition groups, Heritage and ANC, whose campaigns were both based on radical anti-government rhetoric. In fact, the competition inside the legislature will now proceed along two dimensions: between, and inside, the majority parties and within the opposition. The political elites will continue to evolve and become institutionalized; they will redistribute spheres of influence, establish unions and enter agreements.

The way Armenia's political calendar works, parliamentary elections serve as primaries for the presidential elections due less than a year later. Two parties, the Republicans and the Congress, have already announced that their leaders, i.e. the incumbent president and the first president of Armenia, will stand in the 2013 election. Should the forthcoming election prove as "competitive, vibrant and peaceful" as the OSCE judged the current one to be, it will continue the trend for open political competition, something uncommon in the former Soviet world.

Meanwhile, the main challenges to Armenia's political life persist. Armenia's political system is poorly developed; political parties are either elite groups or electoral machines, largely passive in-between elections. Business is strongly integrated with politics. The biggest challenge of all is that Armenia's citizens are not looking for meaningful political paradigms and the dominant discourse is a simplistic "good guys vs. bad guys." This being so, it is logical for a citizen to sell their vote for a bag of potatoes or cave in to economic pressure. However, the only remedy is to improve campaign techniques and allow politicians to compete for votes, something Armenia is hopefully learning to do.

About the Author

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Armenia's Parliamentary Elections: A Step Forward or a Wasted Opportunity?

By Mikayel Zolyan, Yerevan

Abstract

In spite of certain improvements, such as relatively balanced media coverage of the campaign and a drop in violent incidents, Armenia's 2012 parliamentary elections largely repeated the pattern that had been established in previous years. The ruling political force secured an overwhelming victory, employing questionable means such as bribing voters and exerting administrative pressure, and the opposition refused to accept the victory as legitimate. In terms of foreign policy implications, the elections will hardly lead to significant changes, as foreign policy issues were not at the center of this campaign.

Election Fraud: Never Again?

Armenia's record of parliamentary elections is hard to call a success story. Somewhat ironically, the only parliamentary elections that resulted in a change of government took place in 1990, when Armenia was still technically part of the USSR. The opposition unseated the Communist establishment and initiated a process aimed at Armenian independence and democratization. However, in post-Soviet Armenia the record of parliamentary elections is controversial, to say the least. Starting with the 1995 parliamentary elections, most elections have been marred by allegations of widespread fraud and the refusal by the opposition to accept the elections results as legitimate.

There were reasons to expect that the 2012 elections could represent a break with this unfortunate tradition. Eight parties and one party bloc faced each other in the elections to the National Assembly of Armenia. Three parties, the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA), Prosperous Armenia (PPA) and the Country of Laws party, represented the ruling coalition. Two parties, Heritage and Dashnaktsutyun, and one party block, the Armenian National Congress (ANC), represented the main forces of the opposition. The other three parties represented marginal political forces with little chance of appearing in the parliament. The main issue in the elections was whether the ruling RPA would keep control of the National Assembly or other parties would be able to break its political domination.

As the political situation in Armenia had been showing signs of change during recent years, there were grounds for optimism. While the previous national elections in 2008 led to violent clashes, loss of life and numerous arrests, the strained political situation has gradually eased since then. A major step toward a calmer political climate took place in 2011, when the government released the remaining political prisoners, removed the limitations that had been put on opposition rallies, and initiated negotiations with the opposition ANC. Though these negotiations did not lead to any palpable outcome, they did help to calm the political climate.

The desire to overcome the consequences of 2008 was among the factors that prompted declarations from Serzh Sargsyan's government that the elections would be the most free and fair elections in Armenia's history. These declarations were aimed, first and foremost, at the international community, particularly European agencies, who, according to the rumors circulating in Armenian political circles, had in turn promised to speed up Armenia's rapprochement with Europe and provide substantial financial aid. Among other factors which fed the hopes of a democratic breakthrough were the spread of new on-line media and the rise of civic activism, especially among the youth. Finally, many in Armenian civil society and opposition circles believed that the international context, shaped by the Arab spring and the Russian post-election protests, would make the international community less tolerant of the election irregularities that it had accepted in the past. Certainly, the elections of May 6, 2012, did represent a certain change compared to the previous Armenian elections, though not necessarily in the direction that Armenia's pro-democracy activists hoped for.

Domestic Cleavage in the Elections

Debates about economic and social problems or the challenges of reform were not central issues in the campaign. Rather, the most important issue in the 2012 elections was whether the ruling Republican Party would gain an absolute majority in the parliament, or whether it would be forced to form a coalition with other parties to form a government. To preserve its monopoly on power, RPA had to struggle not only with the opposition, but also with its main coalition partner, PPA. RPA, which has been a part of government coalition since 1995 and became the leading party in 1998, was founded and still presents itself as a nationalist-conservative party. However, like most post-Soviet ruling parties, after gaining

power it has become something which resembles a trade union of bureaucrats and businessmen that is much more interested in keeping its monopoly on power than issues of ideology. Thus, in spite of its nationalist-conservative ideology, it has embraced pro-European and pro-democracy rhetoric, when such talk was needed to attract European aid, and recently advocated rapprochement with Turkey. PPA, which may be characterized as a centrist and at the same time populist party, is even less ideology-driven than RPA. This is a party formed completely around one leader, in this case, one of Armenia's richest businessmen, Gagik Tsarukyan. PPA was created with the active participation of the second president of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan, and many observers note that the internal rivalry within the coalition between RPA and PPA mirrors the strained relations between former allies Serzh Sargsyan and Robert Kocharyan, the current and former presidents.

The main opposition force in these elections was the ANC, which itself was a union of various political parties and organizations that supported Levon Ter-Petrosyan in 2008, and refused to acknowledge the official results of those elections. Though Ter-Petrosyan himself and his party Armenian National Movement (ANM) position themselves as liberal-democrats, it is hard to discern a specific ideological orientation in the ANC in general. Two other relatively strong opposition parties, Heritage and Dashnaktsutyun, may be quite close ideologically, however they differed in their attitude to the government. Heritage has always been in opposition, it even supported Ter-Petrosyan in 2008, however soon their ways parted and in 2012 it was joined by the Free Democrats, a splinter group, which left the ANC because of its conflict with Ter-Petrosyan. As for Dashnaktsutyun, it had been a part of government coalitions since Kocharyan came to power, and supported Serzh Sargsyan in 2008. Its main reason for leaving the government coalition in 2009 was not internal politics, but its opposition to the Armenia–Turkey protocols.

The election campaign seemed to confirm some of the positive expectations that surrounded it. Arguably, the most positive development has been the media coverage of the campaign. In the past, Armenian TV broadcasters, largely under direct or indirect government control, have often been strongly biased in their coverage of election campaigns. However, this year provided relatively balanced coverage of the campaign, offering the opposition leaders opportunities to express their views and extensively covering their activities. This improved balance in the media was a result of the government's understanding that the spread of new media made it almost impossible to shut opponents out of the media field. Besides, the Armenian government realized that the international community would be monitoring the campaign and particularly its media coverage quite closely. The election campaign also represented a positive development in terms of the opportunities for the opposition to conduct their campaign. While during the previous years, campaigns had been marred by numerous incidents, in which opposition rallies were obstructed and opposition supporters were attacked, this year opposition parties faced relatively few obstacles in campaigning, with the exception of several violent incidents.

However, in spite of these positive changes, the elections of 2012 hardly represented a move in the direction of genuine democracy. The campaign was affected by widespread vote-buying and pressure on the voters, inflated voter lists, accusations of multiple voting and other shortcomings. Even though pressure on voters and the distribution of election bribes is notoriously difficult to document, numerous such cases came to the public attention during the campaign. In one case, publicized by the Armenian media, one of the ruling coalition parties, Country of Laws, distributed cans of jam to voters. In another case, a charity foundation headed by the leader of Prosperous Armenia distributed 300 tractors. The Republican Party, which controls most state institutions in Armenia, including the education system, used its access to amass support.

The official results of the elections awarded an overwhelming victory to RPA, which won 44.78% of the votes on the proportional list, and the most mandates from majoritarian districts, securing a majority sufficient for forming a government without the support of any other parties. Its competitor among the ruling coalition parties, PPA was a distant second, and opposition parties barely made it into the parliament. Finally, the Country of Laws party, which is perceived as a junior partner of the Republicans, also received about 5% of the votes and will enter the parliament, something that, according to many observers, would have been virtually impossible without bribing and pressuring the voters. Opposition parties, who were joined by PPA, refused to accept these results as legitimate. Civil society criticized the elections harshly, citing vote buying, abuse of administrative resources, and political pressure and harassment of employees by both public sector and private employers. However, unlike 2008, the opposition did not attempt to mobilize its supporters to stage massive protest rallies and decided to accept the mandates allocated to them by the official results.

While paying bribes to voters and the use of administrative resources helped to secure the victory of the ruling coalition, the weakness and tactical mistakes of the opposition also contributed to the final results. ANC, which enjoyed massive support several years earlier, had

lost many of its backers due to internal squabbles and its failed attempt at "dialogue" with the government in 2011. Heritage lost many potential voters because of its electoral list, which failed to generate excitement, and its bickering with other opposition parties. Dashnaktsutyun, which had left the ruling coalition in 2009, is still perceived by many opposition voters as standing too close to the government camp.

Civic society innovators and new media activists, who did not identify with any of the opposition forces, mostly remained passive during the campaign. As a sign of the opposition's failure to attract some of the most dynamic educated young voters, many politically-active young people preferred to spoil their ballots.[1] Some youngsters even "voted" for American vintage movie star and Internet meme Chuck Norris, adding his name to the ballot below the names of the real candidates and posting photographs of the spoilt ballots on a Facebook page created especially for that purpose. So much for "the Facebook revolution," which had been eagerly anticipated by some and feared by others.

While opposition parties and the PPA were the obvious losers of the elections, RPA may also have a cause for concern: the sweeping victory, achieved by questionable means, may yet prove quite dangerous. RPA has found itself in the position of the only force responsible for the fate of the country at a time when it faces grave internal and external challenges. Since RPA owes its victory to the support of the business and bureaucratic elites, it is highly improbable that it will be able to pursue the economic and social reforms necessary for Armenia's development, despite the fact that it had promised such reforms during the campaign. Even though it severely weakened its political opponents, RPA did not eliminate the causes for dissent in the country: as the Arab spring has shown, when popular discontent is not channeled into a functioning political system, it might prove to be a deadly threat for the rulers.

Foreign Policy Issues in the Elections

Foreign policy issues played only a small role in this election campaign. According to Armenia's constitution, the president defines foreign policy and the parliament has relatively less influence in this matter. However, the parties made a conscious decision to stay away from foreign policy issues in their campaigns. Both in Armenia–Turkey relations and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution, the two most pressing issues for Armenian foreign policy, the current situation can be characterized as "frozen." Therefore, debating these issues did not seem to make sense in the current context. Besides, the positions of the main political forces on these issues have in some ways become closer, even though in their public activities they often prefer to focus on the differences. Finally, today issues like Armenia–Turkey relations and the Karabakh conflict is not at the top of society's agenda: the Armenian public is focused mostly on internal issues, such as corruption, the economy, migration and the need to hold free and fair elections.

Of course, everything said above does not mean that the political forces taking part in the elections did not have their own approaches to foreign policy issues. RPA largely defended Sargsyan's foreign policy initiatives since 2008, praised the football diplomacy and Armenia–Turkey protocols as a sign of the government's proactive approach to foreign policy and blamed Turkey for the failure of the process. They argued that Armenia had emerged from the process with a more solid international reputation, while Turkey suffered a loss of credibility in the eyes of the international community. This view was criticized by opposition parties. ANC argued that while the Armenia–Turkey protocols could have been a positive step, the provision creating a historians' commission amounted to a sell-out of the genocide issue and resulted in halting the process of international recognition of the genocide. Moreover, as the ANC argued, Armenia's Republican party government allowed Turkey to deceive it, since Turkey received what it was looking for from the protocols, i.e. the historians' commission and a halt to the international genocide recognition process, while Armenia was left empty-handed. Heritage and Dashnaktsutyun, who had opposed the protocols from the outset, were even more critical of them and demanded recalling Armenia's signature. The remaining ruling coalition parties, Prosperous Armenia and Country of Laws mostly refrained from discussing this topic.

Discussions regarding the Karabakh issue were also quite rare in 2012. This silence represented a contrast to 2008, when pro-opposition and pro-government camps sharply criticized each other: Ter-Petrosyan condemned the government for being unable and unwilling to find a solution to the Karabakh conflict, while the government camp accused Ter-Petrosyan of being too soft on the issue. Ter-Petrosyan responded by accusing the government of bending to Azerbaijan's pressure and leaving the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities out of the negotiations.

However, after 2008 Sargsyan changed the rhetoric, which his supporters employed during the election campaign, and issued statements implying his readiness to make serious concessions in Karabakh, particularly the withdrawal of Armenian forces from what he called the "security zone," in exchange for Azerbaijan's acceptance of the principle of self-determination for Nagorno-Kara-

1 There is no "against all" option on the ballot in Armenian elections.

bakh. However, as negotiations over the Madrid Principles stalled, and the Azerbaijani government began to stress its readiness for a military solution, the Armenian government returned to the more assertive rhetoric of the previous period. As for Armenian society at large, the debates over the acceptable level of concessions in case of a compromise solution are increasingly seen as irrelevant, given the uncompromising position of Azerbaijan. The continuing firefights between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces in the border zone only confirmed the perception that no compromise is possible, at least in the near future.

This public consensus was also reflected in the positions of political forces in the 2012 campaign. Though Ter-Petrosyan continued to advocate a compromise solution for Karabakh, this theme was no longer a prominent part of the ANC's campaigning. The ANC criticized the government for leaving Nagorno-Karabakh authorities out of the negotiation process, and claimed that the only acceptable solution is one that is approved by Nagorno-Karabakh itself. Heritage criticized the government for being too soft on Karabakh and defended its proposal to unilaterally recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. As for Dashnaktsutyun, it has always been a proponent of a more assertive position on the issue. Other political forces largely refrained from addressing Karabakh in the campaign. To sum up, a certain degree of consensus exists across the Armenian political spectrum that in current conditions a compromise solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is unrealistic and the most pressing goals at this stage are preventing an escalation of the conflict and bringing Nagorno-Karabakh back to the negotiating table.

Though the question of whether Armenia should have a pro-Russian or pro-Western orientation is increasingly becoming a part of the public debate, it was mostly ignored by the political parties. These groups usually try to refrain from expressing opinions on the issue of Armenia's "Western" or "Eastern" perspective, or rather claim, as impossible as it seems, that they support both options: the leading political forces were at great pains to emphasize their support both for continuing alliance with Russia and deepening cooperation with the West. During the campaign there were speculations that RPA had closer relations with European structures, while PPA enjoyed the tacit support of Putin's government. In the opposition field similar speculations singled out Heritage, led by American-born Raffi Hovannisian, as allegedly pro-American. However, these parties refrained from addressing these speculations publicly and did nothing in their campaigns that would confirm these speculations. ANC also refrained from raising issues of political orientation, though it did make some references, which made it obvious that on the one hand they did see a more "Western" future in Armenia: thus it argued that Armenia should follow the path of the reforms set by Georgia. On the other hand, they also criticized the West for turning a blind eye to human rights violations in Armenia and in this way "legitimizing" the current Armenian government.

Taking all of these issues into consideration, it is hard to expect any major changes in Armenia's foreign policy as a consequence of these elections. The key variable is not so much Armenia's political parties, but the West's reaction to the recent elections. In this respect the West has found itself in quite a difficult position. On the one hand, in spite of some progress compared to previous years, the elections were still quite far from the democratic ideal, and failing to evaluate them accordingly would not only compromise the moral standing of the West in Armenia and the region, but also could send the wrong signal to other governments in the post-Soviet space, particularly those of Georgia and Azerbaijan, where elections are expected soon. On the other hand, criticizing the elections too harshly would risk alienating the Armenian leadership and pushing it further into the arms of Russia, which in turn is pressuring Armenia to take part in the Eurasian Union initiatives. Whatever the decision, it will affect not only the state of democracy in Armenia, but also that of the whole region.

About the Author

Mikayel Zolyan is an historian and political analyst based in Yerevan. He received a Ph.D. in history from Yerevan State University and currently teaches at V. Brusov Yerevan State Linguistic University. His research interests include issues of nationalism and conflict, as well as democratic transition in the post-Soviet context.

Further Reading

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- Yerevan Press Club, Report on Monitoring of Armenian Broadcast Coverage of the May 6, 2012 Elections to the RA National Assembly, http://www.ypc.am/media_research/In/en
- Partnership for Open Society, Statement on the 2012 Parliamentary Elections in Armenia, May 11, 2012, http://www.partnership.am/en/Statements/38416

Social Media and Armenia's 2012 Parliamentary Elections

By Onnik Krikorian, Yerevan

Abstract

Following a bitterly disputed presidential election in February 2008, parliamentary elections held on 6 May 2012 were a crucial test for Armenia's fledgling democratic process. In particular, with 280,340 Facebook users in the country, or 9.45 percent of the population,[1] there has also been much speculation about the role social media can play in that process, not least since the 2011 Middle East and North Africa uprisings. However, despite some notable examples of the use of Facebook to mobilize citizens on non-politicized issues in recent years, the role of social media in the 6 May 2012 parliamentary elections was limited. Nevertheless, online tools did prove viable as a new medium for registering and reacting to reported electoral violations and other problems.

Background

Despite Armenia's poor economy, exacerbated by the global economic crisis, and a GDP per capita of $5,400 in 2011,[2] Internet penetration continues to increase. Even so, data from the 2010 Caucasus Barometer from the Caucasus Resource Research Centers (CRRC) indicates that only 19 percent of Armenians go online every day. Although data from CRRC's 2011 household survey shows that figure increasing further, a staggering 60 percent of the population had never accessed the Internet at all in 2010. Moreover, early data[3] from the 2011 Caucasus Barometer reports that just 7 percent of Armenians use Facebook, compared to 18 percent using other social networking sites. Socialbakers, in comparison, instead puts the figure for Facebook penetration at 9.45 percent.

Whatever the figure, following the last presidential election, international donors have become increasingly interested in funding online projects,[4] and not least since the state of emergency following the 1 March 2008 post-election clashes which left 10 people dead. With a media blackout imposed on the country for 20 days, blogs were not affected by the emergency situation even though sites such as Radio Free Europe and YouTube were temporarily blocked.[5] Indeed, some observers likened their role during the post-election environment to that of samizdat during the Soviet era. At that time, the heavily polarized political environment on the ground was replicated in cyberspace with pro-government bloggers also spreading information against the opposition or posting updates supportive of the newly elected president.

Since 2008, online social networking sites such as Facebook have arguably changed the situation further, rapidly taking over from blogs as the main online medium for sharing news, opinion and information. Attempts last year by the opposition in Armenia to stage its own post-MENA protests calling for fresh parliamentary and presidential elections illustrated that only too well. Encouraged by protests in Tunisia and Egypt, the opposition also declared that it would stage a "Facebook Revolution" in Armenia, but few signed up to the various Facebook pages set up to attract support. Even so, the numbers taking to the streets were significantly higher, with some demonstrations attracting as many as 15,000 people. Most definitely not a Facebook-organized protest, it highlighted that traditional activism remains the main way to engage the population.[6]

Non-Political On-Line Engagement

Of arguably more importance, however, is how Facebook has empowered at least some of those in-between the polarized government and opposition camps. As an example, the most successful use of social media to date has been alongside traditional campaigns to engage citizens in non-politicized, i.e. non-opposition, activism in general. Mobile phone videos posted on YouTube depicting the bullying of pupils by teachers in state-run schools[7] resulted in changes in the education system, for example, and throughout 2010, in much publicized incidents, hazing in the Armenian military caused outrage among many citizens, and especially those using

1 Socialbakers, Facebook Statistics by Country, as of 11 May 2012: http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/.

2 CIA Factbook Armenia: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/am.html.

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4 USAID, Alternative Resources in the Media, http://armenia.usaid.gov/en/node/269

5 YouTube Blocked in Armenia?, http://blogoscoped.com/archive/2008-03-10-n27.html

6 Global Voices, Armenia: Social Networks for Social Revolution? http://globalvoicesonline.org/2011/02/26/armenia-social-networks-for-revolution/

7 Global Voices, Armenia: Abuse in Yerevan School http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/10/11/armenia-abuse-in-yerevan-school/

Facebook.[8] Online campaigns to prevent the demolition of a Soviet-era open-air cinema to make room for the construction of a church, as well as another campaign to protest the introduction of foreign language schools in Armenia, also attracted support crossing party-lines more so than any actions staged by the opposition.

The previous Yerevan mayor also took to Facebook, with some serious discussions occurring online about the municipality's policies, such as the shooting of stray dogs on the streets of the Armenian capital. These are the types of issues that international consultants working on donor-funded projects address, with a number of projects launched to allow citizens to report the problem of potholes and garbage directly to the local authorities. The online site from this project should also facilitate better communication and cooperation between citizens and local officials after pilot projects in three regional cities of Armenia use GPS positioning from mobile phones to map the towns themselves.

The 2012 Parliamentary Election

Given this experience, it was only natural to expect a similar use of the same online tools for the 6 May election. However, despite the emergence of many online news sites, and the sharing of many of their stories, their reach remains limited. A 2011 Media Public Opinion and Preference Survey by the CRRC, for example, found that 87 percent of Armenians rely on television for their daily news and information.[9] That data showed that only 11 percent relied on social media sites and 9 percent on online news sites.

As the first national election since the bitterly disputed 2008 presidential vote, and in light of increased interest in social media following the MENA uprisings, the media naturally focused on the potential use of Facebook in the 2012 parliamentary election. On 12 April, for example, less than a month before the vote, Eurasianet reported the sighting of a flag decorated with the Facebook logo among the more traditional Armenian tricolors waved at an opposition campaign rally on 30 March in Yerevan's Liberty Square. "I brought the Facebook flag to the rally to show the government that now there is a unique, reliable alternative [for information] to be used by everyone," 24-year old Areg Gevorgian told the online news site. International donors were also interested in the use of social media, the article noted, reporting that Laura Baghdasarian, head of the Region Center, had been funded by the Open Society Foundations-Armenia to monitor the use of Facebook during the pre-election campaign.

"Many politicians and parties have registered accounts in Facebook since last fall," she told Eurasianet, "It is interactive, and this is of key importance; through likes, shares and comments, no other tool provides such an opportunity to understand an audience."

While this is true, there was actually very little engagement online, perhaps in part because of the low importance placed on the parliamentary rather than presidential elections by many Armenians. Indeed, the monitoring by Baghdasarian was actually limited to the Facebook pages of specifically chosen online news sites. Observations on the use of social media by political parties and individual candidates were also not encouraging. "[…] political parties are waging a battle not to gain citizens' love and trust and to acquire new followers, but to speak more, shout louder and disseminate more information than their opponents. In this sense, all the online platforms become not opportunities for dialogue or for establishing contact but simply ordinary platforms," wrote Zaruhi Batoyan on Media.am.[10]

Ararat Magazine, for example, even noted the lack of online campaign advertisements by the governmental Prosperous Armenia, even though throughout Armenia there were many traditional billboards for the party and especially its leader, former arm-wrestling world champion and businessman Gagik Tsarukian. Elsewhere on Facebook, although admittedly based on real-world observations by this author, there was little actual engagement among voters. However, that's not to say that Facebook wasn't useful for activists, especially in highlighting concerns about the pre-election environment. Eurasianet, for example, reported that one Facebook user shared his concerns about the electoral register listing an improbably large number of residents in one address on his personal page. "Edgar Tamarian posted about the apparently unusually spacious flat after finding it on a list of registered voters on the national police website; all of the supposed voters hailed from Georgia's ethnic Armenian village of Nardevan. The police claimed the entry was "a mistake" that they had somehow overlooked."

And on election day itself, Satik Seyranyan, editor of the *168 Hours* newspaper, and herself running in the election, reported on Facebook that the ink used to stamp voter's passports disappeared in less than an hour instead of the 12 hours it should have taken. Drawing on concerns that multiple voting could occur in such a

8 Global Voices, Armenia: Army forced to act after hazing video circulates online http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/09/24/armenia-army-forced-to-act-after-hazing-video-circulates-online/.

9 Armenia2011MediaPublicOpinionandPreferenceSurvey http://www.slideshare.net/bekaisa/ar-media-presentationenglish

10 Media.am, How Political Parties are Using Social Media Ahead of Elections … http://www.media.am/node/1751

situation, other activists and online users posted photographs of the stamp to show if it did or did not disappear.

Prior to election day, on 4 May, Facebook and Twitter, the micro-blogging service which has even fewer users in Armenia than Facebook, were used by some to share first news of an accident at a campaign rally and concert by the ruling Republican Party (HHK) in which dozens of balloons, apparently filled with hydrogen, were ignited by a cigarette. Over 150 people were hospitalized in the incident.

Perhaps the most promising development, however, was the deployment of an online election monitoring site, iditord.org, based on the popular Ushahidi platform. Allowing citizens to submit electoral code violations via telephone, SMS, Twitter, or its own web interface, around 1,000 reports were registered from the launch of the site in early April to the end of polling on Election Day. Since then over 100 more reports were added. Nevertheless, showing the vulnerability of such systems, the site was brought down for 20 minutes by a Denial of Service (DOS) attack on 5 May, and for a few hours the following day when voters went to the polls. According to PanArmenian.Net, however, only two cases reported on the site are being investigated by police.[11]

In conclusion, while the use of online tools was more evolved for the recent parliamentary election in Armenia compared to other votes before it, a combination of apathy and low voter interest prevented them from becoming crucial and indispensable means for combatting fraud or engaging the electorate. Even so, with Armenians traditionally more interested in presidential votes, that will likely not be the case when the incumbent president, Serzh Sarkissian, runs for re-election in 2013. Nevertheless, social media will have to be used as part of a wider and more traditional campaign by civil society and political parties alike.

About the Author
Onnik Krikorian is a freelance photojournalist and writer. He is also the Caucasus editor for Global Voices Online, a leading citizen media site founded in 2004 at Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet and Society.

11 PanArmenian.Net, Expert: police not interested in iDitord forgery records http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/106761/Expert_police_not_interested_in_iDitord_forgery_records

Youth NGOs in Armenia and the 2012 Parliamentary Elections

By Inge Snip, Tbilisi, Uppsala

Abstract
During the campaign for Armenia's May 6, 2012, parliamentary elections, there were some reports of aggressive encounters between youth groups affiliated with the main political parties. However, in contrast to previous elections, there was little or no violence on election day itself. Moreover, due in part to a surprisingly high level of cooperation between several youth NGOs, the OSCE, Western diplomats and local observation missions deemed the elections to be relatively more free and fair than previous ones. The polarization of the political field has led to a more active society—less apathetic and more engaged; this polarization has created space for a larger number of youth NGOs to operate in the country, and a more polarized NGO field. Although civil society in Armenia remains highly politicized, the expanding public space provided more breathing room for non-politically aligned groups. The following article examines the background of youth activism in Armenia, takes a closer look at the different youth groups and their aims, and analyzes their roles during the campaign and on election day itself.

Youth Activism in Armenia
The sun had not risen when a group of ambitious youth wandered the streets of an ice-cold Yerevan in search of election fraud during Presidential elections of 2008 in Armenia. In the previous days, this international group—Armenians joined by Georgians, Russians, Danes, Dutch and Norwegians—had prepared assiduously for this election observation mission. Composed

of groups of 4 to 5, including at least two Armenians, the youth had made a structured analysis of which polling stations to visit. The main focus was determining where to observe the opening and where to monitor the ballot counting, since most fraud takes place at those times. With temperatures dropping to -20 degrees Celsius, icy roads and a cutting wind, the elections were a challenge to the voters, the polling station workers and the observers alike. The Federation of Youth Clubs of Armenia (FYCA) in cooperation with the Danish youth group SILBA organized this international observation mission in order to promote youth sociopolitical participation as impartial observers and their active engagement in the electoral process. With more than 200 applications from Armenians to participate, it seemed as if young people were active in civil society in 2008.

However, opinion polls conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center in 2008, 2009 and 2010 showed only low levels of active youth participation. Moreover, young people in 2008 generally did not go to the polling station to tick a box and vote. The FYCA's election mission in 2008 observed much the same thing: "[t]he age distribution of the voters was mostly on the side of the elder generations; the young voters were less active." Most NGOs—whether youth or general—were politically aligned in 2008: either in favor of former President Levan Ter-Petrosyan or against him; few were neutral, according to Emil Danielyan, an Armenian journalist for RFE/RL and other outlets.

In contrast to the politicized civil society in 2008, now it seems as if NGOs are breaking away from their ties with political parties and are overcoming their differences in order to ensure more free and fair elections. Of the 2012 elections, the Economist wrote that "in a further sign of progress, Armenia's quarrelsome civil-society movement mobilized to keep the elections clean." A Western diplomat present in Yerevan during the elections explained to me that the involvement of NGOs in general was not only was much greater, but also much more successful than it had ever been.

The importance of an active—and independent—civil society for the democratization process is crucial. Scholars such as Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba have argued that civil society (as political culture) is essential to ensure a healthy democracy since it leads to a society in which there is more open information, resulting in fairer elections and citizens holding their government responsible for its actions.[1] Moreover, Robert D. Putnam utilized Pierre Bourdieu's idea of social capital to show how the state of civil society in essence indicates the amount of social capital—trust, respect, shared values—there is in a society. The lager the amount of social capital, the more society holds together.[2]

However, not everyone agrees about the positive side effects of a strong civil society. Pawel Zaleski and John Agnew argue that civil society has obtained a large amount of political power without being democratically chosen to have such power, and therefore it is impossible to hold it accountable for its actions.[3]

This being said, in a country such as Armenia, where an independent civil society still is far from a reality, one should wonder what the actual impact of civil society and youth participation is, and whether it has a positive or negative effect. Moreover, even if we accept the argument that civil society acts as the protector of democracy and democratization projects, a fair concern would be the fact that NGOs are not elected and thus, although they hold political power, they are not held accountable in any way.

On the other hand, what is the impact of social capital in Armenia? According to the 2011 Social Cohesion Survey conducted by the CRRC Armenia, the numbers seem more grim than what most political analysts claim. These results are supported by journalists like Danielyan, who is skeptical about what civil society in Armenia can do to promote democracy. He believes that a lot of the international grants provided to the country are being wasted. Although there are quite a few organizations, such as Counterpart International, which in his opinion seem to be doing interesting work, he argues that little information is disseminated about what this group is up to and the results of its projects are not very encouraging.

Armenia's Youth NGOs

Since an independent civil society is important for democratization, it is interesting to take a closer look at the composition of youth NGOs and to distinguish among the various types of youth involvement. First of all, there are the youth groups of the political parties, including the youth movements of the Republican and Prosperous Armenia parties. As noted above, civil society in Armenia is highly politicized. Moreover, it is also filled with people who are mainly interested in advancing their careers. A close analysis of the youth groups aligned with the Republican and Prosperous Armenia

1 Almond, G., & Verba, S., *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes And Democracy In Five Nations*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage), 1989.

2 Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster), 2000.

3 Pawel Zaleski, "Global Non-governmental Administrative System: Geosociology of the Third Sector," in: *Gawin, Dariusz & Glinski, Piotr [ed.]: Civil Society in the Making* (Warsaw: IFiS Publishers,), 2006; John Agnew, "Democracy and Human Rights," in Johnston, R.J., Taylor, Peter J. and Watts, Michael J., *Geographies of Global Change*, 2002, Hoboken: Blackwell.

parties suggests that few of the activists are there for the political ideas and that most of the volunteers become involved to secure a nice government job.

A second type of youth activism includes the civic sector youth, including those involved in environmental and human rights movements, such as the FYCA and Solidarity of Students. These groups are more vocal and more determined in fighting for their rights than the political youth. Moreover, the political youth are often attached to the policies and standpoints of their seniors within their respective political parties or groups, and thus are less independent in their activities and opinions.

Armenian young people actively participate in various advocacy campaigns and often join political parties, according to the National Democratic Institute (NDI) Armenia office. This view is shared by political analyst Robert Giragosian, director of the Regional Studies Centre. Both NDI and Giragosian see the successes of youth environmental groups as indicators of their engagement and commitment to deepen civil society. Likewise, although journalist Danielyan is skeptical when it comes to the role of civil society, he does agree that youth organizations working on the environment have recently had some major successes with their campaigns. NDI explains:

"Through advocacy efforts, a group of young people in Yerevan succeeded in making the government change its decision about the construction of trade kiosks in a downtown park. And, as a result, the semi-constructed kiosks are being dismantled by the local authorities. Such examples and others drastically change the environment in the country."

However, Giragosian does not consider youth activism and their work through NGOs as changing attitudes in the county "as they are not yet in positions of influence." Nevertheless, he does acknowledge that the success of the campaigns shape public opinion.

Thus, in essence it could be argued that civil society's role, and the active participation of youth in it, has changed over the past few years in Armenia. Giragosian: "The popular demand for real change is much more pronounced, thanks to greater civic and political activism and a decline in the apathy of the past." This new activism is a result of many different factors, but includes the divide between the two ruling coalition parties, the Republican Party of President Serzh Sargsyan and Prosperous Armenia, led by businessman Gagik Tsarukyan, that became more apparent in the wake of the elections.

Youth Activism During the 2012 Elections

Even though the composition, activity and scope of civil society has changed only slightly in recent years, it is interesting to analyze its role during the 2012 elections. Several youth NGOs managed to organize election monitor missions, with the NGO It's your choice claiming to have more than 4,000 active observers. A Western diplomat confirmed that several NGOs had thousands of monitors actively observing the elections. He, moreover, was very pleased to see the prominent NGOs working well together, something which had not been evident previously in the politicized Armenian civil society. In addition, young people were actively involved in ensuring that the elections would be more free and fair via new social media, such as Twitter and Facebook.

The cooperation and the active involvement of youth, both in monitoring the polling stations and reporting irregularities online, resulted in a more transparent election day. For example, due to active online reporting, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) had to address what has been called "the case of the disappearing stamps." After multiple complaints online, including a statement by former foreign minister Vartan Oskanian, that the stamps placed in passports after the bearer voted had disappeared after a couple of hours, the CEC had no other choice than to react. NGO *It's your choice* however, did release a press statement noting that the elections were largely democratic despite various irregularities.

Thus, although civil society in Armenia is still highly politicized, the last elections did show that the active involvement and cooperation of NGOs is possible—which could indicate a possible change in the independence of Armenia's civil society. Moreover, recent successes by environmental youth groups in advocacy campaigns give hope for a more pluralistic and effective independent civil society. As the representative of NDI told me "[s]uch examples and others drastically change the environment of the country."

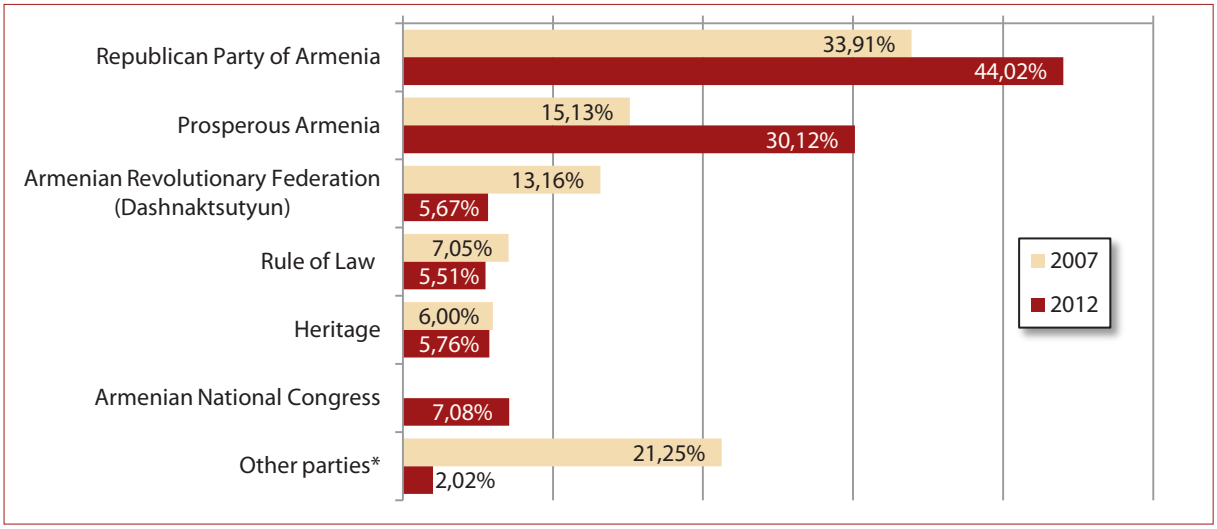
About the Author

Inge Snip has been living intermittently in Georgia for the last 4.5 years. She has worked for several NGOs and is a founder of Evolutsia.net, a news and analysis website covering the political landscape of the Caucasus. She is currently finishing a Master degree in Politics and International Studies at Uppsala University, for which she did individual research on elite configuration at the Harriman Institute, Columbia University in New York City for 6 months. Inge has a LLB degree in International and European Law from the University of Groningen, and a Russian language certificate from the Kyiv National Economic Trade University, where she studied for one year. For a full resume see, her linkedin profile at http://www.linkedin.com/in/ingesnip.

DOCUMENTATION

Results of the Parliamentary Elections 2007 and 2012

Figure 1: Percent of Votes Cast 2007 and 2012



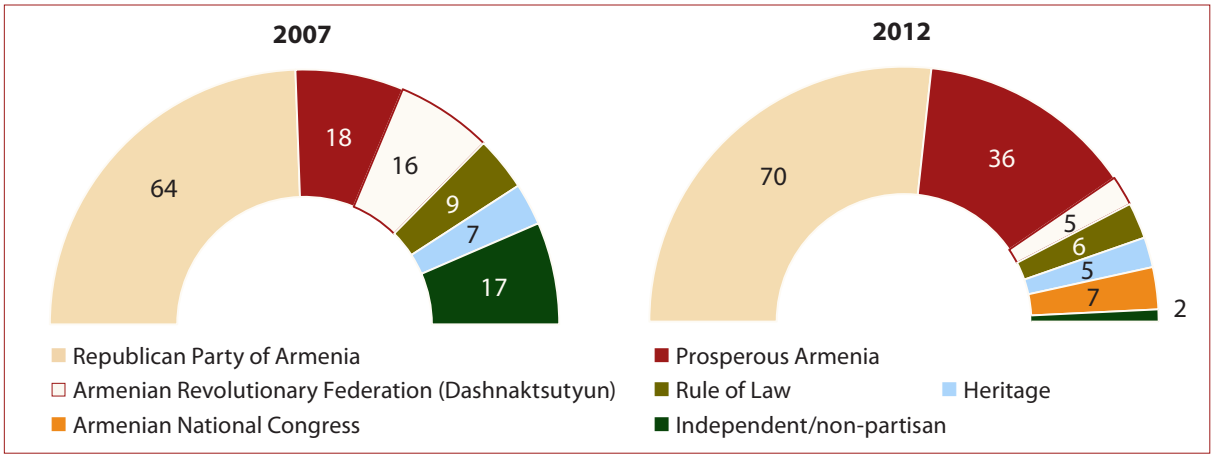
** Total votes for parties that did not cross the five percent (parties) or seven percent (alliances; the only alliance is the Armenian National Congress) threshold necessary for representation in parliament*

Source: Central Election Commission of the Republic of Armenia, http://www.elections.am/

Figure 2: Voters' Turnout 2007 and 2012

Source: Central Election Commission of the Republic of Armenia, http://www.elections.am/

Figure 3: Distribution of Seats in the National Assembly 2007 and 2012

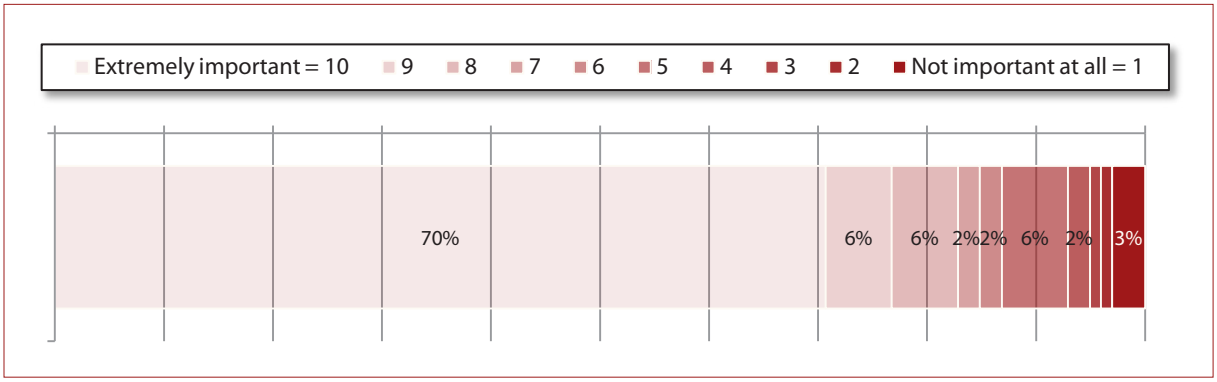


NB: Of the 131 members of the National Assembly, 90 are elected by proportional representation (party lists) and 41 from the 41 constituencies by a majoritarian vote. Source: Central Election Commission of the Republic of Armenia, http://www.elections.am/

OPINION POLL

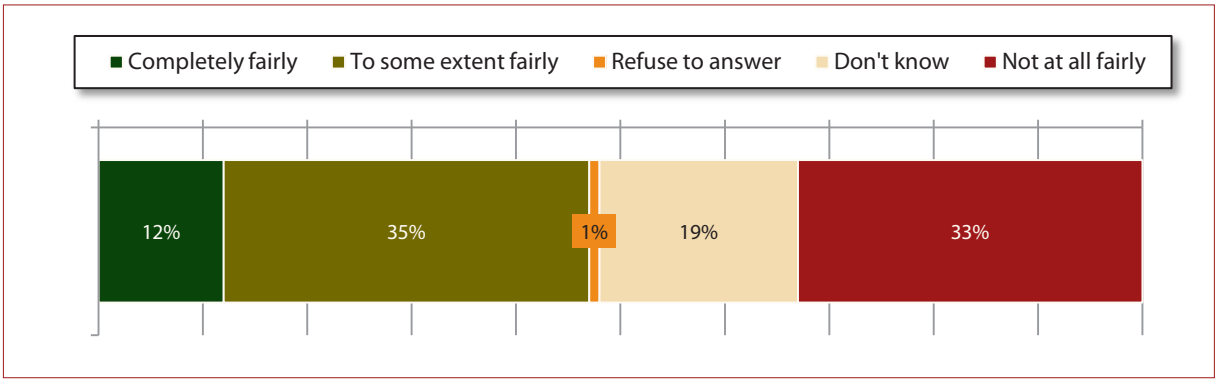
Should I Vote?

Figure 1: In your opinion, how important it is for a good citizen to vote in elections? (Caucasus Barometer 2011, Armenia, %)



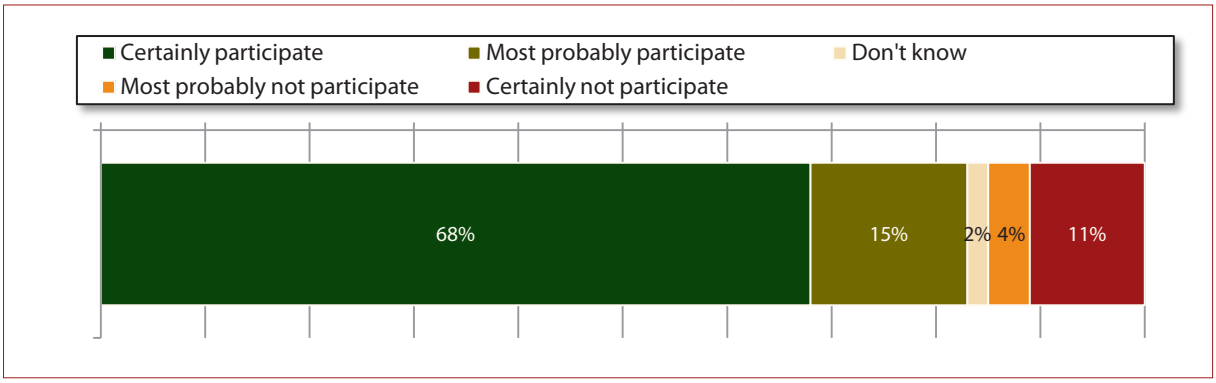
Source: Caucasus Barometer 2011, http://www.crrccenters.org/caucasusbarometer

Figure 2: Would you say that the most recent election (national [Presidential] election of February, 2008) was conducted… (Caucasus Barometer 2011, Armenia, %)



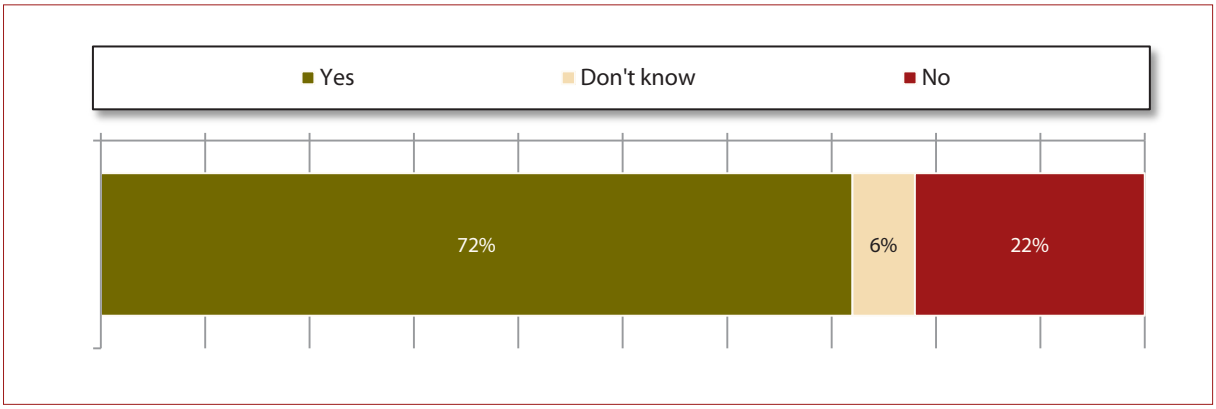
Source: Caucasus Barometer 2011, http://www.crrccenters.org/caucasusbarometer

Figure 6: If presidential elections were held next Sunday, would you participate in the elections or not? (Caucasus Barometer 2011, Armenia, %)



Source: Caucasus Barometer 2011, http://www.crrccenters.org/caucasusbarometer

Figure 4: All things being equal, would you vote for a woman candidate for president? (Caucasus Barometer 2011, Armenia, %)



Source: Caucasus Barometer 2011, http://www.crrccenters.org/caucasusbarometer

CHRONICLE

From 23 April to 18 May 2012

23 April 2012	Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman visits Baku for a two-day visit to discuss Israeli–Azerbaijani cooperation
23 April 2012	Armenia marks the Genocide Remembrance Day to honor the victims of the mass killings by Ottoman Turks during World War I
24 April 2012	The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry says that the visit by the Israeli Foreign Minister is focused on bilateral relations between the two countries and is not directed against Iran or any other country
24 April 2012	A scuffle erupts in the Georgian Parliament after an opposition lawmaker brings up the issue of whether to recognize as genocide the mass killings of Armenians by Ottoman Turks during World War I
25 April 2012	The Azerbaijani Interior Ministry says that Azerbaijan and Russia have started a week-long joint operation targeting organized criminal groups and terrorist organizations involved in the trafficking of munitions, explosives and drugs in Azerbaijan's ten northern districts near the border with the North Caucasus
25 April 2012	The breakaway region of Abkhazia declares the head of the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia Andrzej Tyszkiewicz "persona non grata"
26 April 2012	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili says he is ready to resign if Russia gives up control of the two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia
27 April 2012	Armenian officials say that three Armenian servicemen were killed by shots fired at a military vehicle along the border with Azerbaijan
30 April 2012	Lithuanian Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius visits Georgia and meets with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to discuss Lithuania's support for Georgia's European integration during the Lithuanian presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2013
2 May 2012	Georgia's parliamentary committee for diaspora and Caucasus issues holds a first discussion of Georgia's draft State Strategy on Relations with the Peoples of the North Caucasus
2 May 2012	The State Minister for diaspora issues Papuna Davitaia says that Georgia plans to set up a "parliament" composed of representatives of the Georgian diaspora abroad to increase its involvement in the country's affairs

Continued overleaf

4 May 2012	More than 140 people are injured when gas filled balloons explode at a campaign rally in support of Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian's Republican Party in Yerevan; the police ruling out a deliberate attack.
4 May 2012	The European Broadcasting Union imposes a fine on Armenia over its refusal to participate in the Eurovision Song Contest in Baku
4 May 2012	Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili says that Georgia plans new legislation for a special financial zone on its Black Sea coast region near the Turkish border
6 May 2012	Parliamentary elections are held in Armenia with about 44 percent of the votes won by Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian's Republican Party and about 30 percent going to Prosperous Armenia led by businessman Gagik Tsarukyan
7 May 2012	Opposition parties rally in Baku during an unsanctioned demonstration to demand that the authorities allow them to organize public gatherings in the center of the capital
8 May 2012	An amendment to the Georgian constitution is initiated in the Georgian Parliament to give the planned new city of Lazika, to be built from scratch on the Black Sea coast near the administrative border with the breakaway region of Abkhazia, a special constitutional status that will make it particularly attractive for foreign investments
10 May 2012	Russia's Antiterrorism Committee (NAK) releases a statement claiming that the Federal Security Service (FSB) in cooperation with its Abkhaz counterpart found an arms cache on Abkhaz territory that Chechen militants intended to use to target Sochi during the 2014 Winter Olympics and claims that the transportation of the weapons was arranged in cooperation with the Georgian security services and illegal armed formations in Turkey
11 May 2012	Russian President Vladimir Putin meets with the leader of the breakaway region of Abkhazia Alexander Ankvab in Sochi
11 May 2012	Georgian businessman and opposition leader Bidzina Ivanishvili pledges to sell all his businesses and properties in Russia by the end of May
13 May 2012	Five people, including two children, die after a heavy rain causes a flood in Georgia's capital of Tbilisi
15 May 2012	The European Union issues progress reports on the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans in the three South Caucasus states
15 May 2012	Georgian Sports Minister Vladimer Vardzelashvili says that Georgia is making a solo bid to host the European soccer championships in 2020, abandoning its previous plan to apply jointly with Azerbaijan since Azerbaijan had asked to host the 2020 Summer Olympic Games
17 May 2012	The first-ever march of gay activists in Tbilisi to mark the International Day against Homophobia is blocked by an Orthodox group
18 May 2012	An Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections (IATF) is created in Georgia to react to possible violations ahead of the parliamentary elections in October and to ensure a fair and transparent electoral environment
18 May 2012	Lawmakers in the US State of Rhode Island pass a resolution calling on US President Barack Obama and the US Congress to recognize the independence of the disputed region of Nagorno Karabakh

Compiled by Lili Di Puppo

For the full chronicle since 2009 see www.laender-analysen.de/cad

READING TIP

Die Ukraine und Georgien. Ein Überblick über die Beziehungen in den letzten Jahren

Von Jenny Alwart, Leipzig

Zusammenfassung
Seit einigen Jahren vertiefen die Ukraine und Georgien ihre politischen, wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Kontakte. Rosen- und Orange Revolution haben zu einem besonders intensiven Austausch und einem solidarischen Zusammenschluss gegenüber der Politik Russlands geführt. Die Beziehungen zwischen den beiden Schwarzmeerstaaten werden allerdings selten betrachtet, steht doch das Verhältnis der Ukraine zu den Nachbarn Russland und Polen im Vordergrund der Wahrnehmung. Der Beitrag wirft ein Schlaglicht auf die jüngsten Entwicklungen, die ein Beispiel für Bemühungen um insgesamt konstruktive Beziehungen im postsowjetischen Raum sind.

Der Text wird durch zahlreiche Grafiken und Statistiken ergänzt.

Ukraine-Analysen 101, 13. März 2012, http://www.laender-analysen.de/dlcounter/dlcounter.php?url=../ukraine/pdf/UkraineAnalysen101.pdf

ABOUT THE CAUCASUS ANALYTICAL DIGEST

The Caucasus Analytical Digest (CAD) is a monthly internet publication jointly produced by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (http://www.crrccenters.org/), the Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen (www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de), the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies of the George Washington University (www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu), the Resource Security Institute in Washington, DC (resourcesecurityinstitute.org/) and the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich (www.css.ethz.ch) with support from the German Association for East European Studies (DGO). The Caucasus Analytical Digest analyzes the political, economic, and social situation in the three South Caucasus states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia within the context of international and security dimensions of this region's development. CAD is supported by a grant from Robert Bosch Stiftung (http://www.bosch-stiftung.de).

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Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen

Founded in 1982, the Research Centre for East European Studies (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa) at the University of Bremen is dedicated to the interdisciplinary analysis of socialist and post-socialist developments in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The major focus is on the role of dissent, opposition and civil society in their historic, political, sociological and cultural dimensions. With a unique archive on dissident culture under socialism and with an extensive collection of publications on Central and Eastern Europe, the Research Centre regularly hosts visiting scholars from all over the world.
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Caucasus Research Resource Centers

The Caucasus Research Resource Centers program (CRRC) is a network of research centers in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. We strengthen social science research and public policy analysis in the South Caucasus. A partnership between the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Eurasia Partnership Foundation, and local universities, the CRRC network integrates research, training and scholarly collaboration in the region.

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