

ARMENIA: YEAR OF ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article takes a look at the national and local elections held in Armenia in 2012-2013, examining in particular the opportunities they created for political competition, the validity of the election results, their consequences, and so on. The author prefaces his study by first examining the national elections held in Armenia in the 1990s and 2000s. Furthermore, he focuses

on the viewpoints that are still pertinent today and can enhance our understanding of the current election processes. Whenever possible, the author presents a detailed review of all the statistics currently available to characterize the election process and the development of the domestic political situation in Armenia several years after the 2008 presidential election.

KEYWORDS: *Armenia's domestic policy, Armenia's local self-government system, 2012 parliamentary elections in Armenia, 2013 presidential elections in Armenia.*

Introduction

The post-election opposition of 2008, which took human lives, put the sustainability and consistency of Armenia's political system to a serious test. In 2012-the beginning of 2013, another round

of parliamentary and presidential elections was held in the country. Local elections were also held in the interval between them.

According to the minimalist conception, a country can call its government system democratic when it holds competitive elections. Joseph Schumpeter, one of the initiators of this conception, defined democracy as follows: “the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”¹ This conception saw the light in the 1930s; since then elections, even if only formal, began being held in almost every country of the world. So the above definition was upgraded and now presupposes the existence of an institutional environment, including free media, and so on.

Even if the quality of the election process is not taken as a criterion of the existence or absence of democracy, nation-wide voting is still a good starting point for carrying out a case-study of the political system in a particular country (especially if the concept “elections” covers the pre-election and post-election processes and not only the technical aspect of voting).

Elections have been going on for around a year in Armenia (this year-long period began in February 2012 with the election for mayor of Hrazdan and ended in February 2013 with the national presidential election) and at the time this article was written, they had still not completely ended.

In May 2012, elections were held to the National Assembly (Parliament) of Armenia, the preparations for which have been the main thrust of the country’s domestic policy for several years now. In September of the same year, elections were held to the local self-government bodies in most of the country’s communities.

The upshot of this election marathon, which was an indicator of the development of the Armenian political system, can now be summed up and put in a nutshell. This article will examine how the elections were held and their political outcome, as well as their influence on the alignment of forces in the country.

Prehistory: Elections in Independent Armenia

Since Armenia gained its independence, it has held parliamentary elections five times and presidential elections six times, but only one of these elections was not contested by society and the losing sides. This was the first presidential election held in 1991. Since then, the opposition, which has never gained a victory, has always challenged the election results. Russian expert Sergey Markedonov explains the show of protest by the fact that at all the subsequent elections, the “silver prize-winner” gathered enough votes to bring its voters out into the streets.²

Presidential Elections

Presidential elections in Armenia have always been characterized by a high level of competition accompanied by an acute political standoff. However, this was frequently of a speculative rather than ideological nature, since the candidates essentially offered the voters the same thing.

¹ J. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, Third Edition, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1950, Ch. II, “Another Theory of Democracy,” p. 269.

² See: S. Markedonov, “Raffi Hovannisian: zaiavka na liderstvo,” *Politkom*, 27 February, 2013, available at [<http://www.politcom.ru/15397.html>].

Presidential elections in Armenia have always been held in an atmosphere of intense struggle and accompanied by accusations of vote-counting fraud. A protest electorate began forming in 1996; dissatisfied with the socioeconomic situation in the country, it always voted against the government. This electorate, localized primarily in Erevan and other cities of the country, comprises 30-40% of all the active voters and is willing to vote for practically any deputy who can offer an alternative to the pro-government party.

Levon Ter-Petrosian won the presidential election held in Armenia in September 1996, gathering less than 52% of the votes. Second place went to Vazgen Manukian; he gathered 41.3% of the votes, but in so doing considered himself the winner. The mass protest demonstrations that followed the announcement of the election results did not lead to a change in power. Eighteen months later, Vazgen Manukian gathered only 12% of the votes at an early election and made a name for himself with respect to the speed at which his rating dropped. In 2003, he did not gather even one percent of the votes; the protest electorate does not like losers.

The presidential elections of 1998 and 2003 took place in two rounds with Robert Kocharian winning both times. The results of these elections were contested both by his rivals and by most of the active part of society.

In 2008, the opposition electorate was divided between Artur Bagdasarian and Levon Ter-Petrosian, who gathered 17.7% and 21.5% of the votes, respectively.³ Before the fall of 2007, no one expected Levon Ter-Petrosian to achieve such impressive success; it was practically inconceivable that he would even return to politics after his 10-year absence. This circumstance can be considered quite unique. The ease with which Ter-Petrosian received 350,000 votes shows that he was able to draw a large part of the protest electorate to his side.

It is worth adding that trust in Armenia's political system is still low to this day.

Parliamentary Elections

Parliamentary elections in Armenia have their own history. The first (1995) were held in a non-competitive atmosphere during prohibition of Dashnaktsutun, the largest opposition party at that time, and arrests of its members.⁴ The Armenian National Movement (ANM), the ruling party, in an alliance with the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA), gathered the majority of votes (43%). Second place (17%) went to Shamiram (a women's party) that was an appendage of the ruling party. The communists came third, while two other opposition parties acquired minimum representation in the parliament.⁵

Then the "hottest" elections to the National Assembly were held: in 1999 Armenia came right up to a change of power by constitutional means. After collecting 41.7% of the votes, the Unity bloc consisting of two groups—the RPA under the leadership of charismatic Defense Minister Vazgen Sargsian and the People's Party headed by Karen Demirchian, which opposed President Kocharian—came first. Second place went to the communists, who gathered only 12% of the votes, while the former ruling party ANM gained the support of only 1.2% of the voters.

The Unity bloc, which began taking steps to limit the power of Robert Kocharian and establish a parliamentary republic,⁶ had a good chance of success, but the terrorist act on 27 October, 1999 cut

³ See: Portal of the 2008 Armenian presidential election at Eurasianet, available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org/armenia08/index.shtml>].

⁴ See: V. Mitiaev, *Vnutripoliticheskie protsessy v nezavisimoi Armenii. Armenia: problemy nezavisimogo razvitiia*, Moscow, 1998, p. 95.

⁵ See: G. Kerian, "Evolution of a Multiparty System in Armenia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4 (10), 2001.

⁶ See: L. Panin, "Prezident Armenii proigral vybory parlamenta," *Kommersant*, No. 092, 1 June, 1999.

this short. This event generated a multitude of conspiracy theories, but despite the fact that the Unity bloc, which controlled the parliament and cabinet of ministers at the time, was engaged in the investigation, Robert Kocharian's involvement in the terrorist act was not proven.

The ANM's essentially complete disappearance from Armenian politics in the second half of the 1990s shows the existence of a "pro-government electorate" (which votes for the government just because it is the government). In this case, such factors as respect for the government as such, support of stability (anxiety over the possibility of upheavals if the opposition won), and support of the current government policy could have played a role.

By 2003, the country's political field had broken down into a multitude of small parties, each of which had its own electorate; therefore the RPA, despite showing the most success, gathered only 23.7% of the votes. A total of 6 parties acquired seats in the parliament.

So the RPA began turning into a pro-government party closely associated with the government structures and positioning itself as the president's bastion. This was when the tradition of forming a government coalition ultimately formed in Armenia.

At the parliamentary elections of 2007, the RPA gathered 34% of the votes, while second and third places went to the Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP) and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaksutjun (ARFD) that formed a government coalition and became part of the establishment.

Domestic Political Situation at the Beginning of 2012

Election of Mayor of the City of Hrazdan

The election season opened in February 2012 in Hrazdan,⁷ which is an industrial center and the fifth largest city in terms of population in the country. However, more interesting is the fact that candidates from the RPA and Armenian National Congress (ANC)—the bloc of opposition parties headed by the first president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosian—ran for mayor. This meant that representatives of the "old" and "new" authorities both of Armenia and of the city itself were contending for the seat of mayor. For example, the ANC was represented by former mayor of Hrazdan, veteran of the Karabakh war Sasun Mikaelian (who served a three-year prison term for participating in the events of 1 March, 2008), while the RPA was represented by the current city head, Aram Danielian. It should be noted that the political struggle in Hrazdan was regarded as a "test of strength" before the parliamentary elections scheduled for May.

The ANC was actively involved in the election campaign; nearly all the leaders of the bloc came to support their partner, but this was not enough. Mikaelian, who gathered around 47% of the votes, was defeated by the current mayor, who was re-elected to a new term. The election aroused a great fervor: a large number of observers from Erevan, as well as dozens of journalists, came to the polling stations to keep tabs on the voting. The opposition talked about bribery before the election, but no vote-counting fraud was actually registered on election day.⁸ John Heffern, U.S. Ambassador

⁷ According to a report by Epress.am information agency, "never before has the election of a local mayor raised such a ruckus in Armenia" ("From Associate of Serzh Sargsian to Virulent Opponent," *Epress.am*, 12 February, 2012, available in Russian at [<http://www.epress.am/ru/2012/02/12/Небывалый-ажютаж-в-50-км-от-Еревана-От-с.html>]).

⁸ See: "Final Results: Incumbent Mayor Beats Opposition Candidate Sasun Mikaelian in Hrazdan Elections," *Epress.am*, 13 February, 2012, available at [<http://www.epress.am/en/2012/02/13/final-results-incumbent-mayor-beats-opposition-candidate-sasun-mikaelyan-in-hHrazdan-elections.html>].

to Armenia, who acted as an observer, also positively assessed the election.⁹ After the election of mayor of Hrazdan, there was a popular viewpoint among the opposition that the government had tried out a new falsification method based exclusively on buying off voters, but without coercion or direct fraud.

Lowering Opposition Activity

By 2012, the demonstrations so ubiquitous in Armenia's domestic political life since the mid-1990s had practically dwindled to nothing. Levon Ter-Petrosian, who had been organizing acts of protest almost every week since the fall of 2007, was no longer able to gather large enough crowds. It was obvious that the protest electorate was gradually turning its back on the ANC. It is worth noting that demonstrations underwent their greatest decline in 2011 when the protestors were no longer stonewalled.¹⁰ In 2012, the number of participants in protest demonstrations was never more than 2,000 people, whereby they were usually held for non-political reasons (social, environmental, and so on).

By 2012, the protest electorate had become disillusioned with the ideological opposition and partially joined the PAP, which had enormous organizational and financial resources. This party was founded in the mid-2000s by Gagik Tsarukian, one of Armenia's most prominent businessmen with the support of the then president, Robert Kocharian, and its activity was regarded as an attempt by the latter to return to power. The "Kocharian factor" was an even more popular topic of discussion for the opposition media than the current participants in the political process, whereby Kocharian himself was hardly active at all.

Pre-Election Alignment of Forces

A total of nine parties and blocs took part in the elections, as opposed to 23 in 2007; this shows that parties had already reached quite a high level of consolidation. There was no doubt that six parties would be doing their utmost to overcome the 5% barrier: the RPA, headed by President Serzh Sargsian, the PAP, the ANC, Heritage, headed by First Foreign Minister of Armenia Raffi Hovhannisian, the ARFD (a party without definite leaders), and the Rule of Law Party (RLP) headed by ex-speaker of the Armenian Parliament Artur Bagdasarian.

So essentially no new faces appeared in Armenian politics. As for most of the contenders for seats in parliament, they were long-term political survivors who began gaining popularity among the Armenian population as early as the beginning of the 1990s. Moreover, this time the elections were held with clear domination of the RPA, which forced the opposition parties to unite: Heritage joined the Free Democrats, while the ANC formed a conglomerate of 10 parties.

Let us take a look at the dynamics of the election campaign ratings.

⁹ See: N. Bulgadarian, "Posol SShA uvidel na vyborakh v Hrazdane 'realnoe sopernichestvo,'" Armenian Service of Radio Freedom, 14 February, 2012, available at [<http://rus.azatutyun.am/content/article/24483634.html>].

¹⁰ It should be noted that restricting the freedom to gather and of the media often becomes the catalyst of mass protest demonstrations. In 2001, pressure on the independent Rustavi-2 television company led to mass protest demonstrations in Georgia. In January 2011, demonstrations in Egypt correlated directly with disconnection of the Internet (see: N. Hassanpour, *Media Disruption Exacerbates Revolutionary Unrest: Evidence from Mubarak's Natural Experiment*, Yale University, 2011, p. 33).

Table 1

**Party Ratings in Armenia
in February-April 2012 Compiled According
to the Results of Sociological Polls**

Time Poll was Conducted	Poll Organizer	Results (in % of those who had made a choice)*					
		RPA	PAP	RLP	Heritage	ARFD	ANC
Mid-February	Sociometer ¹¹	39	36	5.1	5.1	6.1	8.5
29 Feb-5 March	IPSC, EuFoA ¹²	37	41	5	4	5	5
Mid-March	Sociometer ¹³	40	35	5...6	5...6	6...7	8...9
4-10 April	ASA, Gallup Int. ¹⁴	40	32	7	3.5	6	10
4-13 April	IPSC, VCIOM ¹⁵	38	36	7	6	5	4
17-22 April	IPSC, EuFoA ¹⁶	40.6	32.6	5.4	6.5	5.0	4.3
17-23 April	ASA, Gallup Int. ¹⁷	39.2	29.9	6.0	6.3	5.5	12.2

* Undecided respondents, those who refused to answer, and those who did not intend participating in the elections were excluded from the calculation. In some polls, the total number of undecided respondents was higher than 40%.

Despite the 3.5% error for each of the above sociological polls, they show approximately the same correlation of forces and dynamics. Furthermore, some indices differ depending on the poll organizer.

By the beginning of 2012, the contours of the government coalition in parliament had become eroded. The ARFD left it as early as 2009, while the intentions of the PAP were not clear at all. In February 2012, the question of signing a coalition memorandum among the PAP, RLP, and RPA was actively discussed, as well as their joint participation in the parliamentary elections. But the PAP refused to sign the memorandum and preferred to act independently.¹⁸

¹¹ See: "Aharon Adibekian: Armenian Society has a Shorter Memory than a Chicken, and That is Good," *Armtoday.info*, 22 February, 2012, available in Russian at [http://armtoday.info/default.asp?Lang=_Ru&NewsID=61056]. For the results, see: [<http://www.tert.am/am/news/2012/03/26/aharon-adibekian/>].

¹² See: "Poll: A Snapshot ahead of Armenia's Presidential Elections. Main Findings," *European Friends of Armenia, TNS Opinion, IPSC*, 22 March, 2012, p. 22, available at [http://www.eufoa.org/uploads/OpinionPoll_EN.pdf].

¹³ See: Ահարոն Ադիբեկյանը չի հավատում «Հայաստանի եվրոպացի բարեկամներ»-ի սոցիոլոգիական հարցումներին (Aharon Adibekian Does Not Trust the European Friends of Armenia Poll), *Tert.am*, 26 March, 2012.

¹⁴ See: "Gallup Predicts Victory for the Republican Party of Armenia," *News.am*, 17 April, 2012, available in Russian at [<http://news.am/rus/news/101624.html>].

¹⁵ See: "Sociopolitical Situation in Armenia on the Eve of the Parliamentary Elections," *Press-Issue*, No. 2005, VCIOM, 20 April, 2012, available in Russian at [<http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=268&uid=112722>].

¹⁶ See: "Poll: Last Assessment of Pre-Electoral Armenia," *European Friends of Armenia, TNS Opinion, IPSC*, 28 April, 2012, p. 25, available at [http://www.eufoa.org/uploads/Poll_28.04.2012_EN.pdf].

¹⁷ See: "Gallup International Association"-ը հրատարակեց 17.04-23.04 ժամանակահատվածում անցկացված սոցիոլոգիական հարցումների արդյունքները (Results of Gallup International Association Poll carried out on 17.04-23.04), *Novosti TV "Armenia"*, 27 April, 2012, available at [<http://news.armeniatv.com/post/id/88977/>].

¹⁸ See: "New Coalition Memorandum Not Signed: The RPA and PAP will Participate in the Elections on Separate Lists," *7or.am*, 13 February, 2012, available in Russian at [<http://www.7or.am/ru/news/view/30624/>].

It was obvious that the PAP was getting stronger, and its competition with the RPA became the leitmotif of the elections to the National Assembly. As already noted, part of the protest electorate had gone over to the PAP, which predetermined a change in the paradigm of the rivalry at the elections; the ideological standoff turned into a contest of ways to attract voters. As a result of this, the elections were no longer perceived as a decisive battle between life and death; although the election campaign went quite normally, there was not a very high degree of opposition among its participants.

2012 Parliamentary Elections

Campaign Programs

It is typical that despite the differences in the ideological platforms of the parties contending in the race their campaign programs were largely similar. The ideologies declared by the parties bore significantly toward the right, but their promises were largely “leftist”; moreover, much was said about social justice, reforms, fighting corruption, and economic growth. Furthermore, the amounts of social assistance offered the population could be compared with the size of the Armenian budget.¹⁹

The ANC presented the most detailed election program; it envisaged carrying out quite an impressive set of reforms in agriculture, education, the economy, justice, and so on, which also required extremely large amounts of spending.

As for the PRA, its program was minimalist and realistic and aimed only at continuing the current economic projects and reforms; the rest limited their promises to general declarations.

The PAP, which promised to improve social conditions and support agriculture, occupied a very unique niche: it proposed paternalism, coveted by the Armenian electorate in the face of post-Soviet unemployment and the disorder reigning in small and medium population settlements.²⁰

Forming a Competitive Environment

Despite the possibility of holding much freer elections than ever before, there was no automatic increase in voting competitiveness.

The new election code gave the opposition much more room for maneuver in organizing elections; all of the parliamentary parties had the right to participate in election commissions and nominate their chairmen (under rotation terms).

The second fact worth noting is the activity of the PAP, which ensured the ubiquitous presence of journalists, authorized persons, and observers. There was quite a large number of observers all told: around 30,000 local and 647 international (more than 250 of them were observers within the framework of the OSCE mission).

¹⁹ See: N. Iskandarian, T. Sargsian, H. Mikaelian, “Predvybornye obeshchaniia partii,” Institute of the Caucasus, May 2012, available at [<http://www.c-i.am/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/brief-prefinal.pdf>].

²⁰ According to the Caucasus Barometer poll carried out by CRRG in Armenia in October–November 2011, 73% of the polled thought that the government should be more like a parent, while 18% described it as a hired worker.

The third innovation of these elections was balanced information broadcasting. Nearly all the television media used to be loyal to the government, while the only opposition television company, A1+, was deprived of its license.²¹ During the election campaign, broadcasting was much more balanced, while previously neutral television companies, such as Erkir media and Kentron (affiliated with the ARFD and PAP, respectively), became oppositional. Increasing criticism of the ruling party was heard on the main television channels, which allowed the voters to make an informed choice.

This proved particularly important since in the spring of 2012, television media were the source of political information for 92% of the Armenian population, while Internet media constituted the main source of information for 31%, newspapers for 19%, and radio for 17%.²² It should be noted that whereas television and radio provided balanced broadcasting of the election campaign, the Internet media and printed press were extremely critical about the Armenian government.

Table 2

**Parties and Their Leaders on Armenian Television and Radio
(8 April-4 May)**

Party	Mentioning ²³ on Armenia's Central Television Channels*				Time Allotted (min ²⁴)**
	Total Mentionings	Of them (%):			
		Positive	Negative	Neutral	
RPA	2,344	1.8	2.7	95.5	5,766
PAP	1,377	7.4	1.9	90.7	7,617
Heritage	1,038	1.1	0.1	98.8	7,841
ARFD	1,241	2.5	0.1	97.4	7,671
ANC	1,116	0.1	2.1	97.8	6,634
RLP	1,019	1.0	2.2	96.8	5,827
Other parties	1,356	0.0	0.0	100	8,535
Total	9,491	2.1	1.4	96.5	49,891

* According to a poll carried out by the Erevan Press Club on central television channels and public radio.
 ** According to a poll by the National Commission for Television and Radio (all Armenian television and radio stations); official statements by civil servants were excluded.

Furthermore, there is a surplus, rather than insufficient, number of minority parties, some of which have not even been able to prepare advertising clips and use free airtime to broadcast inter-

²¹ The A1+ Television Company was deprived of its license in 2002 and has since been trying to return to the air, after winning a case in the European Court, but in 2010, it was again refused renewal of its license. Since 2011, it has been broadcasting online, and since September 2012, it has been airing a television program on the Armnews TV channel.

²² See: "Poll: A Snapshot of Pre-Electoral Armenia," p. 8.

²³ See: "Report on Monitoring of Armenian Broadcast Media Coverage of 6 May, 2012 Elections to RA National Assembly," Erevan Press Club, May 2012, p. 18, available at [http://ypc.am/upload/YPC%20Monitoring_Second%20Stage_April%208-%20May%204,%202012_eng.pdf].

²⁴ Poll results available at [<http://www.tvradio.am/uploads/0814.pdf>], p. 9 (in Armenian).

views with their leaders. This situation arose due to the government's demands to provide equal air-time; but this state of affairs was subsequently perceived as the norm and nothing changed after the elections.

Most of the parties had the opportunity to place street advertisements. In addition to the ANC, which was experiencing serious financial problems, all the large parties had billboards; the PAP had 164, the RPA—100; the RLP—64, Heritage—50; and the ARFD—38.²⁵

Election Results

From the technical standpoint, the elections were organized quite well and went very peacefully. In contrast to the last elections, far fewer serious violations were registered, while no instances of violence were seen at all (this was quite a sensation for Armenia). Nevertheless, cases of the use of the administrative resource, as well as bribing and direct falsifications were registered. Furthermore, voter turnout was sufficiently high and amounted to more than 60%.

As a result of the parliamentary elections, all six major parties crossed the electoral threshold (5% for parties and 7% for blocs). In so doing, only two parties (the PAP and RPA) had an electoral margin of safety; all the others acquired only a few seats in the National Assembly.

Table 3

Results of the Parliamentary Elections of
6 May, 2012

Parties	Votes Received	Distribution of Votes Received*	Mandates**
RPA	664,266	44.02	69 (+5)
PAP	454,671	30.12	37 (+19)
ANC	106,901	7.08	7 (+7)
Heritage	86,993	5.76	5 (-2)
ARFD	85,544	5.67	5 (-11)
RLP	83,123	5.51	6 (-3)
Other parties	24,419	2.02	0 (0)
Invalid bulletins	53,827		
Independent deputies			2 (-15)
Turnout	1,573,053	62.35	131

* The share of votes received in percentage of all valid bulletins. We will note that there was no place to vote "against all," so bulletins that did not indicate a specific candidate were considered invalid.

** According to proportional and majority systems in total. Changes compared to number of seats in the past parliament are given in brackets.

²⁵ See: N. Grigorian, "PPA i na etikh vyborakh potratitsia bolshe vsekh," *Aravot*, 4 April, 2012, available at [<http://ru.aravot.am/2012/04/04/55675/>].

The RPA confirmed its dominance in Armenia's political life, which, incidentally, had remained unchanged since 2008. However, the percentage distribution of the election results throughout the proportional system as a whole corresponded to the sociological polls conducted on the eve of the elections.

How Honest were the Elections?

After election results are announced, the question of possible falsifications on the part of the government is always raised.

The mission of observers from the CIS declared that the elections were held democratically. The OSCE observation mission largely gave a positive assessment, but noted that some violations were registered. According to the final report, violations were registered at 9.40% polling stations visited by the OSCE mission (the OSCE observers visited almost 2/3 of all the polling stations) that had an effect on the voting results, while procedural problems during vote tallying were noted in more than 20 cases.²⁶ Nevertheless, the elections on 6 May, 2012 were described as the best ever held²⁷ (we will note that the OSCE/ODIHR has been monitoring elections in Armenia since 1996).

Local observers registered 1,107 violations; a little more than half of them were procedural in nature, while around 500 can be described as more serious violations.²⁸ The prosecutor's office received 213 reports on violations at the elections, but criminal cases were instigated regarding only 15 of them.

The opposition insisted that "dead souls" had been included on the voters' lists: a figure as high as 700,000 was named.²⁹

The number of voters has indeed increased compared to past elections, even though migration has led to population reduction in recent years. However, Armenian emigrants are not giving up their citizenship and so remain on the lists for several years after their departure. The lists were published openly on the websites of the Central Election Committee and the police department; two weeks later only 0.1% of the voters had been removed from them. Furthermore, the opposition did not present one false passport; if they had actually existed, it would have been impossible to hide such a large number.

The present author thinks that use of the administrative resource and bribing during the campaign are much more serious problems. He tries to reproduce a picture of the morning voting of the army he observed at one of the polling stations. Incidentally, its results were the same at all polling stations: the majority of army recruits voted for the RPA.

Voting in prisons and refugee camps followed approximately the same scenario; this circumstance alone raised the RPA's result by approximately 4%. The fact that public institutions were used to advertize the ruling party should also be considered use of the administrative resource; some voting headquarters of the RPA were housed in rural administration buildings. It is worth noting that the RPA's final index differed from the results of sociological polls before the elections by approximately the same 4%.

²⁶ See: OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, *Final Report*, OSCE, 26 June, 2012, pp. 21-22, available at [<http://www.osce.org/odihr/91643>].

²⁷ See: "May 6 Elections Most Democratic and Transparent Vote Ever Held in Armenia," *News.am*, 22 October, 2012, available at [<http://news.am/eng/news/125727.html>].

²⁸ According to the system of online registration of violations iDitord.org. [<https://iditord.org/2012-parliamentary-elections/>] (in Armenian).

²⁹ See: "Levon Ter-Petrosian Complained to the French Ambassador that There were 700,000 Surplus Voters on the Voters' Lists," *Panarmenian.net*, 4 April, 2012, available in Russian at [<http://www.panarmenian.net/rus/news/101744>].

The RPA also increased its representation in parliament by winning in single-mandate districts; majority deputies have 41 of the 131 seats in them. RPA representatives won in 29 of these districts, which helped the party to obtain the majority of seats in parliament.

The thing is that it is enough to obtain a simple majority of votes to win in single-mandate districts. The competition among the opposition forces contributed to the fact that the republicans acquired less than 50% of the votes but subsequently won. Many of the one-mandate deputies used to be independent, but in the past few years, pursuing a policy to extend its own regional network, the RPA asked most of them, as well as their possible competitors from the representatives of local business elites, to join the party. The cancellation of single-mandate districts was one of the main demands of the opposition parties and the PAP before the parliamentary elections in 2012.

Bribing voters along with use of the administrative resource is a traditional problem at elections in Armenia. Judging from indirect signs, in 2012, buying votes was resorted to much more frequently than ever before; this is explained by the apathy of many citizens toward the political struggle and the drop in the standard of living of Armenian households. In some cases, bribes amounted to only \$30-50, but even these small amounts had an influence on voters' choice, particularly in rural areas.

However, it is difficult to determine precisely how widespread bribing was, since the voters themselves were not interested in revealing this information.

The only polls on this topic were carried out in Yerevan, Vanadzor, and Gumri: 16 voters admitted that they had been offered a bribe, while 9 refused to answer. In more than half of the cases, RPA representatives offered bribes, in a quarter of the cases, it was the PAP, in every fifth case it was the RLP, and in every seventieth, representatives of the ARFD.³⁰

However, neither bribing the population, nor use of the administrative resource can be considered direct falsifications, since they put no pressure on the voters and each could vote as he or she saw fit. Moreover, there was no evidence of any widespread direct vote-counting fraud, ballot stuffing, or so-called merry-go-round voting (where groups of voters turned up to vote more than once at different polling stations) that might have changed the election results by even 1%.

Nevertheless, the election results reflect not so much ideological preferences, as the ability to ensure the desirable result, which only the RPA and PAP were able to do.

Political Results of the Parliamentary Elections and Post-Election Processes

The final election results registered a convincing victory for the state bureaucracy in the form of the RPA, which had never before gathered so many votes nor been criticized so little. The elections were followed by only one act of protest; it took place the day after the voting. It should be noted that it is a tradition in Armenia to organize a demonstration if not actually on election day, then the day after.³¹

As for the opposition, it received fewer votes than it expected; the ANC, Heritage, and ARFD hardly crossed the electoral threshold. As strange as it may seem, the Rule of Law Party also sur-

³⁰ See: "Telephone Survey on 2012 Parliamentary Elections in Armenia," *Transparency—Armenia*, pp. 4-5, available at [<http://transparency.am/dbdata/Survey2012-eng.pdf>].

³¹ See: "Armenian Opposition Bloc Says Elections were Rigged," 8 May, 2012, available at [<http://news.am/eng/news/104710.html>].

mounted the barrier, but it ultimately turned into a spoiler of the RPA and lost any independent value.

The ANC and ARFD became perceptibly weaker and encountered several problems immediately after the elections. For example, the majority deputy left the ARFD, while the Republican Party and several regional structures broke away from the ANC. Despite the fact that the opposition parties criticized the election results in words, none of their representatives rejected their mandates (thus acknowledging the elections as fair).

A little later, the Heritage faction split in two, leaving only two party members and one non-party candidate (who passed on the party lists). Moreover, one of the PAP deputies left the faction.

The failure of the ANC requires some additional explanation. The fact is that although the rhetoric of this bloc did not change right up to its entry into parliament and remained radical, most of the protest electorate turned away from it. The leaders of the bloc, who radicalized their statements to the limit (they called the country's leaders outlaws and Mongol Tatars, and their voters slaves), were unable to tone them down at the proper time and some of the voters stopped taking them seriously. Moreover, the ANC was supported by a more radical electorate, many representatives of which left the country after the 2008 elections.

In turn, the RPA's stronger position made forming an alliance with the PAP absolutely unnecessary, so the latter was offered disadvantageous terms for joining the coalition.

After the elections, the PAP essentially became a magnet for the opposition forces in the parliament; the large size of its faction played an important role in this, which, however, prevented it from becoming more radicalized. This resulted in four opposition and two coalition parties in the parliament (before the elections, there were two and three, respectively). Former government members (three former foreign ministers, two former prime ministers, and so on) received most of the parliamentary portfolios.

So we are dealing with a new status-quo: the opposition, albeit not in the way it would have liked, was represented inside the parliament, which signaled the end of the "street politics" period typical of Armenia for many years.

As paradoxical as it may seem, the failure of the opposition gave Armenian parliamentarianism a new lease on life (since it led to the formation of a stronger parliamentary opposition). Just like several years ago, the National Assembly of Armenia once again became a place for holding debates, but decisions were no longer made unanimously. For example, 75 people voted for the development program envisaged for the next five years presented by the government on 18 June, 2012; 47 were against, and 1 abstained.³²

The turnout of parliamentarians also perceptibly grew: now sessions are held with a full auditorium (otherwise a result is not guaranteed). This is also related to the fact that businessmen (so-called oligarchs) have much more modest representation in the parliament today. According to the estimates of the ANC, 60 deputies of the parliament of the 2007 convocation owned their own business.³³ Now several big businessmen are still represented in parliament, but their total number has perceptibly decreased.

By mid-2012, there was talk in Armenia about the possibility of forming a two-party system in which the RPA and PAP would play the main roles. Despite its suspended state, the PAP retained enormous potential that fully correlated with the financial and organizational opportunities of the

³² See: "Armenian Parliament Approves Government's Action Program," *Tert. Am*, 21 June, 2012, available at [<http://www.tert.am/en/news/2012/06/21/karavarutian-tsragir/>].

³³ See: "Parliamentary Elections in Armenia in 2012: Are Their Representatives being Replaced by Oligarchs?" *IA Regnum*, 30 November, 2011, available in Russian at [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1472984.html>].

RPA. On the eve of the elections, the RPA, trying to avoid a second round and possible subsequent upheavals, made every attempt to push the PAP out of the race for the presidential seat.

But pressure on the PAP proved rather clumsy. From mid-June, audits were carried out at the Sivilitas Foundation, the co-founder of which is former head of the Foreign Ministry Vardan Oskanian (number two on the PAP list). He was accused of laundering money and evading taxes in rather large amounts and was soon deprived of his deputy immunity; in Armenia this case was regarded as political. By the end of 2012, Oskanian's participation in public politics was reduced to zero, since he was unable to efficiently mobilize his supporters. Numerous non-political protest demonstrations on primarily social and environmental problems were held on this account. These demonstrations cannot be described as mass, but they produced a nucleus of active protestors mainly represented by young middle-class people.

Elections to Local Self-Government Bodies: Complete Domination of the RPA

The local elections held on 9 and 23 September, 2012 essentially went unnoticed by the expert community and journalists (an exception was perhaps the election of mayor of Hrazdan). And they were indeed only of local significance, since almost no candidates from the opposition participated in them. As many as one thousand observers were registered at each of the two rounds of voting, who were mainly representatives of regional organizations.

The only thing that attracted the attention of Yerevan society was the fact that Vardan Ghukasian, from the RPA, was prohibited from rerunning for mayor of Gumri. Vardan Ghukasian, who actually mayor of Gumri at the time, was considered a person close to criminal circles and did not enjoy the broad support of the city's population; but he hoped to receive the maximum number of votes by putting pressure on citizens.

On 4 September, Serzh Sargsian openly supported the alternative candidate, a member of the PAP, Samvel Balasarian,³⁴ who, in the absence of serious rivals, acquired 60% of the votes. The victory of the PAP at the parliamentary elections in Gumri squashed the intrigue about whether Ghukasian could win at the local election.

Representative of the RPA, Darbinian, won in Vanadzor, which is the third largest city in Armenia, gathering 48% of the votes. In both cities, the turnout was below average: in Vanadzor, it reached 46%, while in Gumri it was only 37%. This is explained by the emigration of a large number of voters who were still on the lists. Similar indices of voter turnout are recorded regularly in these cities, which refutes the thesis that the votes of citizens who have left are used for ballot stuffing.

On the whole, turnout proved quite high and in most communities it exceeded 50%.³⁵ In some cities, there was serious competition at the elections, due to which the winner gathered less than half

³⁴ See: "Armenian President Confirms Candidate for Gumri Mayor," *Tert.am*, 4 September, 2012, available at [<http://tert.am/en/news/2012/09/04/serzh-sargsyan-interview/>].

³⁵ Turnout indices for communities are available at [<http://res.elections.am/images/doc/masnak09.09.12.pdf>] (for the elections held on 9 September, in Armenian); [<http://res.elections.am/images/doc/masnak23.09.12.pdf>] (for the elections held on 23 September, in Armenian).

of all the votes. But according to current legislation, a relative majority is sufficient to become mayor of a community. The elections themselves were held in a peaceful atmosphere; in most communities, the government representative won. Suspicion is aroused by the fact that many candidates (at least 25%) withdrew their candidacies several days before the election. In approximately one third of the communities, there was no competition at all, since only one candidate participated in the election.

The victory of the RPA helped it to gain a firmer foothold at the local level. Whereas several years ago, most mayors were non-party, subsequently (lagging a little behind the majority deputies) many of them, just like the representatives of other parties, joined the RPA.

In September 2012, members of the RPA comprised the majority among the community heads in Armenia. The RPA mainly strives to enlarge its own base in the regions in order to mobilize the poor, loyal, or neutral electorate with the support of the rural elders and local structures. It should be noted that in some communities, two candidates from the RPA competed.

The opposition parties, Heritage and the ANC, essentially removed themselves from the local elections, explaining this by their lack of confidence in the local self-government system and insufficient resources.³⁶ Other parties, which were traditionally stronger at the local level (RLP, ARFD and PAP), also showed a low level of interest. Nevertheless, the higher level of electability of the candidates from the RPA compared with the ARFD, PAP, and RLP shows that they were in a more favorable position than the representatives of other parties.

Table 4

**Summarized Results of the Local Self-Government Elections
in September 2012³⁷**

Parties	Number of Nominated Candidates	Number of Winners	Degree of Electability (Share of Those Elected among the Number of Candidates Nominated by a Particular Party), %
Non-party	465 (37.6)	138 (21.6)	29.7
RPA	583 (47.1)	404 (63.3)	75.1
Heritage	2 (0.2)	0 (0.0)	0
RLP	18 (1.5)	12 (1.9)	66.7
ARFD	41 (3.3)	26 (4.1)	63.4
PAP	117 (9.5)	55 (8.6)	47.0

³⁶ See: A. Harutyunian, "Armenian Opposition Opts Out of Local Polls," *IWPR*, CRS Issue 657, 7 September, 2012, available at [<http://iwpr.net/report-news/armenian-opposition-opts-out-local-polls>]; I. Hovhannisian, "The ANC and Heritage are Not Being Active at the Local Elections," Armenian edition of Radio Freedom, 10 August, 2012, available in Russian at [<http://rus.azatutyun.am/content/article/24672832.html>].

³⁷ Collated election results are available at [<http://res.elections.am/images/doc/statistics09.09.12m.pdf>] (elections held on 9 September, in Armenian); [<http://res.elections.am/images/doc/statistics23.09.12m.pdf>] (elections held on 23 September, in Armenian) (see also: "Կարևորը մասնակցությունն է" (The Main Thing is Participation), *Aikakan Zhamanak*, No. 163 (3087), 25 September, 2012, available at [<http://www.armtimes.com/36425>]).

Presidential Election: Election Campaign and Alignment of Forces

Fall-2012: First Round of the Election Race

In the fall of 2012, the unofficial presidential race began in Armenia. At first, PAP leader Gagik Tsarukian, who everyone recognized as a candidate capable of posing a real challenge to the government, took active part in it. After the parliamentary elections of 1 October in Georgia, at which oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili won, these moods intensified; Tsarukian has even been called the Armenian Ivanishvili.³⁸ Judging by everything, this comparison clearly appealed to Tsarukian; he congratulated Ivanishvili much sooner than Serzh Sargsian. As for the RPA, it treated the change of power in Georgia very cautiously.

According to the sociological poll carried out by the Sociometer Center at the end of September, 35.6% of the polled were willing to vote for Serzh Sargsian, while 31.8% supported Gagik Tsarukian. The leader of the Heritage Party, Raffi Hovhannisian, gathered 14.2% of the votes, Levon Ter-Petrosian 5.8%, and possible candidates from the ARFD—9.6% (total).³⁹

In the second half of October, another poll was carried out, this time by Gallup International Association; it produced slightly different results. According to it, Serzh Sargsian could count on 39% of the votes, Gagik Tsarukian on 27%, Robert Kocharian on 15%, Raffi Hovhannisian on 6%, and Vardan Oskanian and Levon Ter-Petrosian on 4-5% each⁴⁰ (in so doing, the number of undecided voters was not taken into account).

Vardan Oskanian and Gagik Tsarukian were members of the same team, with which Kocharian was also often associated. It is quite obvious that Tsarukian became a serious threat to the authorities and could have quite easily caused the election to reach a second round, which could have led to unpredictable consequences.

What is more, in October-November, the PAP cooperated quite actively with other opposition parties, demanding cancelation of the single-mandate districts and a transfer to a parliamentary republic, while Gagik Tsarukian held meetings in the regions, at which he criticized the government and the overall situation in the country. The government was also cranking up the pressure: on 2 October, Vardan Oskanian was deprived of his deputy immunity for presumably political reasons.⁴¹ This was also confirmed indirectly by the republicans themselves: the head of the parliamentary RPA faction called Oskanian the Armenian Ivanishvili.⁴² At the same

³⁸ See: "Gagik Tsarukian—armiansky Ivanishvili?" *Armenia Today*, 3 October, 2012, available at [<http://armtoday.info/default.asp?Lang=Ru&NewsID=74707>].

³⁹ See: "Dvumia osnovnymi kandidatami prezidentskikh vyborov iavliaiutsia Serzh Sargsian i Gagik Tsarukian: sotsiolog," *Pervy armiansky informatsionny*, 9 October, 2012, available at [http://www.1in.am/rus/armenia_apolitics_22634.html].

⁴⁰ See: "Gallup International Association: Who Would Armenian Citizens Choose if the Election was Held Next Sunday?" *Panarmenian.net*, 2 November, 2012, available in Russian at [<http://www.panarmenian.net/rus/news/130567>].

⁴¹ See: "Iskandarian: "Delo Oskaniana" imeet politicheskiy podtekst," *Aysor.am*, 4 October, 2012, available at [<http://www.aysor.am/ru/news/2012/10/04/iskandarian/>]; N. Melkumyan, "Armenian Opposition Leader Says He's Being Framed," *IWPR*, CRS Issue 662, 19 October, 2012, available at [<http://iwpr.net/report-news/armenian-opposition-leader-says-hes-being-framed>].

⁴² See: "Rukivoditel fraktsii RPA: Armianskiy Ivanishvili ne Gagik Tsarukian, a Vardan Oskanian," *Panorama.am*, 5 October, 2012, available at [<http://www.panorama.am/ru/politics/2012/10/05/sahakian/>].

time, members of the RPA called on Tsarukian to support Serzh Sargsian at the presidential election; there might also have been some latent pressure or the threat of publishing compromising material.

Corruption was the main topic on the agenda during the first round of the unofficial presidential race in Armenia. In September-October, Serzh Sargsian gave it his full attention: the Control Chamber exposed numerous corruption scandals, and investigations began regarding several high-ranking officials. Some of them were arrested, including the head of the Consular Department of the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the former head of the State Social Security Service. Arrests also continued of medium-ranking officials; their intensity dropped after mid-October and later stopped altogether.

Public criticism of the prime minister and several other key officials voiced by the president at a government meeting held in mid-September made the above-mentioned events seem like part of the election campaign. It appeared suspicious that the Armenian president, who usually stayed out of the limelight, was so openly criticizing the ministers.⁴³

In turn, Head of the PAP Gagik Tsarukian said while in Brussels that so far corrupted officials were leading the struggle against corruption in Armenia and that it would be impossible to beat them; this statement aroused irate comments from representatives of the ruling party.

Determination of Presidential Contenders

However, Gagik Tsarukian dragged his heels and repeatedly postponed the date for announcing his decision regarding the format of his participation in the presidential election. On 8 December, he met unofficially with Serzh Sargsian and on 12 December publicly announced his refusal to participate in the election or support any of the presidential candidates.

His decision bewildered the opposition and the government, since it was no longer clear who Serzh Sargsian's main rival would be at the presidential election. Meanwhile, progress at the talks on Armenia's associative membership in the EU and a deep and comprehensive free trade area depended on how well the election was held and whether there was a competitive environment.⁴⁴

It is extremely interesting that until December 2012, former Armenian president, Robert Kocharian, who left his post in 2008, was among the possible contenders for the head of state; at that time, the population did not take very kindly to his semi-authoritative style of rule. The ongoing crisis changed the attitude toward Kocharian; we will remind you that during the years of his presidency, the Armenian economy grew at high rates.⁴⁵ Rooting for Robert Kocharian was engaged in on the 2rd.am website.

On 13 November, Kocharian issued a statement in which he refuted any relation with the PAP and supported the demands of the opposition to transfer to the 100% proportional system. Furthermore, he added that "majority elections in Armenia feed the feudalization process." This statement

⁴³ See: H. Mikaelian, "Vnutrenniaia politika Armenii v sentiabre-oktiabre 2012," *Analitichesky biulleten—Armenia*, RAS Institute of Europe, available at [<http://ieras.ru/pub/bulleten/Am3.pdf>].

⁴⁴ See: "Important for Reinforcement of Armenian-EU Relations, Barroso Says," *Tert.am*, 1 December, 2012, available at [<http://www.tert.am/en/news/2012/12/01/baroso-press-conference/>].

⁴⁵ During the second term of Robert Kocharian's presidency (2003-2007), Armenian GDP increased by 85%, while during Serzh Sargsian's first term (2008-2012), it grew by only 3%. Dynamics of the Armenian GDP are available on the website of the National Statistics Service at [<http://armstat.am/ru/?nid=126&id=01001>].

only added fuel to the fire of the discussions about Kocharian's possible participation in the election. But on 13 December, the next day after Tsarukian's statement, Kocharian's secretary officially announced that the former president was not intending and had never intended participating in the election.⁴⁶

The other candidates also postponed making a final decision until the last minute. On 25 December, the day registration of the candidates began, Levon Ter-Petrosian announced that he would not be participating in the election, giving his age (he was 68) as the reason, which surprised many. The next day, the ARFD announced that it would not participate in the election, whereby adding that it would not support any of the candidates either.

So, in December all the main contenders had left the election race. So the presidential election in Armenia was called technical, that is, deprived of any real competition.⁴⁷

Heritage Leader Raffi Hovhannisian, whose party took only 6% of the votes at the parliamentary elections, was President Serzh Sargsian's main rival. A few more candidates also announced their participation in the election. They included former prime minister Hrant Bagratian, who was not supported by a single party, Soviet dissident Paruir Airikian, who spent more than 17 years in prison camps, and a few less well-known candidates, for example, Vardan Sedrakian, a self-proclaimed "eposologist" (i.e. a researcher of epic folklore), Andreas Ghukasian, director of the Ai radio station, and Arman Melikian, former foreign minister of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Second Round of the Presidential Race

At the beginning of 2013, the election campaign was essentially relaunched. The president's rivals, who used to be minorities, were the main actors. However, the absence of the more prestigious opposition politicians particularly played into the hands of Raffi Hovhannisian. The thing was that for many years Hovhannisian's personal attraction has been higher than his political rating. According to sociologists, this is due to his American background, image of a patriot, orientation toward the intelligentsia, as well as the fact that he smiles often, which no other leader of the Armenian political establishment, apart perhaps for Gagik Tsarukian (who also has a high personal rating), ever does.

Raffi Hovhannisian, who quickly made himself at home on the abandoned opposition field, engaged in an energetic election campaign: his rating increased by several percentage points every week. There can be no doubt that the country's authorities had their hand in this; 70% of the votes (if not more) won by the current president would have looked like an obvious reminder of the withdrawal of all the main rivals from the race.

It should be noted that no ideological opposition was essentially seen in the election race; an exception was Raffi Hovhannisian's proposal to declare the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. But Serzh Sargsian criticized this statement, noting that "there can be no more risky undertakings at present."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See: "Robert Kocharian Won't Take Part in Presidential Elections," *Slaq.am*, 13 December, 2012, available in Russian at [<http://www.slaq.am/eng/news/107184/>].

⁴⁷ See: "A Political Scientist Calls the Upcoming Presidential Election in Armenia 'Technical,'" *Armenpress.am*, 15 January, 2012, available in Russian at [<http://armenpress.am/rus/news/705036/>].

⁴⁸ R. Stepanian, "Serzh Sargsian kritikuet Raffi Hovannisiana," Armenian service of Radio Freedom, 12 February, 2013, available at [<http://rus.azatutyun.am/content/article/24899360.html>].

Soon Raffi Hovhannisian was almost as well known as Serzh Sargsian, who hardly ever appeared on the TV screens.⁴⁹ According to a poll carried out by European Friends of Armenia at the beginning of February 2013, Hovhannisian's election campaign was the most convincing.⁵⁰ There can be no doubt that he was lucky: due to the absence of rivals and the government's passivity, he was able to draw a large part of the PAP electorate to his side.⁵¹

Table 5

**Election Campaign Rating of Candidates,
January-February 2013**

Time of Poll	Organizer of Poll	Results (% of those who had made their choice)*				
		Serzh Sargsian	Raffi Hovhannisian	Hrant Bagratian	Paruir Airikian	Others
12 Dec-13 Jan	Sociometer ⁵²	72	20	5	3	
15-20 Jan	EuFoA ⁵³	68.6	20.8	4.4	4.8	1.4
15-23 Jan	Gallup Int. ⁵⁴	76	12	5	5	2
18-19 Jan	Sociometer ⁵⁵	72	20	3.5	3.5	1
25-29 Jan	VCIOM ⁵⁶	61	27	4	5	3
25 Jan-2 Feb	Gallup Int. ⁵⁷	68	24	2	5	1
31 Jan-5 Feb	EuFoA ⁵⁸	58	33	2.8	4.9	1.3

* Undecided respondents, those who refused to answer, and those who did not intend participating in the elections were excluded from the calculation. In some polls, the total number of undecided was higher than 25%.

⁴⁹ According to a report by the Erevan press club on coverage of the election campaigns, Serzh Sargsian took third place in terms of air time allotted to the candidates for election agitation between 21 January and 16 February, yielding to Raffi Hovhannisian and Paruir Airikian (see: "Report on Monitoring of Armenian Broadcast Media Coverage of Ra Presidential Elections in 2013," *YPC*, p. 16, available at [http://ypc.am/upload/YPC%20Monitoring_RA%20Presidential%20Elections%202013_eng.pdf]).

⁵⁰ Seventy-one percent of the polled called Hovhannisian's campaign the most convincing, while 64% opted for Sargsian's campaign (see: "Poll: Armenia on the Eve of Presidential Elections," *European Friends of Armenia, TNS Opinion, IPSC*, 9 February, 2012, p. 18, available at [<http://www.eufoa.org/uploads/POLL20130209EN.pdf>]).

⁵¹ At the beginning of February, 49% of PAP's voters were ready to give their vote to Hovhannisian and 42% to Sargsian (see: "Poll: Armenia on the Eve of Presidential Elections," p. 27).

⁵² See: A. Barsegian, "Ըստ Ադիբեկյանի՝ ընտրողների 72 տոկոսը կքվեարկի Սերժ Սարգսյանի օգտին" (According to Adibekian, 72% will Vote for Serzh Sargsian), Armenian public radio, 9 January, 2013 [<http://www.armradio.am/hy/2013/01/09/ըստ-ադիբեկյանի-ընտրողների-72-տոկոսը-կք/>]).

⁵³ See: "Poll: A Snapshot ahead of Armenia's Presidential Elections. Main Findings," p. 18.

⁵⁴ See: "Gallup: President Sargsian ahead in Election Race," *News.am*, 29 January, 2013, available at [<http://news.am/eng/news/137787.html>].

⁵⁵ See: "Sociologists Predict that Sargsian will Gather from 68.8% to 72% of the Votes at the Presidential Election," *AMI "Novosti Armenia"*, 25 January, 2013, available in Russian at [<http://www.newsarmenia.ru/politics/20130125/42791202.html>].

⁵⁶ See: "Presidential Election in Armenia: Two Weeks before the Voting," *VCIOM, press issue*, No. 2223, 5 February, 2013, available in Russian at [<http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=113600>].

⁵⁷ See: "Gallup Poll: Ghukasian's Anti-Rating is Highest," *Aysor.am*, 7 February, 2013, available in Russian at [<http://www.aysor.am/en/news/2013/02/07/gallup/>].

⁵⁸ See: "Poll: Armenia on the Eve of Presidential Elections," p. 23.

As we see from the table, during the official election campaign, Serzh Sargsian's rating tended to drop and fell by approximately 15%. Raffi Hovhannisian's rating rose by almost the same amount and, judging from the election results, continued to increase after that. However, Hovhannisian's personal popularity rose much faster than the rating of his Heritage Party.⁵⁹

The election campaign was held in an atmosphere of the most favorable treatment of all the alternative candidates, but not all of them were able to take advantage of this opportunity. The election campaign was remembered for the desperate attempts of the minority candidates to attract the voters' attention; it was the most eccentric of recent times.⁶⁰ For example, Paruir Airikian, Aram Arutiunian, and Andreas Ghukasian declared hunger strikes from time to time, whereby the latter kept his up for a whole month.

On 1 February, some unidentified person fired at Paruir Airikian as he was returning home; people close to candidate Vardan Sedrakian were accused of organizing the attempt on his life.⁶¹ Nevertheless, wounded Airikian found the strength to enter political bargaining, reminding everyone of his right to postpone the election. In the end, he did not make use of this right, but lost almost all of his voters.

Results of the Presidential Election

On 18 February, 2013, the presidential election was held in Armenia in a calm atmosphere. Any violations reported during the day mainly regarded overcrowded polling stations; there were very few more serious violations.

For example, a total of 394 violations were registered on iDitord, that is, almost three times fewer than at the parliamentary elections.¹² When presenting the results of the election monitoring, Artak Kirakosian, one of the heads of the observation mission of the Civil Society Institute, noted that in 2013, there were 7-8-fold fewer violations than at the presidential election in 2008.⁶²

According to the official data, 1.52 million people took part in the election (that is, a little less than in the parliamentary elections). Furthermore, Serzh Sargsian received 860,000 votes, Raffi Hovhannisian 540,000, Hrant Bagratian around 32,000, and Paruir Airikian 18,000. The other candidates gathered a total of 18,000 votes.

The election results are presented in terms of region in the table below.

This time, the OSCE observation mission gave the election in Armenia a very good assessment, noting the high level of its organization.⁶³ Moreover, an interim report noted that violations that could

⁵⁹ See: "Gallup: By Refusing to Nominate a Candidate for the Election, the Prosperous Armenia Party Lost the Support of Some of the Electorate," *Panorama.am*, 9 February, 2013, available in Russian at [<http://www.panorama.am/ru/politics/2013/02/09/gallup2/>].

⁶⁰ See: M. Grigorian, "Armenia: stanut li 'tekhnicheskimi' prezidentskie vybory," BBC, 30 January, 2013, available at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2013/01/130129_armenian_elections.shtml].

⁶¹ See: "A Third Person, a Relative of Eposologist Vardan Serdakian, has been Arrested in the Case of Attempted Murder of Airikian," *Iin.am*, 12 February, 2013, available in Russian at [http://www.iin.am/rus/armenia_apolitics_27174.html].

⁶² See: "Artak Kirakosian: The Election of the Armenian President was Held in a Much More Ambient Atmosphere," *Panorama.am*, 21 February, 2013, available in Russian at [<http://www.panorama.am/ru/society/2013/02/21/a-kirakosian/>].

⁶³ See: "Armenian Election Generally Well-Administered with Fundamental Freedoms Respected, but Some Key Concerns Remain, International Election Observers say," OSCE/ODIHR, 18 February, 2013, available at [<http://osce.org/odihr/elections/99676>].

Table 6

**Election Results
by Armenian Region⁶⁴**

Region (marz)	Number of Participants, thous	Turnout (%)	Number of Invalid Bulletins*	Results in Terms of Candidates (%)		
				Serzh Sargsian	Raffi Hovhannisian	Hrant Bagratian
Erevan	446,005	54.05	23,380	49.30	42.83	4.36
Aragatsotn	72,768	63.62	1,459	66.00	30.78	1.45
Ararat	157,921	74.10	2,956	76.38	21.38	0.90
Armavir	128,635	57.26	4,351	54.20	42.55	1.20
Vayots dzor	29,697	62.70	1,644	63.66	32.26	1.81
Gegharkunik	128,881	69.09	2,347	79.69	17.96	0.93
Kotayk	138,257	59.43	4,174	61.97	33.50	1.97
Lori	143,337	60.35	3,967	55.79	39.72	1.51
Siunik	71,985	65.61	1,644	65.02	31.79	1.28
Tavush	71,278	65.70	1,874	54.08	40.68	2.05
Shirak	132,939	57.99	4,065	44.02	52.61	1.23
Total	1,521,703	60.18	50,988	58.64	36.75	2.15

* Since there was no place to vote "against all," all the bulletins in which no specific candidate was selected were considered invalid.

have affected the outcome of the voting were noted at only five polling stations, whereby they were primarily procedural problems and not related to vote-counting fraud or ballot stuffing.⁶⁵

The group of observers from the International Expert Center for Electoral Systems also recognized the election in Armenia as democratic.⁶⁶ Soon the leaders of the EU, Council of Europe, NATO, Russia, the U.S., France, Germany, Ukraine, Georgia, and even Turkey were congratulating Serzh Sargsian.

The Opposition Does Not Recognize the Election Results

However, the election was assessed critically within the country. Serzh Sargsian's opponents interrupted the presentation of the ODIHR's interim report on the Armenian election. Furthermore, the OSCE was accused of complying with its falsification, although this time there were fewer cases of use of the administrative resource than at the parliamentary elections in 2012.

⁶⁴ Author's calculation based on the data published by the Central Election Commission.

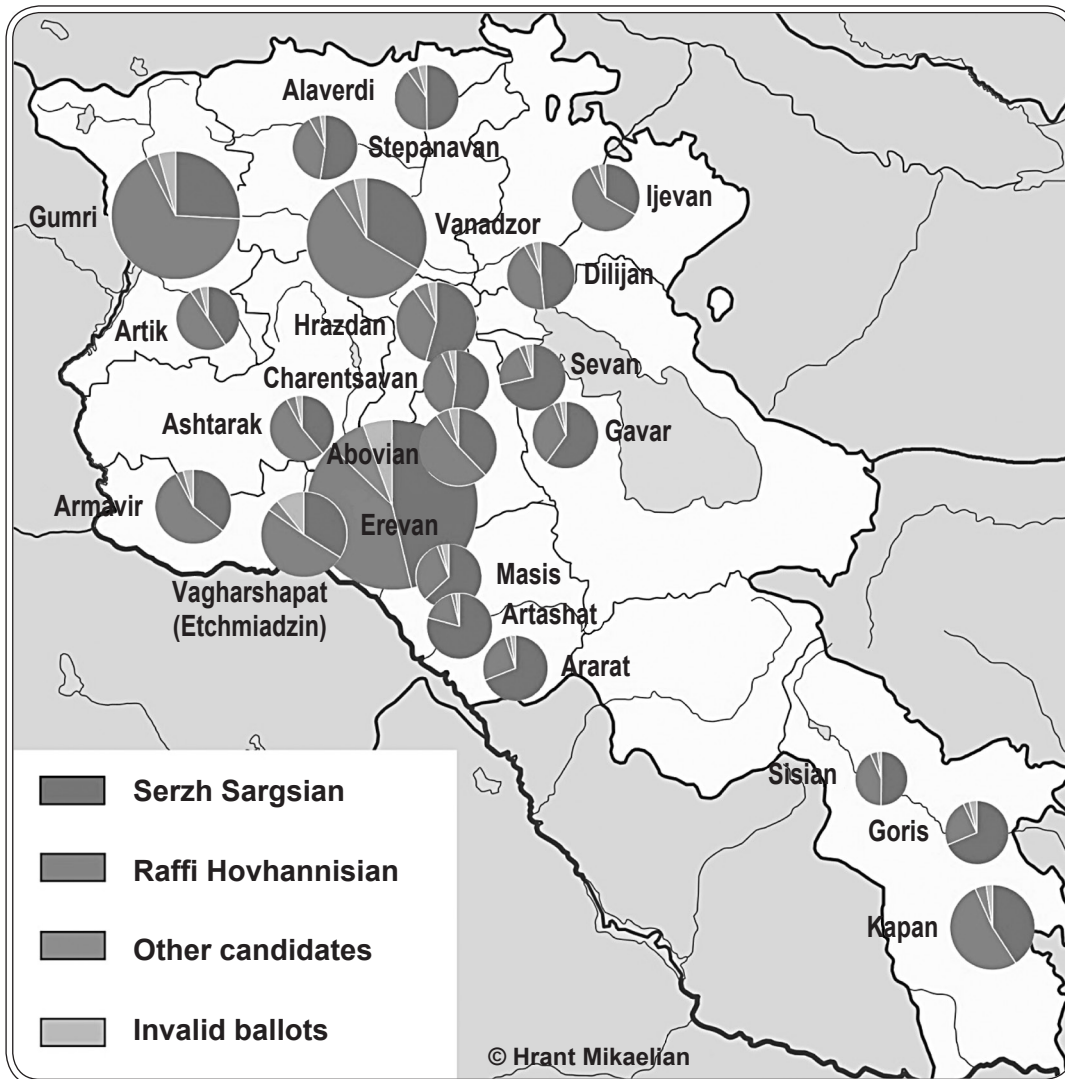
⁶⁵ See: *Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions*, OSCE/ODIHR, 19 February, 2013, p. 11, available at [<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/99675>].

⁶⁶ See: *Election Report*, ICES, 19 February, 2013, available in Russian at [<http://www.elections-ices.org/files/publications/16521.pdf>].

Sargsian’s overwhelming advantage was confirmed at the polling stations where the army voted, whereas in many cities the opposition candidate won. The activity of the ruling party led to the fact that in the villages, known for their political passivity and where around one third of the population lives, Serzh Sargsian gathered the overwhelming majority of the votes.

Let us try to understand why the opposition did not recognize the election results.

Voting Map of Armenian Cities



Before the election, few expected Raffi Hovhannisian to receive 540,000 votes, but it was this result that revived the intrigue that appeared to have long left the stage of Armenian politics. Raffi Hovhannisian refused to recognize the election results; on the contrary, he was calling himself the president of Armenia. Furthermore, the fact cannot be ignored that the administrative resource was used in favor of the current president.

Despite the fact that the losing candidate refused to recognize the election results, Armenia still made certain progress. It is enough to mention that after the election, the losing and winning candidates met and calmly discussed several issues. The fact that politics are no longer restricted to the center of Erevan can also be considered a good sign: Raffi Hovhannisian began holding protest demonstrations in essentially all the cities of the country.

City residents rightly considered that the election did not reflect the result of nation-wide voting since in many cities Raffi Hovhannisian won (his campaign was aimed precisely at city residents); he was not understood and not accepted in the villages. Moreover, Hovhannisian did not have organizational resources in the small communities of Armenia; after visiting so many cities, he could hardly travel to 870 Armenian villages as well.

If we rely on the available information about the small number of violations, we can find an unexpected explanation for the overall negative assessment the election process was given inside the country. Against the background of its improvement, some violations (serious and not very), such as use of the administrative resource, suddenly stood out in bold relief, although in the past they were taken for granted.

In the second half of February, Hovhannisian's rating was on the rise. Despite this, in those areas where he won or gathered a large number of votes, a low turnout and large number of invalid bulletins were seen, which shows the lack of trust in the electoral system of the country as a whole. The mentioned facts say that Raffi Hovhannisian, who just recently recommended himself as an opposition leader, still had the potential to attract the protest electorate. In other words, if Raffi Hovhannisian had been more active in the regions with a large number of city residents, he would have received a higher number of votes.

Post-Election Development of Events: BaRevolution

The protest demonstrations organized by Hovhannisian were soon christened "BaRevolution" (Hello Revolution), implying the politician's habit of walking around the streets and saying hello to the voters. Quite a large number of young people were involved in the demonstrations; they were peaceful and did not draw huge crowds (they usually drew between 5,000 and 15,000 participants in Erevan, and between 200 and 1,500 people in other cities).

The fact that the so-called revolution was actively supported by many former supporters and associates of Ter-Petrosian (including those who had not participated in the election at all) confirms that the protest electorate has not lost its potential and is still geared toward carrying out a revolutionary change in power, that is, complete dismantling of the existing system of rule. This is precisely the reason for Hovhannisian's rapid rise in popularity; however, he was unable to recommend himself as a successful political manager.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Hovhannisian is extremely likeable and is not rejected by either the members of unofficial Orange organizations or by the older generation discontent with the socioeconomic situation.

As for the protest demonstrations, their nucleus consisted of environmental activists who have succeeded in manifesting themselves over the past three years.

Since the nucleus of the protest movement is comprised of middle-class members of unofficial organizations, the likelihood of it escalating into a revolution is not very high. As the experience of recent revolutions (successful and unsuccessful) has shown, the most aggressive charge comes from middle-aged disillusioned unemployed people or young people deprived of social perks. Furthermore,

we are dealing with people for whom protest is only a game (particularly young people). Despite the four-year history of the leftist movement in Armenia, it never did become mass and did not go beyond the center of Erevan and Gumri; so there is no point expecting street protests to bring about an overturn of power.⁶⁷

Still, Was the Presidential Election Falsified?

After the election results were announced, one of the main complaints was the correlation between the turnout and the number of votes Serzh Sargsian received; the data in Table 6 can serve as a graphic example. The author of this article calculated the Pearson Correlation Coefficient for the election, revealing that the share of votes Serzh Sargsian received is positively correlated with the turnout in Armenia's regions; the coefficient amounted to 0.8265. In Raffi Hovhannisian's case, this coefficient was equal to -0.7968 .

The opposition is using this fact as proof of mass ballot stuffing and falsifications. In turn, Russian and Armenian experts offered their own model for counting the election results, basing the turnout on normal or Gaussian distribution. Such calculations were carried out in Armenia too and produced a largely similar result: around 42 for Sargsian, and between 48 and 51 for Hovhannisian.⁶⁸

Experts explain the positive relation between the turnout and number of votes Sargsian received and negative coefficient in the case of Hovhannisian as proof of ballot stuffing or vote-counting fraud. But it should be noted that the mathematical models used to calculate the above-mentioned coefficients have one special feature: they presuppose in general equal participation of voters throughout the country and homogenous voting at the national level.

Keeping in mind the facts we already know, the conclusion can be drawn that this feature is the weak link in the study's methodology. First, everyone knew even before the election that the turnout in the village (78%) was expected to be higher than in the cities (73%), not to mention in Erevan (66%).⁶⁹ Taking into account the stable migration outflow observed in Armenian cities (apart from Erevan) and simultaneous high level of support for Hovhannisian, it could be presumed that this was where the official turnout would be much lower than expected since the survey was carried out among the de facto population.

Furthermore, it is easy to explain the difference in turnout indices between Gumri, Vanadzor, and Kapan, which were caught in the emigration wave after Armenia gained its independence, and the economically prosperous cities of the Ararat region, which people leave much more rarely (here this index was of course higher). Moreover, we know that Raffi Hovhannisian's election campaign was designed mainly for the cities.

As a member of the observation mission, the present author of this article visited 8 polling stations in the city of Goris. In addition, he carried out an analysis of the election results at polling stations where categories of citizens vulnerable to administrative pressure voted. As a result, it was

⁶⁷ See: I. Azar, "Poka, revoliutsia," *Lenta.ru*, 25 February, 2013, available at [<http://lenta.ru/articles/2013/02/25/armenia/>].

⁶⁸ See: "Policy Forum Armenia Publishes the Results of Its Preliminary Analysis on 18 February, 2013 Presidential Election in Armenia," 22 February, 2013, available at [<http://www.pf-armenia.org/sites/default/files/2013%20Election%20Statement-3.pdf>]; "'Wizard' in Armenian is 'kahard,'" available in Russian at [<http://romanik.livejournal.com/718556.html>]; "Armenian Election in the Mirror of Official Statistics," available in Russian at [<http://abuzin.livejournal.com/114160.html>].

⁶⁹ See: "Poll: Armenia on the Eve of Presidential Elections," p. 21.

possible to assess the influence of the administrative resource on the election results. For example, around 90% of army recruits voted for Serzh Sargsian; the same was seen in prisons and refugee camps. Keeping in mind the total number of army recruits, prisoners, and refugees, the conclusion can be drawn that Sargsian's results were inflated by approximately two-fold.

In addition, there was ballot stuffing (two cases of extensive stuffing are known), and in the Yerevan administrative district of Malatia-Sebastia, a suspiciously large number of people voted according to absentee ballots (2,800 higher than the norm); these direct falsifications raised Sargsian's results by another 0.2%.

It is precisely these generally small direct falsifications that OSCE observers were referring to when they announced the high level of the election in Armenia.

The present author also managed to count the anomalously high number of votes Sargsian received in the evening. This is explained by the members of his staff mobilizing those voters who had sold their vote but had not come independently to the polling stations; in Goris, for example, this kind of "distortion" amounted to around 9%.

The number obtained by multiplying the votes of those who came to the polling stations during the day (if it can be said that they came independently) and the disproportionately high number of Sargsian's supporters who appeared in the evening (if it can be said that they voted exclusively for money) is an indication of the influence of electoral bribes on the final voting results. In so doing, there is no reason to extrapolate this number (9%) as distortion of the results throughout the country: in some regions it could vary. Even if we take it as a basis, Sargsian would still have gathered more than 52% of the votes after deduction of the influence of the administrative resource. Moreover, there is no evidence that voters were coerced into buying votes, so this factor can be taken for granted at this stage.

Conclusion

Armenia has passed the election exam at this stage; the degree of antagonism in terms of government vs. opposition has dropped somewhat, even though the latter did not recognize the results as legitimate. All the opposition parties acquired seats in parliament, while the former rival of the current president is happy to communicate with the government.

However, active use of the administrative resource and the buying of votes that took place prevent the elections held in Armenia in 2012-2013 from being considered completely fair. Running ahead, an important step forward would be if administrative methods were rejected at the next election.

The year 2012 demonstrated that a competitive struggle for electorate votes can be carried out by liberalizing the media space. There is also potential for gradually reducing the tension in the political system caused primarily by the government's low level of legitimacy and the revolutionary moods in society.

As for parties representing citizens' group interests, hopefully they will appear in the future.