

THE STATE OF POLITICS IN ARMENIA

COMPARTATIVE ANALAYIS OF INTERNATIONAL OPPOSITION PARTIES AND THEIR EFFECTS IN GOVERNMENT

In a democracy, the significance of having an opposition or coalition in government is that it represents an alternative government and is therefore responsible for challenging the laws, encouraging transparency and producing varied and coherent policies wherever necessary.

In Armenia, it has been very difficult to achieve a successful opposition government, due to the fact that the republican party of Armenia dominated Armenian politics for decades. Serzh Sargysyan became President in 2008 and ensured the solidification of his grip on his party and authority and power over the country. He eliminated competition and marginalized the opposition parties during elections through vote buying, oppression and assault.

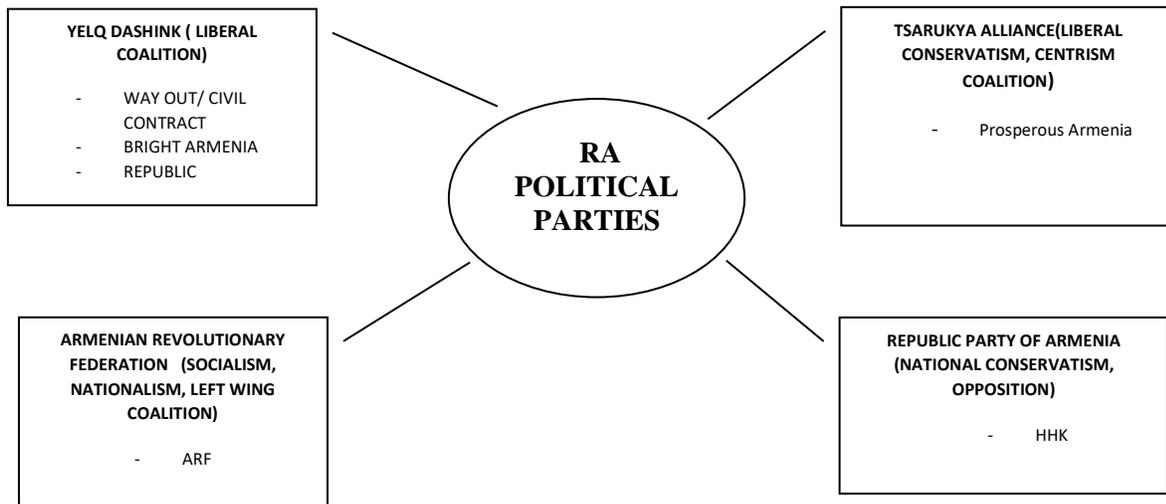
In comparison, in Nicaragua it was observed that its guerilla leader Daniel Ortgega attacked civil liberties so as to bolster a one-party rule over the nation for the third consecutive presidential term, unimpeded by opposition leaders. During the 2017 parliamentary elections, many parties in parliament had lost their seats and the Republican Party won an absolute majority as it entered a coalition with ARF as it had done in 2012.

In Armenia, the legislative branch of government is called the National Assembly of Armenia or *Azgayin zhoghov*, and is a unicameral body consisting of 101 seats. The government is made up of a multiparty system, where a president as well as the legislature are elected on a national level, the prime minister is the head of government and the executive . Unicameralism is the practice of a government having one legislative parliamentary chamber. Unicameral legislatures were created in societies where there was no need for muticameralism, which is the practice where the legislature us divided into several deliberative chambers or houses.

A unicameral legislature often prevails in unitary states and is efficient in regards to lawmaking and reduces costs, as legislative processes are much simpler and prevent any possibility of a deadlock in parliament. However, a main weakness in this system includes a lack of restraint on the majority parliament and there is a risk that sectors of society may not be adequately represented, thus leading to discrimination.

In the General Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, the political groups that create the entirety of parliament includes; the majority government, consisting of the Way Out Alliance, Civil Contract, Bright Armenia, Hanrapetakan Party; the minority government, consisting of ARF and Tsarukyan Alliance; and finally the opposition party now consists mainly of the Republican Party.

ARMENIAN PARLIAMENTARY PARTIES:



ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The current threshold is set at 5% for single parties and 7% for blocs and multi-party alliances. During the 2012 elections, the RA National Assembly had 131 seats of which 41 were single member constituencies. However, after the 2015 referendum, the constitution was amended to reduce the minimum number of seats in the National Assembly to 101 seats. During elections, voters are given a ballot paper with two sections, consisting of a closed list of candidates on a national level and an open list for candidates for the constituency. According to electoral law, candidates are required to receive 54% to become majority. If a party receives a majority of the vote but gets less than 54% of the seats, they will be awarded additional seats to give them 54% of the total. Voters elect on national level a head of state - the president – for a five year term and a legislature.

In its historical timeline, national assembly election results were as follows:

6 MAY 2012

During the parliamentary 2012 elections, a total of 9 parties participated, those including; Prosperous Armenia, Heritage, ANC, ARF, Democratic Party of Armenia, Armenian Communist Party, Republican Party of Armenia, Unified Armenians Party and the Rule of Law.

President Serzh Sargsyan's ruling Republican Party gained more majority of the parliament seats. Armenia's wealthiest man Gagik Tsarukyan's Prosperous Armenia came second with about one fourth of the seats, while ANC, ARF, Rule of Law and Heritage won less than 10 percent each. Armenia faced unprecedented opposition protests over the 2008 presidential election. Out of 131 seats in the National Assembly, 90 are distributed and 41 are elected by majoritarian voting.

Post elections movements to eliminate constituency seats and opting for a full party list system was supported by 3 of 5 parliamentary parties (ARF, PAP, Heritage) as well as opposition bloc ANC, in a bid to eliminate district authorities which were back up by the Republican Party.

In the aftermath of the elections, opposition party ANC Armenian National Congress announced demonstrations in freedom square demanding a re-lection and claiming electoral fraud and rigging. While international monitoring groups like the OSCE Election Observation Missions, commented that the election was peaceful, they also noticed interference by the Republican party, which violated election law in the weeks leading to the vote.

2 APRIL 2017

The 2017 elections were the first held following the 2015 Constitutional referendum allowing reforms to Armenia to become a Parliamentary Republic which transferred substantial executive power from the presidential office to the prime minister and the parliament. It was seen as an important test of the democracy in Armenia, not only in regards to the distribution of presidential power among the parliament, but also the implementation of the election process itself. The election results saw a tight race between RPA and Tsarukyan's bloc: RPA, 33%; Tsarukyan, 29%; Yelk, 9% and ARF, 8%. However, the final results gave RPA a comfortable victory, but short of its own majority: RPA, 49.15%; Tsarukyan Bloc, 27.37%; Yelk Bloc, 7.78%; ARF, 6.58%. The turnout of the votes was 60.93%.

President Serzh Sargsyan's Republican Party of Armenia gained majority votes and won 58 out of 105 seats in the National Assembly, with 770,441 votes from the public (out of a subsequent 2,588,468 voter turnout that day).

In their final observation report, the OSCE EOM criticized the election by claiming there had been obvious vote-buying, pressure, harassment of civil servants and civilians, bribe distribution and fraud. Transparency International, as well as other international monitoring groups, all criticized the election and also confirmed vote buying and bribe distribution.

IMPORTANCE OF AN OPPOSITION

The question about the importance of opposition parties within a democracy is a challenging one, specifically when oppositions exist to increase transparency, accountability or responsibility however the opposition in the National Assembly of Armenia has been accused of vote buying, corruption and fraud scandals.

While opposition parties are an unparalleled component to parliamentary democracies that reassure application of checks and balances within parliament and provide contributions to policy, the Republic of Armenia has used pressure and vote buying to gain public support and serve 3 consecutive terms as the ruling party of the National Assembly. While governments are obligated to pay respect to the presence of an opposition party, the presence of the Republic of Armenia has been ill welcomed. It has been a challenge for opposition parties in government to become elected during parliamentary elections, as the ruling party (HHK) ensured that no other votes are given to the nominated and running parties in the election.

However it is the main role of government to ensure that government functions fairly and justly across all aspects of civil society and democracy. It has been said that without an opposition government, there will be an end to democracy as opposition has a very crucial role within parliament.

OPPOSITION PARTIES COMPARATIVE TABLE

	UK	LITHUANIA	AUSTRALIA	GERMANY	ISRAEL
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional Monarchy • Multiparty • Coalition • Two Party House 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unitary semi - presidential government • Multiparty, • Coalition • Two party house 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy • Multi party, • Coalition • Two party house 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic Federal parliamentary republic • Multiparty, • Coalition • Two party house 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parliamentary democracy • Multiparty system • Coalition • Two party house
MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION	<p><i>House of Commons</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Conservative and Unionist Party (<i>Majority</i>) ➤ Labour Party (<i>Opposition</i>) ➤ <i>Minorities:</i> Liberal democrats, Scottish National Party, Democratic Unionist Party, Sinn Fein (<i>Minorities</i>) 	<p><i>Seimas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (<i>Majority</i>) ➤ Homeland Union, Social Democratic Party of Lithuania, Liberal Movement, Order and Justice, Labour Party (<i>Minorities</i>) 	<p><i>House of representatives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Conservative Liberal (<i>Majority</i>) ➤ Labour party (<i>Opposition</i>) ➤ Australian Greens, Centre Alliance, Pauline Hansons One Nation, Conservatives, United Australia Party (<i>Minorities</i>) 	<p><i>Bundestag</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Christian Democratic Union of Germany (<i>Majority</i>) ➤ Social Democratic Party of Germany (<i>Opposition</i>) ➤ Alternative for Germany, Free Democratic Party, The Left, SDP, Greens, The Blue Party. (<i>Minorities</i>) 	<p><i>Knesset</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Likud (<i>Majority</i>) ➤ Zionist Union Labour Party (<i>Opposition</i>) ➤ Zionist Union Hatnuah, Greens Movement, Joint List Hadash, Joint List Balad, Join List Ta'al, Yesh Atid, The Jewish Home (<i>Minorities</i>)

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