

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Armenia

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>5</td> <td>5</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>5</td> <td>5</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>12</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	Polity:	5	5	0	Democ:	5	5	0	Autoc:	0	0	0	Durable:		12		Tentative:		No		
Score:	2009	2010	Change																						
Polity:	5	5	0																						
Democ:	5	5	0																						
Autoc:	0	0	0																						
Durable:		12																							
Tentative:		No																							
SCODE	ARM	CCODE	371	Date of Report	1 June 2011																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	2	4	5	2	3																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date			3 February 1998	Begin Date																					
				4 February 1998																					
Polity Fragmentation: No (disputed sovereignty of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan)																									
Constitution																									
1995																									
Executive(s)																									
President Serzh Sargsyan (HHK); directly elected, 19 February 2008, 52.9%																									
Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan (independent); appointed by president, 8 April 2008																									
Legislature																									
Unicameral:																									
National Assembly (131 seats; 41 directly elected, 90 proportionally elected; most recent elections, 12 May 2007)																									
Republican Party of Armenia (HHK): 64																									
Prosperous Armenia (BHK): 25																									
Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnak/HHD): 16																									
Rule of Law (OE): 9																									
Heritage (Z): 7																									
Other parties: 10																									
Judiciary																									
Constitutional Court																									

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Transitional or Restricted Elections (7)

The President of Armenia is directly elected. Despite the competitive nature of executive recruitment in this country, election observers for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) noted serious irregularities in both the September 1996 presidential elections and the 1998 elections held to replace President Levon Ter-Petrosyan (who was forced to resign in February 1998). Robert Kocharian,

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Prime Minister and Interim President (formerly president of Nagorno-Karabakh), was named president following a run-off election with former Communist leader Karen Demirchian. While OSCE observers noted significant irregularities in the 1998 balloting they did not dispute the outcome.

In November 1999 President Kocharian appointed Aram Sargsyan as prime minister to replace his brother, Vargen Sargsyan, who was killed in the October 1999 terrorist attack on the National Assembly. Continuing friction between Prime Minister Sargsyan and President Kocharian resulted in the president's dismissal of the government and the appointment of a new prime minister, Andranik Markarian, in May 2000.

Presidential elections were held on February 19, 2003 and were contested by four candidates. With votes for President Kocharian falling just shy of the required 50% majority, a runoff ballot with Stephan Demirchian (son of Karen Demirchian, who was slain in the 1999 attack on the National Assembly), was conducted. The runoff election was won by Kocharian (67.5%) but the results were hotly disputed by the opposition parties. International observers criticized the election as "falling short of international standards." In the wake of this election Markarian was reappointed as prime minister, however, he died suddenly on 25 March 2007 and was replaced by Defense Minister Serzh Sargsyan. Following May 2007 legislative elections, a ruling coalition was formed that included Serzh Sargsyan's Republican Party (NHK), Prosperous Armenia (BHK), Armenian Revolutionary Federation, and the National Solidarity Party; together, the coalition controlled 104 of the 131 seats.

President Kocharian, who was barred by the constitution from serving a third consecutive term, actively sought to pass on his office to his prime minister, Serzh Sargsyan. Presidential elections, held on 19 February 2008, were contested by Prime Minister Sargsyan, former-President Levon Ter-Petrosyan and six other candidates. The final results gave Serzh Sargsyan the victory with 52.82% of the vote. Ter-Petrosyan claimed serious electoral violations, including ballot-stuffing, kidnapping and voter intimidation. As post-election violence escalated, President Kocharian issued a three-week state of emergency. Many opposition supporters were arrested and at least 8 were killed. International observers judged the election to be generally democratic but noted some problems with the vote count. The Constitutional Court rejected the opposition's calls to overturn the election.

Executive Constraints: Substantial Limitations (5)

In the post-Soviet era the president has maintained extensive powers of appointment and decree that have not been effectively checked by either the legislature or the judiciary. Under this semi-presidential system, the president has wielded the power to dissolve the parliament after consulting with the Speaker and Prime Minister. Under increasing pressure from the Council of Europe, however, the ultimate power of the presidency has come under intense scrutiny. In November 2005 a constitutional referendum was held to reduce the powers of the Armenian president. Under the terms of the referendum, the powers of the president to dismiss the national assembly, to oversee the judiciary and media, and to make ministerial appointments were to be weakened while the independent powers of the judiciary were to be enhanced. The opposition parties urged a boycott of the referendum, claiming that the constitutional changes would actually strengthen presidential powers. While the government reported turnout of 65% for the referendum, opposition forces and international observers estimated the turnout to be closer to 20%. While the referendum passed with 93% of the vote, nevertheless, not much has really changed in the structure of governance in this country. The government remains semi-presidential in structure and decision making process remain largely centralized in the hands of the president.

Political Participation: Factional Competition (7)

The post-Soviet political environment in Armenia remains unsettled. While the country has made significant strides in its transition from a centralized, command economy to a market economy, nevertheless, the country continues to be plagued by economic hardships associated with the conduct of the war with Azerbaijan and continued regional tensions. Unemployment remains high and industrial output low. Armenia's relative isolation in the volatile Caucasus region, its internal security problems, as well as the unresolved status of the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave and poor relations with Azerbaijan continue to shape the political atmosphere in the country. Domestic tensions reached a peak on October 27, 1999, when five armed men broke into a session of the National Assembly, killing several high-ranking government officials (including the Prime Minister and Speaker of the National Assembly) and holding parliamentarians hostage before surrendering to security forces after being allowed to publicly voice their grievances. While the instigators of the raid on the National Assembly have argued that they acted alone in

an effort to spark a popular revolt against the government, others believe that President Kocharian was the mastermind behind this plot. No evidence has surfaced to directly implicate the President.

Factionalism in Armenian politics has increased markedly since the October 1999 attack on parliament as President Kocharian has come under increasing criticism for his use of executive power against opposition parties. The People's Party of Armenia (HZhK), the junior partner in the majority Unity Bloc (Miasnutiun) in the National Assembly, issued a statement in September 2001 saying that Miasnutiun was defunct and calling for new legislative elections. The statement described Miasnutiun's other member, the Republican Party of Armenia (NHK), headed by Prime Minister Andranik Markarian, as a "stooge" of President Kocharian and accused the NHK of enacting "anti-popular laws through all kinds of pressure and falsification." Leaders of the HZhK and two other parties (the National Accord Front and Hanrapetutium) issued a statement calling for the impeachment of Kocharian, whom they accused of violating the constitution and condoning terrorism by sabotaging the investigation into the October 1999 National Assembly shootings. Tensions increased again in April 2002 when the independent A1+ television channel, the country's main opposition station, which had frequently broadcast harsh criticism of the government, was forced to end its broadcasts on April 3 after losing a tender for its frequency to an entertainment company with reported links to a member of the presidential administration. Tens of thousands of people attended protest rallies in the capital convened by 14 opposition parties; the protest continued throughout April. After garnering the required number of signatures to force a special session of the National Assembly, an opposition attempt to reinstate A1+ failed to gain a quorum of the legislature. The Armenian Economic Court rejected a suit brought by Meltex, the founder of A1+.

The February 2003 presidential elections were shrouded in controversy as were the subsequent legislative elections, held in May 2003. On June 11 the three main parties supporting President Kocharian, the HHK, OE, and Dashnak, formed a coalition government and reappointed HHK chairman Markarian as prime minister. Members of the opposition parties, Justice and National Unity, boycotted the legislative session that opened on June 12, 2003. In April 2004, opposition parties organized a series of demonstrations in the capital (Yerevan) calling for the resignation of Kocharian. Government forces reacted strongly to quell dissent and the protests failed to dislodge the government or gain substantial concessions; opposition leaders called off the demonstrations in June 2004. The level of force used in the government crackdown drew widespread international criticism. While internal tensions appeared to have calmed considerably in the run up to May 2007 legislative elections, open contention increased once again as opposition demonstrations were staged in Yerevan in the aftermath of the disputed presidential elections of February 2008.