

The Impact Of Voter Turnout And Peculiarities Of Elections In Post-Soviet Armenia

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Abstract: In post-Soviet countries, the process of democratization is not linear and causes a variety of conflicts. The electoral process and the election institute, as essential elements of electoral political culture, have an important role in political process, especially when the state is transitioning to a parliamentary system of governance, where the quality of internal and external state politics effectiveness mainly depends on the national legislative body. Based on comparative statistical data analysis as well as using behavioral and discourse approaches, the article explores voter turnout in 1991-2018 national elections by revealing its impact on electoral processes as well as peculiarities of elections in Armenia. The findings of conducted research have shown that there was a higher voter turnout during presidential than parliamentary elections and constitutional referendums which is due to more personalized than institutionalized perception of political power. The electoral institute is not sustainable and has a conflict nature in Armenia. To improve the functioning of electoral institute and to restore public confidence in it, it is not necessary to improve only the legislation but to develop the political forces by inclusion of democratic values in public consciousness through political process. In this sense, the evolution of party system based mainly on democratic ideas and not only on personalities is needed. The political process in spring of 2018 in Armenia may create some preconditions ensuring electoral process transparency, taking into account the increase of public confidence among elections as well as the significant decrease in election fraud, and the credibility of early parliamentary election results after the Velvet Revolution. 2018 early parliamentary election can be considered as a step forward to democracy improvement in Armenia.

Index Terms: elections voter turnout, multi-party system, post-Soviet transformation, political process, political culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

The collapse of Soviet Union, causing unprecedented socio-political situation in post-Soviet republics, forced systemic transformations in all spheres of public life (Torosyan, T. 2006, Poghosyan, G. 2003). The current situation required searching and developing of modern mechanisms for public-political relations regulation, as the implementation of former Soviet mechanisms and approaches was not practicable. According to some researchers opinion at the beginning of 1990s (Huntington, S. 1991), the change of public order and the transformation of political regime required a formation of new forms and contents of political institutions and a new political culture that would have to be based on democratic values and liberal ideas. The western experience of democracy and political institutions were viewed as models for the political modernization of newly independent republics. The West, in its turn, was interested in introducing its social and political system in the newly established states as the bipolar world order collapsed and there was created an opportunity to revise the impact and control zones in post-Soviet space. The political pluralism of western social and political life, the competitive electoral institute as well as other democratic mechanisms, institutions and values that did not exist in Soviet times began to gradually be implemented in newly independent states. The Soviet one-party political system, which rejected political pluralism and competition, in itself did not allow the existence of a real competitive electoral institute. The centralized Soviet political power was removing the politically active part of society from real politics with all acceptable and unacceptable means. But in the period of Soviet *Perestroika* (restructuring), tendencies of political pluralism recognition and market economy formation were observed (Krishtanovskaya, O. 1995, 63-73). And it is no coincidence that without a deep understanding of democratic values, mechanisms and institutions, the peoples of post-Soviet space were enthusiastic about dramatic changes in public life. They wanted to see the newly independent country as a liberal one, as it is possible to ensure a large participation of society in political processes when developing a democratic regime. Especially it is important in the process of political power formation where the electoral institute plays a crucial

role. Political competition and pluralism are practically manifested by alternative electoral institute, which, as being an instrument for the reflection of democracy, is important in evaluating the effectiveness of domestic political structures and processes, defining deficiencies, and, consequently, in their balancing, stabilization and improvement. The study of electoral institute gives an opportunity to identify the problems and peculiarities of elections, as well as analyze the impact of voter turnout on those processes. Moreover, since it is a unique process, to which participate political and state governance systems, the electoral process give an opportunity to formulate an integrated assessment of these systems. There is no coincidence that in 1990s, the elections were considered as key issues in post-Soviet transformation paradigm (Carothers, T., 2002, 6-21). Of course, the idea of elections' key importance for democratization (Torosyan, T., Sukiasyan, H., 2014, 51-61) has been revised later, but elections continue to be an important factor characterizing the level of democracy. The fact how citizens perceive elections has a major impact on the legitimacy of transitional political systems. In post-communist systems the legitimacy depends on the feelings that emanate from elections, associated with the accountability of elected officials, the political influence of government, and personal interests. The results of 1993-1994 polls on the elections in some of post-Soviet countries have shown that those who have made such a choice have shown political interest and have supported the legitimacy of the system. However, there was a few number of such voters. The acceptance of election results by the people as legitimate will soon depend on the level of democratic institutions responsibility and accountability, their political influence and personal interests (Pammatt, J., De Bardeleben, J., 1996, 363-381). Competitive elections and a competitive party system are two institutions presumed to promote responsive government and democracy. Building on a survey design conceptualized by Donald Stokes and Warren Miller in the 1960s, Arthur H. Miller, William M. Reisinger, and Vicki L. Hesli examine the congruence between the policy preferences of parliament members and their constituents in post-Soviet countries. The evidence suggests that the newly competitive and democratic elections, as well as the rise of political parties

that occurred after the collapse of Communism, were indeed enhancing political representation in post-Soviet societies. Given the policy orientation of the newly elected leaders, however, the outcome does not necessarily imply a consolidation of support for democracy and a market economy (Miller, Arthur H., Reisinger, William M., Hesli, Vicki L., 1998, 327-349). In this regard we can state that there are some similarities between electoral processes in post-Soviet countries which are due the common political past and heritage. This research is focused on identification of voter turnout impact on post-Soviet Armenia's elections, as well as determination of elections' peculiarities, considering the absolute and relative dynamics of citizens and political forces' participation in these processes.

2. VOTER TURNOUT IMPACT ON ELECTIONS' EFFECTIVENESS

International experience of election analysis shows that elections' effectiveness is mainly conditioned by voter turnout. This is one of central issues in electoral studies. Political equality is central to modern perceptions of democracy (Dahl, R., 2006). Citizens should not only have equal rights to participate in collective decision-making, but they must also exercise these rights by participating in the election of their representatives. Active participation in political process is required because it forms better citizens (Mill, J.S., 1861). Participation is also important because decisions made thereby are more representative (Bartels, L., 2008; Enns, P., Wlezien, C., 2011). Without participation, the statement that democracy is largely self-governing, becomes incomplete (Bartle, J., Birch, S., Skirmuntt, M. 2017, 30-44). Elections are celebrated in democracies as well as in non-democracies. Studies on the factors explaining turnout normally focus, however, only on democracies. Are turnout peculiarities different in non-democracies? If so, how different are those? To answer to these questions it is important to explore some relevant issues on the case of Armenia's elections. First, in this case the type of electoral system becomes extremely important. Frederico Ferreira da Silva rightly states that personalized electoral systems further increase the influence of leaders on electoral participation (da Silva Frederico, F. 2018, 61-79). Probably, after 2015 Constitutional amendments in Armenia that determined transition to a parliamentary model of governance, the implementation of rating system¹ in electoral Code was due to that reason. Rating system attaches great importance to the factor of person, as a means of promoting voter turnout mostly in societies where voters are not used to ideological but personalized election campaign. Second, it should be noted that the implementation of multi-party system and the adoption of constitution and electoral legislation in post-Soviet countries created all necessary institutional framework and rules for electoral institute. However, this institute is not a primitive mechanism for public administrative system establishment, but rather a result of democratic political culture. Its effectiveness largely depends on coincidence of aspirations and visions of two major players in electoral process - the voters (society) and the elected (political forces) with the system of inherent democratic values. In this regard political discourse can be used as indirect indicator of electoral process. For the purpose of examining the voter turnout impact and elections' effectiveness in

Armenia, 1991-2018 data of all 19 nationwide votings (presidential elections, parliamentary elections, constitutional referendums), as well as political discourse manifestations during these processes were analyzed. See Tables 1,2,3 and Figure 1.

Table 1. Citizens' participation in nationwide votings Presidential Elections.

Date	Total number of voters in Armenia according to the voter list	The number of voters who participated in the vote	Election Turnout Percent
Presidential Election of 1991	2. 155. 698	1. 518. 090	70.4%
Presidential Election of 1996	2. 201. 999	1. 331. 029	60.4%
Presidential Election of 1998 (1st round)	2. 300. 816	1. 449. 004	62.9%
Presidential Election of 1998 (2nd round)	2. 300. 816	1. 567. 702	68.1%
Presidential Election of 2003 (1st round)	2. 315. 410	1. 462. 383	63.1%
Presidential Election of 2003 (2nd round)	2. 331. 507	1. 595. 702	68.4%
Presidential Election of 2008	2. 311. 917	1. 671. 027	72.2%
Presidential Election of 2013	2. 528. 050	1. 521. 489	60.2%

Table 2. Parliamentary Elections.

Date	Total number of voters in Armenia according to the voter list	The number of voters who participated in the vote	Election Turnout Percent
National Assembly Election of 1995	2. 461. 700	1. 283. 573	52.1%
National Assembly Election of 1999	2. 198. 544	1. 137. 660	51.7%
National Assembly Election of 2003	2. 340. 744	1. 233. 757	52.7%
National Assembly Election of 2007	2. 319. 722	1. 391. 540	59.9%
National Assembly Election of 2012	2. 522. 906	1. 572. 858	62.3%
National Assembly Election of 2017	2,585,134	1,575,786	60,9%
National Assembly Election of 2018	2,593,120	1,262,164	48.67%

Table 3. Constitutional Referendums.

Date	Total number of voters in Armenia according to the voter list	The number of voters who participated in the vote	Election Turnout Percent
Constitutional Referendum of 1995	2. 189. 804	1. 217. 531	55.6%
Constitutional Amendments of 2003	2. 339. 704	1. 215. 908	51.9%
Constitutional Amendments of 2005	2. 317. 462	1. 514. 545	65.3%
Constitutional Amendments of 2015	2. 547. 916	1. 302. 613	51.1%

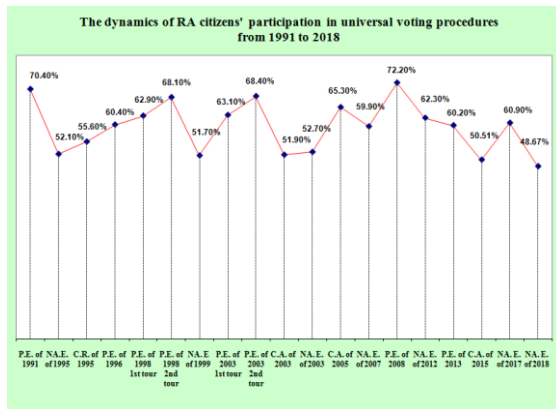


Figure 1. 1991-2018 Dynamics of Voter Turnout Percentage in Nationwide Voteings.

The impact of voter turnout on elections is due to several features when comparing absolute and relative indicators. First of all, during 2013 presidential and 2012 parliamentary elections, the number of voters has increased by about 200000. This could have caused serious reservations regarding data reliability, but as absolute indicators of turnout are comparable with indicators of previous elections, the reservations should be made for turnout relative indicators of 2012 parliamentary and 2013 presidential elections. As a result, it is possible to state the following regularity. Voter turnout is the largest in presidential elections (60 to 72%), then constitutional referendums (50 to 65%) and the lowest in parliamentary elections (48 to 62%) despite the fact that two last parliamentary elections (in 2017 and 2018) took place after 2015 constitutional referendum, when a parliamentary model of governance was adopted. Moreover, the above-mentioned peculiarity is the same for both absolute and relative indicators. In particular, in both cases the highest voter turnout was recorded during same elections (the highest was in 2008 Presidential election - 72.20% or 1.671.027 voters, the lowest - in 1999 National Assembly election - 51.70% or 1.137.660 voters and 2018 National Assembly election - 48.67% or 1.262.164 voters). By the way, in comparison with parliamentary elections of 1999, more than 124,504 voters participated in parliamentary election of 2018 despite the fact that comparing with 1999, the number of voters in 2018 has increased by 394,576. See Figure 2.

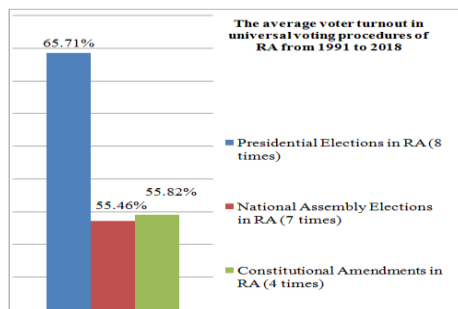


Figure 2. The average indicators of relative turnout in nationwide voteings.

The precise regularity of voter turnout according to types of electoral processes (presidential, parliamentary and constitutional referendums) can be explained by several reasons. The first one is the viability of stereotype that has been shaped by Soviet government over decades. In Soviet era, the Bureau of Central Committee of Communist Party and more often the Secretary General was perceived by society as supreme body of state administration. It is not accidental that personalized perception of public administration often had extreme manifestations (widespread cry for Stalin's death, letters to Lenin's mausoleum even in 1970s and 1980s) with expectation of various issues resolving. Even in post-Soviet era, personality cult remains dominant in most citizens' consciousness as inertial consequence of Soviet political socialization. Meanwhile, the attitude towards parliament was often indifferent and over last decades it was even contemptuous. It should be noted that political parties possessing main levers of governance contributed to it by defining and applying formal criteria for parliament recruiting. Obviously, the change of value stereotypes takes a long time, even when efforts are made in that purpose. Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority of political parties formed in post-Soviet countries were created by similarity to Communist Party, because these actions were taken by people whose knowledge and experience were restricted to Soviet time. The greater participation in presidential elections is due to another circumstance too. As these elections are personalized, the conflict political discourse level is higher. The more political discourse is conflictual, the greater is political activeness during elections and vice versa (Ordukhanyan, E. 2010, 127-128). Hence, personalized electoral process is a stimulus for larger and massive participation. This phenomenon was clearly observed in 2018 April-May revolutionary process in Armenia, when one person succeeded in mobilizing masses with snowball effect and reached the change of executive body, as well as early parliamentary election. In this sense the party system stability is largely determined by the strength of links between masses and elite. Josephine T. Andrews and Richard L. Bairrett Jr. highlighted the role of institutions, focusing on how electoral rules and elected institutions, especially the presidency, impact elites' incentives to coordinate on a stable set of parties or to form new parties, thus affecting electoral volatility. They find that directly elected presidents increase volatility and that presidential power magnifies this effect. Absent a directly elected president, high district magnitude is associated with increased volatility, but district magnitude dampens the impact of an elected president on volatility; hence, their findings underscore the interactive impact of institutions on party systems. The authors also find evidence that bicameralism and concurrence of presidential and parliamentary elections decrease electoral volatility (Josephine, T., Andrews, Richard L., Bairrett, Jr., 2014, 307-321). As for voter turnout intensity specifically during presidential elections, it is noteworthy F. da Silva's statement that personalization of politics provides more electoral participation. This phenomenon has also been observed in Armenia's elections. F. da Silva point out that this tendency is also observed in Western democracies, where leaders widely influence on electoral participation. Hence, personalization of politics has a positive impact on high voter turnout. In particular, the research findings show that political leaders have a major impact on electoral participation. The role of leaders is also great even during mobilizations in parliamentary

elections by parties (da Silva Frederico, F., 2018, 61-79.) But in the Armenian case there is a discrepancy in this provision. In other words, lower rates were registered in the case of parliamentary elections. In fact, the reason of that was not the lack of party leaders' personal impact, but party system misdevelopment. We can state that during Armenia's presidential elections, when they were held in two rounds, the voter turnout indicators were always higher in the second round. This reflects that in second round of presidential elections, when only two candidates remain, the voters are more active, because it is easier to make a choice by voting for one of two candidates. In this case the impact of political discourse is growing, as candidates who are shifted to second round of elections, have opportunity to make a greater impact on electoral process through their electoral speeches and debates. Consequently, it can be argued that political discourse can have a serious impact on voters behavior. There was a wider range of public-political discussions in presidential elections than in parliamentary ones because voters linked their interests, demands, and solution of social issues to president's institute. From this point of view, the perception of president's institute had not undergone big changes even after 2005 constitutional amendments when president's powers were substantially reduced, and a complete counterbalances and constraints constitutional system was established. All of above mentioned factors contribute to organization of large-scale public and political discussions which influence electorate's consciousness and behavior through political discourse. Exploring 1998-2008 Armenia's elections M. Bader notices a slow progress (Bader, M., 2012,49-57). It is interesting that Bader's research confirms our statement made for Armenia that parliamentary and presidential elections have a number of significant differences. In particular, Bader notes that 1998 presidential and 1999 parliamentary, 2003 presidential and parliamentary, 2007 parliamentary and 2008 presidential elections in Armenia were competitive (Bader, M., 2012, 57). It is important to argue that these elections were competitive because of high participation of candidates and political parties. Therefore, we can state that presidential elections in Armenia were not only competitive but also more effective because of higher voter turnout than during parliamentary elections and constitutional referendums. Meanwhile, according to types of electoral process, not only voter turnout, but also pre-election and post-election developments have their peculiarities. With the exception of 1991 and 1998 presidential elections, all others were accompanied by political instability, political tensions, conflict discourse, mass post-election protests, and sometimes clashes with law enforcement officers. However, parliamentary pre-electoral and post-electoral processes (except for 1995 elections) were mainly peaceful, not leading to a sharp confrontation. Consequently not only presidential elections had a special perception by post-Soviet Armenian society, but also political opposition, as main stimulus for pre-election and post-election tensions.

3. REGULARITIES AND PECULIARITIES OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN ARMENIA

To understand the impact of presidential elections on political process and how they changed over time it is necessary to explore some statistical data and factors like post-election developments. The data of 6 presidential elections in Armenia is presented in Table 4 and Figure 3.

Table 4. Six presidential elections in Armenia.

Presidential Election Year	Number of Candidates	Elected President	Percentage of Votes
1991	6	Levon Ter-Petrosyan	83%
1996	4	Levon Ter-Petrosyan	51.75%
1998 (2 rounds)	12	Robert Qocharyan	(1st round) - 38.7%, (2nd round) - 59%
2003 (2 rounds)	9	Robert Qocharyan	(1st round) - 49.8%, (2nd round) - 67.8%
2008	9	Serzh Sargsyan	52.82%
2013	8	Serzh Sargsyan	58.64%

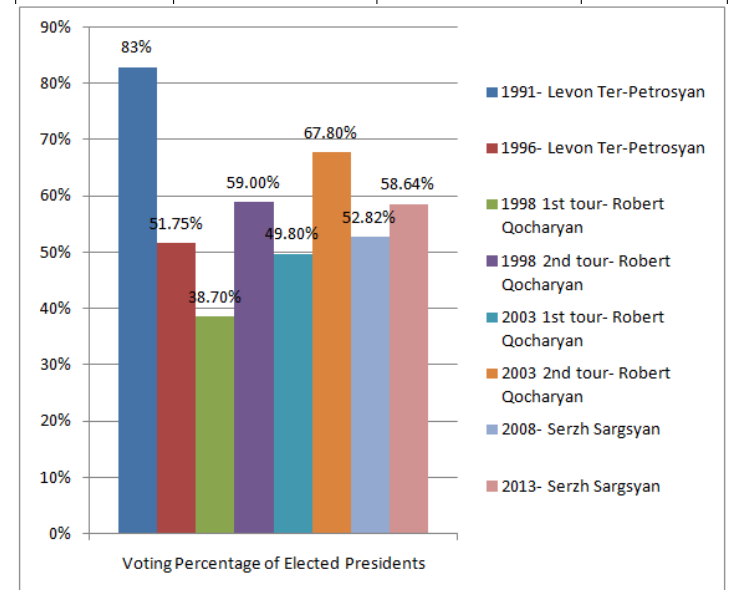


Figure 3. Voting percentage of elected presidents.

The analysis of Armenia's presidential elections has shown that the number of candidates was balancing between 4 and 12. This is an important issue because when a lot of candidates participated to presidential elections, a certain quantity of votes has been lost. Hence, in this sense it should be noted that mostly when the number of candidates was from 9 to 12 there was a second round of presidential elections (1998 and 2003). But when the number of candidates was up to 9 (besides 2008), there were one round elections (1991, 2008, and 2013). Another regularity of Armenia's presidential elections is that besides 1991 election, during all next ones the voting percentage was always higher when elections were held in two rounds (1998, 2003) than in one round (1996, 2008, 2013). As for elections results, we can state that according to majoritarian and direct voting, the percentage of votes given to the first president L. Ter-Petrosyan is the highest during all presidential elections. This is a peculiarity of presidential elections in Armenia because all other elections had not similar or close results. All other presidents have not reached even 70% of votes. First of all this was due to the high legitimacy of L. Ter-Petrosyan as leader of Pan-Armenian National Movement that fought for Armenia's independence during the collapse of Soviet Union. But as for his next presidential term, it should be noted that over time L. Ter-Petrosyan was losing his political endorsement and legitimacy because of his unsustainable politics that deepened social and economic

crisis in Armenia. In 1996 presidential elections L. Ter-Petrosyan got only 51.75% of votes. The election results were contested by the opposition leader V. Manukyan who was the second according to election official results. He launched a series of massive demonstrations and protests claiming that there were a lot of frauds, and election results were not valid. It should be noted that post-election process was very tense. Even there were some acts of violence between protesters and law enforcement. After a real transparent presidential election in 1991, since 1996 there were many electoral frauds almost during all presidential elections in Armenia. 1996 presidential election was a turning point to more authoritarian than democratic regime development. But we can see in Figure 3 that during following presidential elections the voting percentage of winners was always lower than in 1991. In this regard it is important to note that after L. Ter-Petrosyan's resignation in 1998, only 1998 presidential election was basically peaceful, and there were no post-election obvious tensions, demonstrations, and violence. As for R. Qocharyan's and S. Sargsyan's presidential two terms, it should be noted that during 2003, 2008 and 2013 presidential elections the competition between leading candidates was high, there was even deeper conflict discourse than in previous presidential elections. Aftermath, post-electoral protests and violence amplified in Armenia. In 2nd round of 2003 presidential elections there were some clashes between the opposition leaders, protesters and police. But the pick of violence was on 1st March, 2008 when 10 people were killed during post-election protests. In this period the opposition leader was the first Armenian president who was contesting the election results with his supporters. Some protests but less violence were observed also during 2013 post-presidential election process when the opposition leader was R. Hovhannisian. Again many electoral frauds were observed in this election. Summarizing the results of Armenia's presidential elections it should be noted that unfortunately, frauds, protests and violence were a sustainable part of presidential elections. Over time the intensity and level of protests and violence have increased or decreased conditioned by electoral frauds quantity. And this had a huge impact on presidential elections' perception in society.

4. REGULARITIES AND PECULIARITIES OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ARMENIA

Taking into account the transition to a parliamentary model of governance where political forces are main actors ensuring multi-party system development and being responsible for political stability, it is important to explore all Armenian parliamentary elections according to data of proportional voting. See Table 5 a; b and Figure 4.

Table 5 a. The data of 7 parliamentary elections in Armenia.

National Assembly Convocation	Political Forces Entered in Election	Political Forces Represented in Parliament	Number of Voting Forces	Number of Opposition Forces	Ruling Forces	Opposition Forces	Percent of Ruling Forces	Percent of Opposition Forces
First - 1995	13	5	2	3	Union "Republic" Union "Shamiram"	Communist Party of Armenia, National Democratic Union, Union for National Self-Determination	59.54%	25.18%
Second - 1999	21	6	1	5	Block "Solidarity"	Communist Party of Armenia, Right and Unity, ARF Dashnaksutyun	41.69%	38.34%

Table 5 b.

Third - 2003	21	6	3	3	Republican Party of Armenia, Orinats Yerkir Party, ARF Dashnaksutyun	Block "Justice", National Unity Party, United Workers Party	47.71%	28.29%
Fourth - 2007	23	5	3	2	Republican Party of Armenia, Orinats Yerkir Party, Prosperous Armenia Party, ARF Dashnaksutyun	Heritage Party /from 2009 also ARF Dashnaksutyun /	56.09%	19.16%
Fifth - 2012	9	6	2	3+11	Republican Party of Armenia, Orinats Yerkir Party,	Armenian National Congress, ARF Dashnaksutyun, Heritage Party + /Prosperous Armenia Party/	47.51%	17.75% + (28.9%)
Sixth - 2017	9	4	2	2	Republican Party of Armenia, ARF Dashnaksutyun	Block "Tsarukyan" Block "Exit"	61.9%	38.1%
Seventh - 2018	11	3	1	2	Block "My Step"	Prosperous Armenia Party, Bright Armenia Party	70%	30%

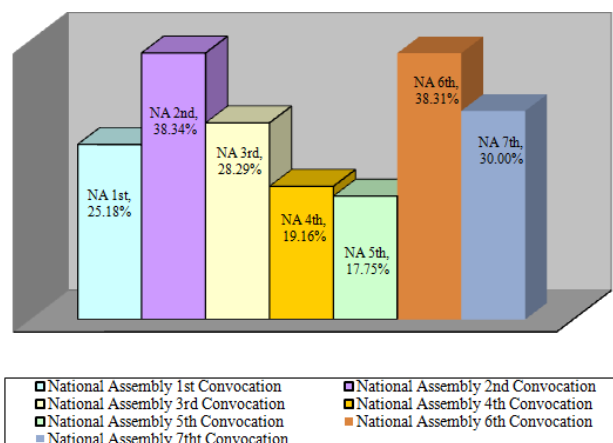


Figure 4. The Representation of Parliamentary Opposition in National Assembly of RA According to Proportional Electoral System

Analyzing the results of parliamentary elections in Armenia according to proportional voting, we immediately notice two regularities: the number of political forces entered the parliament has some stability: from 3 to 6, and about two dozen parties and blocks took part in first four elections. However, according to data of 2012 and 2017 elections, the number of political forces participating in parliamentary elections has dropped by more than twice. After 2007 election 4 of 5 forces formed a coalition government, and the parliamentary opposition was represented only by "Heritage" faction. Two years later ARF left parliamentary majority, but as this faction was also small, the situation did not change. The analysis of above mentioned data show another regularity. Since 1995 as a result of each subsequent parliamentary election, new political forces (accordingly Armenian Revolutionary Federation and Orinats Yerkir in 1999, United Workers Party in 2003, Prosperous Armenia Party and Heritage Party in 2007, Armenian National Congress in 2012, block "Exit" in 2017, Bright Armenia Party and block "My Step" in 2018) entered the parliament. When exploring 2007 NA

election in Armenia N. Roussias and R. Ruiz-Rufino note that it was really competitive, distinguishing two reasons for that. First, after 1991 referendum, international community had recognized 2007 parliamentary election as free and fair. Second reason emanates from 2005 constitutional amendments. According to S. Shugart and J. Carey's classification (Shugart, M., Carey, J., 1992) Armenia made a transition from presidential to parliamentary-presidential system. With a stronger National Assembly all political parties participated in elections, looking forward at 2008 presidential election in February (Ruiz-Rufino, R., 2008, 356-390), during which the highest voter turnout was registered in Armenia. 2007 NA election is noteworthy if we consider also the case of PAP. In its first attempt in 2007, as well as in all subsequent elections this party became the second big faction in parliament. This peculiarity is mostly conditioned by its material potential, leader's personal qualities, as well as coalition, alternative or loyal opposition tactics exercised in pre- or post-electoral processes. However, according to some experts and politicians' statements, one of initiators of PAP was the president of the country, which provided to it a serious support. But the election of National Assembly (NA) of 7th convocation has shown that these statements are incomplete, as in 2018 new political situation the PAP once again got 2nd place in early parliamentary election. Perhaps, in this respect, allegations on party's material potential, leader's personal qualities, and loyal opposition tactics are more substantiated. In 2012 parliamentary election PAP did not enter the coalition, but it is difficult to consider it as fully opposition faction because in political stance PAP was largely in agreement with decisions made by ruling RPA. Even until 2017 NA election PAP often avoided calling itself an "opposition" and identified its status as an "alternative". Only after 2017 NA election, PAP declared itself as an opposition faction. Until 2017 NA election PAP was mainly involved in different events initiated by political opposition, but limited goals of PAP as second faction, greatly reduced its impact on political developments. This circumstance seriously affected not only party's effectiveness, but also was a significant obstacle to multi-party system sustainability. It is not accidental that RPA had absolute majority in state and local self-governing representative bodies until 2018 NA's dissolution. Real competition's low level in state representative bodies not only seriously disturbed the full functioning of constitutional system's checks and balances between branches of power but also hindered the development of multi-party system. Such situation was typical not only for Armenia but also for some other post-Soviet countries where there was no multi-party system, but a set of parties. In this regard, T. Torosyan rightly points out that without being part of the system, parties are not responsible not only for other elements of that system but also for the society, by giving tribute to irresponsible rhetoric and populism (Torosyan, T., 2006, 144). As for 2017 NA election, there we can find two peculiarities. First, this was an election with a new electoral system after 2015 constitutional amendments aiming to establish parliamentary model of governance. Second, this NA was dissolved after one year of functioning. This was the first case in Armenia's 3rd Republic history, when parliament was dissolved with the power of law as a result of 2018 revolutionary process called a "Velvet revolution". Despite the fact that after this parliament's formation there were no post-election protests, and election results were recognized as credible with certain reservations, nevertheless, one year later

S. Sargsyan's nomination after his presidency for a new prime-minister by RPA and ARF, aggravated the political situation. Consequently, N. Pashinyan's popular movement led not only to S. Sargsyan's resignation but also deprived NA of its legitimacy and led to its dissolution in November 2018. It is important to underline that the 6th NA's dissolution was done in full compliance with RA Constitution. As a result, early parliamentary election was called. In this election "My Step" block headed by N. Pashinyan got 884,864 votes (70.42%), which is the highest rate of public confidence ever recorded in Armenian parliamentary elections. As for NA of 7th convocation, it is too early to make judgments on its effectiveness. However, it should be noted that compared to all other national elections the lowest voter turnout was recorded in this election - 48.67%, which is primarily conditioned by the regularity of low voter turnout during Armenia's parliamentary elections, as well as by continuing inaccuracies in voter lists, and by decrease of bribes, compulsion that artificially stimulated voter participation in previous elections. The sharp decline of these vicious phenomena creates promising prerequisites of real competition for upcoming elections. But we have to state that besides positive political settings after 2018 revolutionary process, there are still some crucial issues hindering multi-party system development in Armenia. Almost a complete lack of conceptual and ideological pluralism is one of these issues. Basically, political parties' programs do not differ from each other. Hence, political forces do not rely on different social groups, revealing their concerns and suggesting solutions, but mainly on their leaders' personal qualities and reputation. That is why parties' involvement in political process greatly depends on their political leaders. In such political parties the negative and dangerous aspect of leadership determinism is that party's behavior is due to its leader's personal behavior (Ordukhanyan, E., Sukiasyan, H., 2012, 42). 2018 parliamentary election is different from previous ones by its legitimacy level. It is already noted that presidential elections were more active and had a high conflict level. But in this case 2018 parliamentary election was very transparent, peaceful, and the results were recognized by the people as legitimate. No political parties contested this election results' validity. When compared with 1991 presidential election, we can state that till now the first and the last nationwide elections in Armenia are the most reliable. After defining some regularities and peculiarities of Armenian parliamentary elections it is important to take a look on international observation missions that assess the quality of electoral processes by giving some reports. Obviously, the analysis of elections in post-Soviet Armenia is impossible without a number of deep-rooted issues. This is why the reports of OSCE / ODIHR observation missions² during elections are useful in terms of assessing electoral processes. However, they only formulate an overall assessment of elections quality. In this respect, N. Roussias and R. Ruiz-Rufino rightly point out that Election Observation Missions (EOM) are for democratic improvements promotion through election observation. But how effective are they? According to these authors, observation missions tie hands of incumbent officials who tend to develop unlawful actions and electoral behavior strategies. Thereby this raises opposition's opportunity to compete during elections. Moreover, the outcomes of election observation missions are conditioned by regime type, believing that their existence may have a greater impact on autocratic

regimes than in democracies. The comparative analysis of 580 presidential and parliamentary elections' results in 108 countries from 1976 to 2009 has shown that above-mentioned theoretical allegations are credible. EOMs raise competitiveness during elections in dictatorial regimes, reducing limits of current government victory. But they do not affect competitiveness in democratic regimes. In addition, EOMs increase the probability of electoral turnover in dictatorial regimes, but not in democracies (Roussias, N., Ruiz-Rufino, R., 2018, 116-127). In this sense, it is important to note that as a semi-authoritarian regime, Armenia improved its democracy score over time due also to OSCE / ODIHR observation missions and its reports. Hence, these missions were and are fruitful for Armenia's elections and democratization. The comparative analysis of OSCE / ODIHR reports on Armenia's elections allows to argue that some positive changes have been observed in electoral processes over time. In particular, 2018 early parliamentary elections were held in accordance with fundamental freedoms and had wide public trust, which should be maintained during further electoral reforms. The open political debate, including media, has contributed to a lively campaign, despite the fact that online provocative rhetoric has caused concern. The absence of electoral frauds, including election bribes and pressure on voters, has provided an opportunity for real competition and transparency.

5. CONCLUSION

The comparative statistical data analysis of voter turnout impact on Armenia's elections' dynamics testifies that presidential and parliamentary elections in post-Soviet Armenia differ from each other by their intensity, competitiveness, tension, and by political discourse used during pre-election and post-election processes. In post-Soviet Armenia there was always higher voter turnout during presidential than parliamentary elections and constitutional referendums. Consequently, presidential elections were more effective and important from the standpoint of participation and political developments. In addition, this regularity was noticed not only in the formerly presidential system till 2005, but also later during the semi-presidential system till 2015 constitutional referendum and up to full transition to a parliamentary model of governance in 2017. Till now 1991 presidential election and 2018 parliamentary election are the most reliable elections in Armenia. Although elections play an important role in terms of post-Soviet democratization, the development of a multi-party system is crucial for democratic transition, which still remains problematic in Armenia's case. The party system is still evolving. It is in transformation because parties were and are centralized mostly around personalities and not ideas or programs. The comparative analysis of Armenia's national elections' results from 1991 to 2018 has shown that the factor of political personality as well as personalized perception of political power continues to prevail in public consciousness. Voters prefer to vote for persons more than for political ideas and programs. Even in the case of transition to a parliamentary model of governance, this trend still persists, hindering the development of a multi-party system especially on the basis of ideological pluralism. To improve the functioning of electoral institutions and to restore public confidence in them, it is not necessary to improve only the legislation but to develop the political forces by inclusion of democratic values in public consciousness through political process. In this sense, the

evolution of a party system based mainly on democratic ideas and not only on personalities is needed. Last election trends show that some preconditions for electoral culture development are already created in Armenia. In last nationwide elections western technologies are widely used. And during 2018 early parliamentary election campaign no violent manifestations and protests were observed. Despite all these issues, 2018 revolutionary process in Armenia is able to create some preconditions for making electoral process more efficient, taking into account the increase of trust among voters, the significant decrease in election fraud, and the high legitimacy of early parliamentary election results in December 2018. In general the nature of elections in Armenia step by step becomes more democratic, reliable, and transparent.

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