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Do You Feel the Pashin(yan)? An Analysis of Democracy in Armenia

Tyler Rosner
Northern Kentucky University, rosnert1@mymail.nku.edu

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Do You Feel the Pashin(yan)?

An Analysis of Democracy in Armenia

Tyler Rosner, Northern Kentucky University (rosnert1@mymail.nku.edu)

Abstract

This article explores the development of democracy in Armenia through an examination of its post-Soviet history and most recent election. In order to conduct this examination, this paper is divided into three parts: 1) an exploration of democracy as a theory and how it may be applied to the Republic of Armenia, 2) a review of the literature on proportional representation systems, as Armenia adopted a half-open/half-closed list proportional representation system in 2017 and conducted their 2018 election using this system, and 3) an analysis of the successes and failures of Armenia's 2018 national elections. We find that given the definition of democracy by both Robert Dahl and Joshua Cohen, Armenia is currently laying the foundation for a successful democracy while still having a significant amount of work to do. Armenia has taken crucial steps through their choice of electoral systems and attempts to solidify key institutions, but the government still requires more public trust. Since the 2018 election, there is fear of democratic regression, as the media landscape is still highly partisan, and no electoral reforms have been made since the 2018 election. In 2020, Armenia postponed a planned nationwide vote on a constitutional referendum due to COVID-19. The referendum was scheduled for April 5, 2020 and will now take place in 2021. In September of 2020, fighting in the consistently contested region of Nagorno-Karabakh broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan and has escalated considerably compared to the hostility of previous decades. The fighting has led to Prime Minister Pashinyan declaring martial law and a potential reliance on Russia in response to Turkish-backed Azerbaijani military attacks on Armenian soldiers in the region.