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Elections in Armenia

May 6 National Assembly Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Asia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by Armenia's election authorities as of May 1, 2012, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

Who will Armenians elect on May 6, 2012?

Armenians will be voting for a new 131-seat National Assembly (NA). Ninety seats are elected through party list proportional representation – a system in which voters cast their ballots for lists of candidates composed by parties. The parties that receive 5 percent or more of the vote are assigned a corresponding percentage of the seats in the NA with the individuals from the list. Party blocs must receive at least 7 percent or more of the votes to gain seats in the NA.

The remaining 41 seats are elected through majoritarian elections in single mandate constituencies, or districts. The deputies in the NA are elected to five-year terms. Nine political parties and one bloc have entered candidates in the election.

What is the National Assembly? What is its mandate?

The NA is a unicameral body serving as the legislative branch of the Republic of Armenia. It is a hierarchy composed of a president, vice presidents, deputies and committees.

The prime minister is appointed by the president and is determined by party distribution of seats in the NA. The appointee must receive support from a majority of deputies in the NA. If no majority exists, the appointee will be the individual with the greatest level of support. The prime minister is appointed within 10 days of the first sitting of a newly elected NA, which occurs on the third Thursday following the election.

The chairman of the NA is elected by a majority vote of the deputies.

The NA appoints members of the Constitutional Court; has the power to appeal to the Constitutional Court to impeach the president (and subsequently remove the president if the court concludes there are grounds for his/her removal); and dissolve the government (the bureaucracy in Armenia) via a no-confidence vote.

Why are these National Assembly elections so important?

The 2012 parliamentary elections are being held with the memory of the 2008 events still fresh in the minds of voters. Although violence is not anticipated, the development of youth activism and the explosion of social media will make the 2012 vote the most scrutinized in Armenia's history. This will be countered by general voter apathy and limited expectations that the election is capable of producing real change.

In the 2008 presidential elections, then Prime Minister Serzh Sarkisian was elected as Armenia's third president. Opposition political parties and primary opposition candidate and former President Levon Ter-Petrosian claimed the 2008 polls were orchestrated in favor of Sarkisian, an ally of outgoing President Robert Kocharian.

Despite official observations from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe (CoE) regarding concerns of a biased media and a lack of separation between state and party function, public confidence and equal treatment of candidates, the OSCE later issued a generally positive assessment of the elections.

The day after the presidential election, more than 20,000 demonstrators filled Yerevan's Freedom Square to protest the official election results, which they believed were fraudulent. The demonstrations were peaceful until the morning of March 1, 2008, when police and security forces attempted to disperse the demonstrations. This resulted in the government using force against demonstrators.

President Kocharian subsequently implemented a 20-day state of emergency in Yerevan; banning all demonstrations and unauthorized news broadcasts. Once protests concluded on March 2, 10 people were killed, 130 injured and countless more arrested. Those arrested included three members of the NA, whose immunities were lifted in order for the arrests to be made, and the campaign manager for former President Ter-Petrosian.

The widespread accusations of ballot stuffing and voter intimidation that followed the 2008 elections were the most recent in a nation with a history of post-election unrest. Of the five presidential elections to have occurred in Armenia since its independence, only the first was free from accusations of fraud. All four parliamentary elections held since independence, have been met with accusations of fraud by the opposition, domestic monitors and international election observers.

What is the current political situation in Armenia?

Currently, Armenia's government is made up of a ruling coalition—which includes President Sarkisian's Republican Party (RPA), Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP) and the Rule of Law Party. The primary opposition parties, with representation in the NA, are the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) and the Heritage Party. Both these parties are fielding parliamentary candidates for the upcoming elections. The Armenian National Congress (ANC), led by former President Ter-Petrosian, is considered a contender for achieving representation in the new NA, having won seats in the 2009 Yerevan City Council elections.

After the 2008 presidential election, relations between the ruling coalition of three political parties and the opposition have been uneven. In addition to charges of electoral fraud in 2008, opposition political parties believe they were locked out of the political and public policy process due to the ruling coalition's—notably the RPA's—monopoly on state power and resources.

What is the current state of political parties in Armenia?

Nine political parties and one bloc will compete in the party list portion of the parliamentary elections, with thirteen parties contesting the majoritarian and party list components overall.

In the approach to May's NA elections, the leaders of the RPA, PAP and Orinats Yerkir – President Serzh Sarkisian, Minister Gagik Tsarukyan and National Security Council Chairman Artur Baghdasaryan – held a meeting at which they agreed to contest the May elections separately.

The leaders of the governing coalition parties expressed their continued commitment to the alliance in the approach of this election, but relations between RPA and PAP are widely believed to have deteriorated as the election has approached. Notably, PAP abstained from assembly votes on RPA-backed legislation and joining the Inter-Party Center for Public Oversight of elections, an initiative by four major parties to monitor the elections.

The RPA currently has 62 deputies in the NA and has dominated the government for the past five years. The fact that Armenia has experienced a severe economic downturn (Forbes ranked Armenia's economy the second worst in the world in 2011) while the party has been in power has been something that its opponents have worked to exploit. The RPA has attempted to explain as a result of the global financial crisis.

In the NA, the PAP has 26 deputies, the ARF has 16 deputies, the Rule of Law Party has eight deputies and the Heritage Party has seven deputies. There are currently 12 deputies that are not members of any faction.

What is the current legal environment in which this election will take place?

Following the disputed 2008 presidential election, and the governments' violent reaction to the demonstrations, pressure to make reforms to the political process mounted.

The NA agreed to address shortcomings in the electoral code and its implementation in coordination with opposition forces and international experts, including IFES. In 2010, IFES held an Election Legislation Reform Symposium—composed of legal experts and stakeholders from government, political parties and civil society—to discuss electoral reform and address draft legislation. This started a serious election law reform effort, culminating in the passage of a modified election code in June 2011.

The new code integrated many of IFES' recommendations and recommendations of the entities with whom IFES put the NA in contact. New code provisions include more fairness and efficiency in selecting election management officials, including the Central Election Commission (CEC); clarity for local election observers' mandate; and strengthened enforcement of campaign finance laws. Nevertheless, some in the opposition have raised concerns over code provisions addressing election management selection, electoral complaint adjudication, domestic observers' accreditation and videotaping voting and counting. There is also general cynicism over actual implementation of the code.

The May 6 NA election will be the first election in Armenia to be held since the new electoral code was passed. The improved election code, still far from perfect, offers the opportunity for a step in the right direction. If properly implemented, it offers a more level playing field for political competition.

Who will monitor the elections?

There are currently 44 domestic organizations that are registered with the CEC to monitor upcoming elections. The list of organizations registered to monitor these elections, and the number of monitors, has steadily grown as Election Day. As of now, the following organizations are registered:

Organization	No. of Monitors	Organization	No. of Monitors
It's your Choice	4000	Erebuni	2311
Free Society Institute	2050	All Armenian Youth Association	1727
Improve Our Village	1623	Fist	1604
Club of Young Diplomats	1535	Independence Generation	1441
The Sons of Victory	1248	Cornerstone	1216
Proportional Development Community Development	1067	Legally-Educated Society	585
Development Centre of Armavir	407	Youth for Achievements	247
Scientific Center of International Experience Studies	179	Electoral Systems Center	150
Martuni Women's Community Council	133	Center of Social-Economical and Legal Reforms	119
Youth Union of Goris	109	New View	105
Armenian Center for Democratic Education-Civitas	99	Regions Development and Research Centre	99
Dilnet Service	85	Capacity and Development for Civil Society	71
Helsinki Committee of Armenia	65	Student Council of Martuni	66
Center for Social Integration and Development	64	Harmony	60
Federation of Youth Clubs	55	Young People for the Youth	54
Civil Society Institute	39	Armenian Centre of Human Right's Protection after Fridtjof Nansen	34
Republican Council of Women	32	Rights Protection without Borders	32
Liberty and Democracy	28	Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office	27
Shahen	27	Unison	22
Youth Club for Intercultural Dialog, Democracy and Peace	22	The Knightly Academy of International Security	20
Atour Assyrian Association of Armenia	11	Supreme Council-deputy club	5
Irazek	4	Rights Information Center	1

In addition to these entities, four political parties developed a joint effort to establish free and fair elections, known as the Inter-Party Center for Public Oversight of Elections. The four parties are: PAP, the Heritage Party, Rule of Law Party and ANC. Though the RPA was extended an offer to join in the effort, it refused, stating that the center's refusal to extend an offer to the Orinats Yerkir Party—the third party composing the governing coalition—was an insult. A major focus of the center is expected to be on the illegal use of administrative resources, since opposition parties have stated that if the RPA is prevented from using administrative resources the opposition will win the NA elections.

In reaction to the formation of the Inter-Party Center for Public Oversight of Elections, the RPA organized the creation of a public advisory body within the NA. This public advisory body—where the NA would monitor its own elections—has stated its purpose as monitoring the implementation of the Electoral Code and responding to alerts of possible violations.

Who will observe the elections?

There are currently seven international organizations that are registered with the CEC to observe the upcoming elections. This list has also steadily grown as May 6 approaches. As of now, the following organizations are registered:

- The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) established an election observation mission in Armenia on March 22, 2012. It deployed a 14-member core team and a 24 long-term observer team to 10 different locations around the country. The OSCE will also send 250 short-term observers to Armenia from May 3-9, 2012.
- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)
- Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Inter-Parliamentary Assembly
- CIS Observation Mission
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
- International Expert Center for Electoral Systems (ICES)
- European Parliament

What bodies have legal and political authority in Armenia?

The elections are administered by an election commission system composed of the CEC, 41 territorial election commissions (TECs) and 1,982 precinct election commissions (PECs).

Each election commission is composed of seven members and additional proxies, appointed by candidates, parties and blocs registered to compete in the election.

The members of the CEC are appointed for seven years. Because the current CEC was composed in August 2011, current members are serving staggered and shorter terms so the commission's turnover does not occur all at once. TEC members are self-nominated citizens that are appointed by the CEC. No more than five members of the CEC and each TEC can be of the same gender.

The CEC administers registration of candidate lists of political parties and blocs for proportional elections and TECs administer registration of candidates within their electoral district for the majoritarian elections.

PECs administer voting and ballot counting. In order to be appointed as a PEC member, citizens must pass a qualifying examination and hold a CEC qualification certificate. Two members of each PEC are appointed by its overseeing TEC. Each party and bloc represented in the NA can appoint one of the remaining five PEC members.

The chairpersons of the CEC and TECs are elected by commission members from amongst themselves. The PEC chairpersons and deputies are distributed amongst the parties and blocs, with representation in the NA, in proportion to the number of seats they hold.

What laws regulate the National Assembly elections in Armenia?

The NA elections are regulated by the following:

- The Constitution of the Republic of Armenia
- Law on the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly
- The Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia
- The Law on Political Parties
- The Administrative Procedures Code
- Law on Fundamentals of Administration and Administrative Proceedings
- Law on the Constitutional Court
- Law on Freedom of Assemblies
- The Administrative Offenses Code
- Criminal Code

What is the legal process for electoral dispute adjudication?

The election commissions and the Administrative Court have overlapping jurisdictions when dealing with election-related complaints. The Administrative Court was formed in January 2008; this will be the first NA election to occur under the court's oversight.

Complaints and appeals regarding the actions or inactions of an election commission can be appealed to the appropriate overseeing election commission (complaints regarding a PEC are appealed to the appropriate TEC, and those of a TEC to the CEC). All complaints regarding the CEC are under the jurisdiction of the Administrative Court.

Complaints regarding the voter list are under the jurisdiction of the first-instance courts of the general jurisdiction. The decision made by the court on these matters is not subject to appeal.

The Administrative Offences Code and Criminal Code were both amended in 2011, increasing fines and prison terms for electoral offences and establishing additional election-related offences.

As a result of some residual contradictory legislation, it is anticipated by judges and election officials alike that there may be some uncertainty on Election Day in terms of jurisdiction.

What role do electoral disputes and electoral dispute adjudication play in Armenian elections?

Armenia's post-election periods have been characterized by widespread allegations of electoral fraud; the opposition force's refusal to accept official results; and eroded distrust in the electoral system.

The most recent notable elections in Armenia, the 2009 Yerevan mayoral elections, displayed a continuation of this trend. Despite the backlash from the 2008 presidential elections, it was observed that electoral fraud persisted in the 2009 Yerevan elections, just in a less flagrant manner.

Armenian authorities did take legal action against the blatant fraud, stating that these were isolated incidents, which was interpreted by many as an attempt to deflect the public's and the international community's attention from alleged widespread malfeasance during the election. An ongoing issue in Armenia's electoral administration is accurate voter registration. Official voter records include Armenians who are no longer permanent residents in the country. Opposition political parties fear that the RPA will use inaccurate voter lists to stuff ballot boxes and submit multiple votes for candidate.

How many electoral constituencies have been established?

There are 41 single-mandate electoral constituencies, each with one majority-elected deputy in the NA. The other 90 deputies are elected by a single nationwide constituency.

The country is also divided into 1,982 precincts, with some having up to 2,000 voters within it.

How does voter registration operate?

According to the last report, there are 2,485,844 registered voters in Armenia; this is about 6.7 percent more than the amount that was registered for the 2008 presidential elections. The registered voters are recorded on precinct voter lists, based upon the citizens' registered place of residence.

The voter list is maintained by the Passport and Visa Department (PVD), a division of the Republic of Armenia Police. The voter list was made available on the PVD's and the CEC's websites, and at polling stations so citizens can confirm the accuracy of their information and/or request inclusion on the list.

Voters who are not a part of the voter list can apply to be included during the four days prior to Election Day, as well as on Election Day until the end of voting.

Citizens living within Armenia, that do not have a registered residence, can apply to the PVD to be included in a supplementary voter list based upon their current residence. This must be done at least seven days prior to Election Day. Voters who intend to vote in a community other than the one in which their residency is registered must go through the same process.

Special voter lists have been compiled for military units, pre-trial detention centers, police and national security personnel stationed abroad, citizens serving in diplomatic and consular offices abroad, and legal entities registered in Armenia and located abroad. It is expected that approximately 238 diplomatic service staff abroad, and their families, will vote via the Internet prior to the May 6 election. Aside from citizens that qualify under the previously mentioned categories, citizens living abroad for more than six months are not permitted to vote.

Who is eligible to vote?

The Constitution of the Republic of Armenia affords citizens, who have reached the age of 18, the right to universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot. Exceptions to this, outlined in the constitution, are citizens found to be incompetent by a court decision, duly sentenced to prison or serving a sentence. Suffrage can also be restricted in the interests of national security, public order and crime prevention, and protection of public health, morality, constitutional rights, freedoms, honor and reputation.

While the constitution allows for the law to define the right of suffrage for noncitizens in local elections, only Armenian citizens have the right to suffrage in NA elections.

Who is eligible to be a candidate?

The constitution allows any person to be elected as a deputy in the NA who has reached the age of 25, is a citizen of Armenia and permanently resided in Armenia for the preceding five years, and has the right to vote.

Citizens found to be incompetent by a court decision, duly sentenced to prison or serving the sentence, shall not be entitled to vote or be elected.

Candidate registration ended on April 1, 2012. Out of the 1,206 candidates nominated (for proportional and majoritarian elections), more than 97 percent were registered. About 19.7 percent of registered candidates are females; of those, 22 percent are on party lists and 7.7 percent are majoritarian candidates. Ninety-four of the 131 current deputies (72 percent) are seeking re-election.

What are the rules on political parties?

The constitution declares the right of every citizen to freely form political parties and their right to join such parties, as well as the right to not be compelled to join a political party. The constitution allows for laws to restriction the right to form and join parties for employees in the armed forces, police, national security, prosecutor's office, as well as judges and members of the Constitutional Court.

What are the rules on campaigning?

The official campaign period for candidates and political parties began on April 8, 2012, and will continue through May 4. Under the Electoral Code, this period is governed by rules aimed at providing equal opportunities to all candidates. During this period, local self-governments are required to provide the candidates with premises for campaign events.

What are the rules that govern the media?

The constitution requires that an independent regulatory body be established with the aim of ensuring the freedom, independence and plurality of the broadcasting media. The National Commission for Television and Radio (NCTR) was formed for this purpose. Half of the members of this body are elected by the NA and the other half are appointed by the president. The NCTR is responsible for enforcing all media related regulations outlined by the Electoral Code. The NCTR will monitor both public and private broadcasters; particularly monitoring the allocation of airtime to political parties and blocs to ensure equal time distribution and equal news and informational programming to ensure unbiased coverage.

The Electoral Code requires public broadcasters to provide free airtime to political parties and blocs with registered party lists in the election. It requires that the prices for paid political advertising on private and public broadcasters be made public; this was done on March 5. The code requires all broadcasters, public and private, to ensure non-discriminatory conditions for all contestants and to provide unbiased and impartial information in all news programming.

Each party and bloc is entitled to 60 minutes of free airtime on public television and 120 minutes on public radio. Additionally, the parties and bloc are permitted to buy 120 minutes on public television and 180 minutes of public radio. Majoritarian candidates are not entitled to free airtime on any public broadcasters. There are no limits on the amount of political advertisements parties or blocs can buy from private broadcasters.

All campaign coverage and advertisements must cease 24 hours prior to Election Day and the publication of exit polls is prohibited until all the polls are closed.

What is the state of the media in Armenia?

The closure of the A+ television station in 2002 was widely seen as the end of independent television channels in Armenia. Following the 2008 presidential elections, there is a continued absence of independent television channels and strict loyalty to the regime.

What are the rules for campaign finance?

The new Electoral Code has strengthened campaign finance laws and modified campaign spending limits, including allowing each political party or bloc with an officially registered party list 60 minutes of free airtime on state television and 120 minutes on public radio. Parties can also buy up to an additional

120 minutes on public television and 180 minutes on public radio. There is no upper limit for the amount parties or blocs can spend on private television or radio broadcasting.

What are the basic rules for vote counting?

The results are hand counted by the PECs, and subsequently sent to the TECs. The results are posted after all the counts are received. It is illegal for results or exit polls to be released before all polling stations have closed.

What are the guidelines for registering for proportional elections?

Political party candidate lists must be composed of no less than 25 candidates and no more than 270. They are a closed list system, where the parties, not the voters, determine the order of candidates on lists.

Parties and blocs competing in proportional elections had to pay an electoral deposit of AMD 8 million (about USD \$20,480.00), which is 8,000 times the minimum wage. This deposit will be returned to the party or bloc if they receive a seats mandate in the NA.

Candidate lists can be denied registration if the list contains too few or too many names; if the list does not meet the 20 percent gender quota; if the activities of the party or bloc has been suspended or liquidated; if the bloc's membership reduces to a single party; if the party or bloc fails to pay the electoral deposit; if nomination documents were falsified; or if the candidates are ineligible.

Out of the 1,026 candidates submitted on proportional lists, three candidates were rejected and seven candidates withdrew before the list was registered.

Which parties will compete in the proportional elections?

Eight parties and one party bloc submitted candidate lists to the CEC for the proportional component of the election; all nine were registered. The participating entities are:

- Armenian National Congress Party bloc
- Armenian Revolutionary Federation
- Communist Party of Armenia
- Rule of Law Party
- Democratic Party of Armenia
- Heritage Party
- Prosperous Armenia Party
- Republican Party of Armenia
- United Armenia Party

The Heritage Party and the Free Democrats Party have formed a joint slate for the proportional elections.

The RPA's party list is led by President Sarkisian, includes the prime minister and eight out of 10 *marz* (province) governors. The party announced that it will structure its party list for the proportional elections so as to ensure that those actively serving in parliament will return, but also in a way to ensure that alongside the attorneys and economists will be "artistic people."

Prosperous Armenia's party list includes three government ministers, 22 NA deputies (though only 11 of the deputies are slated in the top 30 spots on the list), and two *marz* governors.

The ARF's party list is led by Vahan Hovhannisyan, the vice president of the NA from 2007 to 2008. Hovhannisyan resigned the post in 2008 in protest of the handling of the 2008 presidential election.

What are the guidelines for registering as a majoritarian candidate?

The deadline for candidate nomination expired on March 22, 2012, and the deadline for candidate registration expired on April 1, 2012. Candidates competing in the majoritarian elections had to pay an electoral deposit of AMD 1 million (about USD \$2,551.00), which is 1,000 times the minimum wage. This deposit will be returned to the candidate if they receive 5 percent of the vote.

There are 148 candidates registered for majoritarian elections. TECs rejected the registration of two nominees. Over 20 candidates have withdrawn; however, the majority of them have been self-nominated candidates.

The TECs denied registration to two majoritarian candidate nominees; one refused to pay the AMD 1 million electoral deposit and the other had been outside of Armenia for nearly 11 months over the past five years.

Who will compete in the majoritarian elections?

There are 148 candidates under the majoritarian system. There are 59 candidates registered as not being affiliated with a party or electoral block. Eight of these, however, were nominated by political parties. Of the 89 candidates registered as being affiliated with a party, six of them were self-nominated.

The parties that candidates are registered as being affiliated with, or were nominated by, are the following:

Party	No. of Candidates	No. of Incumbents
Armenian Revolutionary Federation Party	8	2
Rule of Law Party	9	3
Communist Party of Armenia	2	0
Democratic Fatherland Party	2	0
Democratic Way Party	1	0
Heritage Party	6	4
Liberal Party of Armenia	1	0
Marxist Party of Armenia	1	0
Pan-Armenian National Movement Party	9	0
People’s Party of Armenia	2	0
Prosperous Armenia party	15	8
Republican Party of Armenia	37	19
Republic (Hanrapetutyun) Party	1	0

Some of the RPA’s candidates are running in the same district. RPA does not have any affiliated or nominated candidates in nine of the electoral districts. Four of the RPA incumbent candidates were previously not a part of RPA’s faction within the NA.

One of PAP’s incumbent candidates, who is nominated but not registered as being affiliated with PAP, is currently in the RPA’s faction in the NA and another had not been a part of any faction within the NA.

The founder of the Heritage Party, incumbent Raffi Hovhannisyan, had been registered as a candidate, but withdrew his candidature in order to avoid a contest with Nikol Pashinyan, the editor-in-chief of Haykakan Zhamanak newspaper, who represents the ANC.

What provisions have been made to accommodate voters with physical or mental disability?

Large magnifying devices will be available for voters with visual impairments, tactile ballot guides will be available for blind voters and ramps have been built for persons with physical disabilities so they can access the polling stations in wheelchairs.

The CEC has played the key role in enfranchising persons with disabilities across Armenia by taking steps to allow them to access the polling stations and cast their own ballots.

Resources

- The Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, Chapter 4: The National Assembly
- Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia
- The Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly
- CEC National Assembly Election Website ([Link](#))
- OSCE Election Observation ([Link](#))