



## Armenia — Va-PoReg Country Report

Kailitz, Steffen, et al., 2026: Varieties of Political Regimes (Va-PoReg). Country Report Armenia, Dresden: Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/JYEL7U>

01/01/1453 Start Part of Other Country [of Ottoman Empire]: From 1453 until 1829 western Armenia was a part of the Ottoman Empire. Eastern Armenia, consisting of Yerevan and Nakhichevan khanates of Iran, was under Persian control.<sup>1</sup> In the aftermath of the Russo-Persian War (1826–1828) the parts of Eastern Armenia were incorporated into Russia after Qajar Persia's forced ceding in 1828 per the Treaty of Turkmenchay.<sup>2</sup> This territorial division was also current on our start date on 01/01/1900. Eastern Armenia remained part of the Russian Empire until its collapse in 1917.<sup>3</sup> Western Armenia on the other hand remained a part of the Ottoman Empire until its dissolution.<sup>4</sup>

04/22/1918 End Part of Other Country [of Ottoman Empire, Autocratic Monarchy]/Start Part of Other Country [of TDFR]: Armenia became a founding member of the short-lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (TDFR). Acknowledging the Armenian struggle for independence against the Ottoman Empire, we classify this regime change event as a rebellion.<sup>5</sup>

05/28/1918 End Part of Other Country [of TDFR]/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: On this date, Armenia declared independence following the voluntary dissolution of the TDFR. With no incumbent regime remaining, the Armenian National Council assumed authority. and established a non-electoral transitional (multiparty) regime. This occurred in the broader context of the geopolitical rearrangements initiated by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk earlier that year. Despite initial institutional fragility and external threats, the regime was pluralistic in character, involved multiple parties and aimed at organizing elections. This transition constitutes a voluntary exit, with the direction coded as liberalizing. The regime is classified as non-electoral transitional regime. With its inclusive structure and the absence of oppression and opposition it is a borderline case to a democratizing regime (Lansford 2021: 78).

06/21[&23]/1919 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On these dates, the first direct parliamentary elections were held under universal suffrage, every person over the age of 20 had the right to vote regardless of gender, ethnicity or religious beliefs and three women were elected as members of parliament. The election was boycotted by the Hunchaks and Populists. The government was held by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, Dashnaksutun).<sup>6</sup> The First Republic of Armenia, established in 1918, faced significant challenges due to its geopolitical position. Surrounded by hostile neighbors and caught in the broader context of regional conflicts, Armenia struggled to maintain its territorial integrity and security. These external threats impacted the country's internal political processes, making the establishment and maintenance of democratic norms and institutions a difficult endeavor. The situation was further complicated by the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide and the influx of refugees, which added to the internal turmoil and humanitarian crisis. characterized by a strong atmosphere of mistrust and uncertainty among the various political parties. The parliamentary elections in 1919 further demonstrated the ARF's dominance, where it won a substantial majority of the seats. This landslide victory highlighted the ARF's influential position in the government but also indicated a lack of significant opposition within the parliament.<sup>7</sup> The state of emergency, which was declared in May 1920, is an indicator of the fact that democratic civil rights were not fully realized. As a result of the state of emergency, the parliament gave up its rights in favor of the executive.<sup>8</sup> Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the

observations of LIED. The period should be classified as an electoral hybrid regime rather than an electoral democracy because: (1) the ARF's landslide victory combined with major opposition boycotts indicates elections lacked genuine competitiveness, (2) the May 1920 state of emergency transferred parliamentary powers to the executive, eliminating meaningful checks and balances, and (3) one-party dominance persisted despite formal multiparty structures. In electoral democracies, democratic institutions function imperfectly but remain operative; here, the concentration of power in a single party and the suspension of legislative authority through emergency rule demonstrate authoritarian characteristics with only electoral façades, characteristic of hybrid regimes.

12/02/1920 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Part of Other Country [of Russia, Communist Ideocracy]: Due to the threat of a Soviet ultimatum the Armenian government transferred power to the Communists.<sup>9</sup> A (semi-)independent socialist soviet republic was established. The case was classified as a de facto protectorate of the USSR.

12/30/1922 Continuation Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]: The Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia became a founding republic of the USSR. Western Armenia returned to Turkey (Lansford 2021: 78). Armenia became part of the Transcaucasian SFSR.<sup>10</sup> Since Armenia became part of another country a regime change has to be coded in the dataset. However, at the same time it was basically a continuation of the communist regime spell starting on 12/02/1920. LIED only starts to provide data for Armenia since 1991. Sovietization in Armenia was enforced through the nationalization of industry and the suppression of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun). Imposed war communism and expropriations lead to a peasant uprising in 03/1921, which was violently suppressed by the Red Army. The Soviet regime targeted the Armenian Apostolic Church and curtailed national culture in an effort to shape a Soviet Armenian identity. Political authority rested with the Communist Party of Armenia, subordinate to the Soviet Communist Party in Moscow. Like other Soviet republics, Armenia was affected by severe purges. The assassination of First Secretary Khanjian on 07/09/1936 marked the onset of mass arrests and executions of intellectuals and clergy. Thousands of Armenians were imprisoned, executed, or deported, including major cultural figures. Open national resistance was limited but grew in cultural and intellectual forms. Dissidents used literature and historical memory to preserve Armenian identity under Soviet control.<sup>11</sup> Following the Stalinist terror, the post-1953 period saw a cultural and intellectual revival, marked prominently by the construction of the Tsitsernakaberd Genocide Memorial in 1965, which became a focal point for national identity and dissent. By the late 1980s, the Armenian independence movement was galvanized by the demands for the unification of the Nagorno-Karabakh region with Armenia, leading to ethnic conflicts with Azerbaijan.<sup>12</sup>

09/21/1991 End Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date independence was regained. Immediately before the official date of independence on 10/17/1991 the first presidential elections took place, which were won by Levon Ter-Petrosyan.<sup>13</sup> The opposition Union for National Self-Determination, led by Paruyr Hayrikyan, claimed „that there were violations during the campaign, including an act of violence against him and his supporters”.<sup>14</sup> Initially, ideas and goals about democracy and pluralism were expressed, but the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict demanded all attention and a national unity. As a result, not only did the democratic demands and processes fade into the background, but also the gradual elimination of potential opponents by the incumbent government.<sup>15</sup> The classification of the regime is highly disputed. The classifications range from clearly autocratic to clearly democratic. GWF and HTW classify the period 1991-1994 as democratic, RoW as an electoral democracy, BMR as non-democratic, MCM and LIED as a multiparty autocracy and CGV as a civilian autocracy. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. According to LIED elections were not competitive during this time, whereas V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI indicate that elections in this period were free, fair and somewhat clean. Per FH's classification, the country scores between 6 and 7 as partly free and is categorized as rather free in our interpretation. V-Dem's PCLI classifies the existence of political liberties as present in 1991 and as somewhat present from 1992 to

2017 and as present from 2018 onwards again. LIED classifies political liberties as absent for this period. We classify the regime between 09/21/1991 and 12/31/1994 as a borderline case between an electoral democracy and an electoral hybrid regime and afterwards as a clear case of an electoral hybrid regime. Severe deficits in the electoral process have been present, even if it was possible for the opposition to participate. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. On 12/31/1994 according to GWF the elected Ter-Petrosian government crossed the line between democracy and dictatorship in suspending the largest opposition party (Dashnak, HHD) to prevent its participation in the July 1995 parliamentary election, and in subsequent months it disqualified multiple other parties and more than a third of the candidates (Bremmer 1997: 86-87, Lansford 2012b: 65-73, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 41-42). Ter-Petrosian's coalition originally included nearly all non-communist Armenians. The coalition narrowed over time but always included people from multiple regions. On 02/04/1998 Ter-Petrosian and numerous other top officials of the HHSh stepped down due to widespread public demonstrations and a decline in support from significant political figures, resulting in the Kocharian government assuming power (Libaridian 2006: 9-10). Since the accession of Kocharian, the leadership has been dominated by individuals from Nagorno Karabakh; the HHSh is no longer in government (Middle East Journal 1998, Usher 1999:20, Libaridian 2006: 9-10, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 41-42). However, different from GWF it is not coded in this dataset as a new regime but a continuation of the electoral hybrid regime. In 2015, voters approved constitutional changes that, among other things, transformed the country from a problematic quasi-presidential to a parliamentary form. The president, previously directly elected for a maximum of two five-year terms, would now be selected by the parliament for a singular seven-year term. Additionally, a significant transfer of executive power to the prime minister would occur, with the prime minister also being chosen by a parliamentary majority.<sup>16</sup> Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. The elections were not competitive according to LIED since 1994. During this period, V-Dem's EF&FI scores Armenian election freedom and fairness first as ambiguous and since 2003 as not really the case. Their CEI calls the elections largely not clean. In 1995, Armenia is classified as partly free by FH, with a score of 8. Our analysis, however, categorizes Armenia as rather not free. In 1996 and 1997, the country receives scores between 9 and 10 as not free and is categorized as rather not free in our interpretation. From 1998 to 2003, the country is classified as partly free, with a score of 8. From 2004 to 2017, the country's score once again fell within the not free range, scoring between 9 and 10. From 2018 onward, Armenia is classified as partly free by FH again, with a score of 8, which we interpret as rather not free. Between 1995 and 1997, according to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. Since then, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive encountered substantial institutional limitations on power. For the timeframe 1992-2007, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. During 2008 and 2009, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 2010-2017, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. Since then, our interpretation of V-Dem's JCE alternates between the indications of judicial constraints on the executive being moderate (2018, 2020, 2022-2023) and robust (2019, 2021). From 2018 to 2021, V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also robust. For the years 2022 and 2023, V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. On 12/09/2018 a series of anti-government protests in Armenia from April to May 2018 staged by various political and civil groups led by a member of the Armenian parliament – Nikol Pashinyan (head of the Civil Contract party) occurred. Protests and marches took place initially in response to Serzh Sargsyan's third consecutive term as the most powerful figure in the government of Armenia and later against the Republican Party-controlled government in general. Pashinyan declared it a Velvet Revolution.<sup>17</sup> The parliamentary elections on

12/09/2018 „were markedly freer and fairer than elections in previous years”. Local and international observers also deemed the snap parliamentary elections on 06/20/2021 „to be competitive, well organized, and fairly administered”. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED, for the first time ever, rates Albanian elections as competitive in 2018. The V-Dem EF&FI as well as CEI now classify Armenian elections as free, fair and clean. The OSCE assessed the election as meeting international standards.<sup>18</sup> As per FH, for this regime period, the country receives a score of 8, which we interpret as falling into the rather not free category. While civil liberties are mostly upheld, the judiciary grapples with systemic political interference, while judicial institutions suffer from corruption. Judges are purportedly pressured to collaborate with prosecutors in securing convictions, resulting in notably low acquittal rates.<sup>19</sup> In September 2022 Azerbaijani forces crossed into Armenian territory and armed conflict was initiated in a dispute over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, resulting in up to 200 casualties.<sup>20</sup> Brief Passage: Why Armenia Never Crossed into Electoral Autocracy

Here’s the concise passage without redundancies to the existing text:

The threshold to electoral autocracy was never crossed. Opposition parties retained significant parliamentary representation throughout rather than being reduced to token presence characteristic of hegemonic party systems. While manipulation created systematically unequal playing fields, outcomes were not entirely predetermined: subnational contests occasionally produced opposition victories, and the regime remained transformable from within. The successful 2018 Velvet Revolution provides decisive evidence that opposition possessed realistic though difficult paths to executive power. In electoral autocracies, such peaceful transitions through opposition mobilization are structurally impossible because manipulation renders alternation unachievable. Armenia’s hybrid characteristics permitted the transformation that electoral autocracies prevent.

Electoral Hybrid Regime as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Bremmer 1997, Blood 1997, Curtis/Suny 1995, Grotz/Rodriguez-McKey 2001, Middle East Journal 1998, Lansford 2012b, Libaridian 2006, Luchterhandt 1996, Sehring/Stefes 2010, Usher 1999)

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian\\_Armenia\\_\(1502%E2%80%93931828\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_Armenia_(1502%E2%80%93931828))

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Armenia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Armenia)

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian\\_Armenia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Armenia)

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenians\\_in\\_the\\_Ottoman\\_Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenians_in_the_Ottoman_Empire)

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Armenia#Transcaucasian\\_Federation\\_\(1917%E2%80%93931918\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Armenia#Transcaucasian_Federation_(1917%E2%80%93931918))

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal\\_suffrage#cite\\_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37;](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37;)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1919\\_Armenian\\_parliamentary\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1919_Armenian_parliamentary_election)

<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Republic\\_of\\_Armenia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Republic_of_Armenia)

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Republic\\_of\\_Armenia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Republic_of_Armenia)

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Republic\\_of\\_Armenia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Republic_of_Armenia)

<sup>10</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian\\_Soviet\\_Socialist\\_Republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Soviet_Socialist_Republic)

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian\\_Soviet\\_Socialist\\_Republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Soviet_Socialist_Republic)

<sup>12</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenia#History>

<sup>13</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991\\_Armenian\\_presidential\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Armenian_presidential_election)

<sup>14</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paruyr\\_Hayrikyan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paruyr_Hayrikyan)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a6c014.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/armenia/freedom-world/2022;>  
[https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Armenia\\_2015?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Armenia_2015?lang=en)

<sup>17</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018\\_Armenian\\_revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018_Armenian_revolution)

<sup>18</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021\\_Armenian\\_parliamentary\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Armenian_parliamentary_election)

<sup>19</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/armenia/freedom-world/2023>

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