



Artsakh — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[also known as Nagorno-Karabakh]

07/07/1923 Start Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]: The Soviet Union established the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) as an autonomous Oblast within the Azerbaijan Socialist Soviet Republic with its capital Stepanakert. The region has been populated by Christian Armenians while the surrounding regions have mostly been settled by Muslim Azeris.¹ Having been a source for conflict for centuries, the incorporation into the Soviet Union served to calm the conflict for about 60 years. In 1988, however, Armenians within the NKAO called for a transfer of administrative authority from the Azerbaijan Socialist Soviet Republic to the Armenian Socialist Soviet Republic. This demand was heavily opposed by the Azeris.²

10/18/1991 End Part of Other Country [of USSR, Communist Ideocracy]/Start Part of Other Country [of Azerbaijan, One-Party Autocracy]: On this day Azerbaijan declared its independence from the Soviet Union and became an independent country, taking with it Nagorno-Karabakh. On 11/27/1991 the new Azerbaijani parliament revoked the autonomous status of Nagorno-Karabakh, triggering a campaign for independence amongst the ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh.

01/06/1992 End Part of Other Country [of Azerbaijan, One-Party Autocracy]/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under Armenia, Electoral Democracy]: On this day, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) declared its independence from Azerbaijan following a public referendum which saw immense support for independence. This declaration has only ever been recognized by Armenia. Instead of developing an own constitution, the NKR declared the application of Armenian law within its territory, as well as the declaration of independence to be the law of the land.³ We therefore classify it as a de facto protectorate of Armenia. This classification follows the argument of Stefania Kolarz, that neither Baku, Yerevan nor Stepanakert can legitimately or effectively represent the NKR on the international stage (Kolarz 2019: 45f) and therefore we do not see it as a sovereign entity. On 01/31/1992 the Azeri military launched an offensive to reestablish Azeri control over Nagorno-Karabakh, sparking the first Nagorno-Karabakh war. With Armenia supporting the militias of Nagorno-Karabakh, they managed to take control over all of Nagorno-Karabakh as well as surrounding territories. They thereby linked the enclave to Armenia via a significant land border.⁴ On 05/13/1994 Russia, as well as other neighboring countries, managed to mediate a ceasefire agreement between Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan. This ceasefire was largely stable for over a decade with some small-scale breaches in the form of border skirmishes (European Parliament 2018). In this time, the NKR held several elections and in 2006 a national referendum approving the first constitution of the NKR. This constitution also established the names Republic of Artsakh and Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh to be identical. It also changed the political system from a semi-presidential to a presidential one.⁵ The 2020 elections were the first to take place after an electoral revamp in 2019 that abolished voting districts in favor of proportional representation based on party votes. It saw multiple parties compete and several of them winning substantial shares of the vote. The Democratic Party of Artsakh and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, who had been amongst the biggest political forces in Artsakh previously, lost greatly in the 2020 elections.⁶ These developments are indicative of at least some democratic competitiveness between the

parties. FH always rated the Republic of Artsakh as partly free, with the highest ever achieved score being 37/100. Amongst the main reasons for this are corruption and limited civil rights.⁷ These are the reasons why we label the Republic of Artsakh an electoral hybrid regime. The elections and the independence of the Republic of Artsakh have never been recognized by any country other than Armenia. The Republic of Artsakh stayed entirely dependent on Armenia for economic, military and political support. Without Armenian support, the Republic of Artsakh could not have sustained itself. For this reason, we continue to classify it as a de facto protectorate of Armenia. After a long period of relative quiet, on 09/27/2020 the ceasefire was broken by an Azeri offensive, that was able to swiftly crush the Armenian and Artsakh resistance. The second Nagorno-Karabakh war lasted 44 days and was overshadowed by reports of war crimes on both sides.⁸ On 11/09/2020 Armenia had to sign a peace deal with Azerbaijan in which it had to withdraw all military from Artsakh and agree to have Russian peacekeeper units stationed in Artsakh to guard the peace. Azerbaijan also took all territories that had not been part of the NKAO during the Soviet Union, leaving one single street in the Lachin-corridor the only land connection between Artsakh and Armenia.⁹ Emboldened by the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, Azerbaijan started a blockade of this street in December of 2022, by sending soldiers disguised as ecological activists to blockade the Lachin corridor. Later on, Azerbaijan dropped the facade and had the street blockaded by the army. This blockade led to serious starvation, lack of basic necessities within the Republic of Artsakh and marked a clear breach of the peace deal signed with Armenia. The Russian peacekeepers did not intervene.¹⁰ LIED and V-Dem do not list Artsakh in their datasets. According to FH's classification for 1993 to 1997, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. Per FH's evaluation for 1998, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. As classified by FH for 1999-2001, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. According to FH, for the years 2002 to 2009, a score between 9 and 10 makes the country not free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather not free. Per FH, for the years 2010 and 2011, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. Per FH's evaluation for 2012-2022, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free.

09/19/2023 End Artsakh [Electoral Hybrid Regime]: On this day, a renewed offensive, sometimes called the third Nagorno-Karabakh war,¹¹ of Azerbaijan managed to take the entirety of Artsakh within 24 hours. It gave the ethnically Armenian residents the choice to either take on Azeri citizenship or be expelled. Almost all of the ethnically Armenian population fled into Armenia, becoming over 100.000 refugees.¹² According to FH's classification for 2023, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. The president of the Republic of Artsakh, Samvel Shahramanyan, declared the formal dissolution of the Republic of Artsakh and the cessation of its existence for the 01/01/2024.¹³

01/01/2024.

For the time after 01/01/2024, see Azerbaijan.

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagorno-Karabakh_Autonomous_Oblast

² <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nagorno-Karabakh>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Artsakh#cite_ref-Constitution_12-2

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18270325>

⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20221027224732/http://www.nkr.am/en/chapter-I-foundations-of-constitutional-order>

⁶ <https://evnreport.com/spotlight-karabakh/artsakh-presidential-race-goes-to-second-round-in-historically-competitive-election/>

⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/nagorno-karabakh/freedom-world/2023>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_crimes_in_the_Second_Nagorno-Karabakh_War

⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18270325>

¹⁰ <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-spotlight/the-significance-of-the-lachin-corridor-in-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict>

¹¹ <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2023-09-20/third-karabakh-war>

¹² <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/armenian-azerbaijani-conflict-armenia/armenia-struggles-cope-exodus>

¹³ <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/09/28/europe/nagorno-karabakh-officially-dissolve-intl/index.html>

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