EVALUATION NOTE

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A PEACEFUL TRANSITION OF POWER & PUBLIC'S EXPECTATIONS IN ARMENIA

Looking back at 2018, a wave of powerful political developments opened a new page in Armenia's civil rights movement. Eventually culminating in a change of government, this transition of power in Armenia became known as the "Velvet Revolution," mainly due to the lack of violence and peaceful handover of power. As the early months of 2018 consolidated the success of the Armenian Velvet Revolution, the country was also elevated in the eyes of the world, gaining international attention and interest. Currently, Armenia is passing through a hectic period of domestic reforms, which are penetrating into the economic, social, legal and political layers of the system. The fact that the Velvet Revolution was a bottom-up, non-violent civil resistance movement offers cautious optimism for a successful and deeper democratization process, shepherded and supported by Armenian civil society. Meanwhile, it is due to the new government's genuine commitment to the democratization process that suggests the further success of the Velvet Revolution.

If some fifty years ago social scientists approached protests as "an undemocratic intrusion into politics",[2] today, with more grassroots movements organized globally, non-state actors are gaining more attention in the field of international politics. Scholars Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan conducted a comparative analysis of 323 nonviolent and violent campaigns against

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[1] http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1370
[2] Pamela E. Oliver, Jorge Cadena-Roa, and Kelley D. Strawn, "Emerging Trends in the Study of Protest and Social Movements", Political Sociology for the 21st Century, Elseiver Science Ltd., Vol.12, 213-244, 2003.
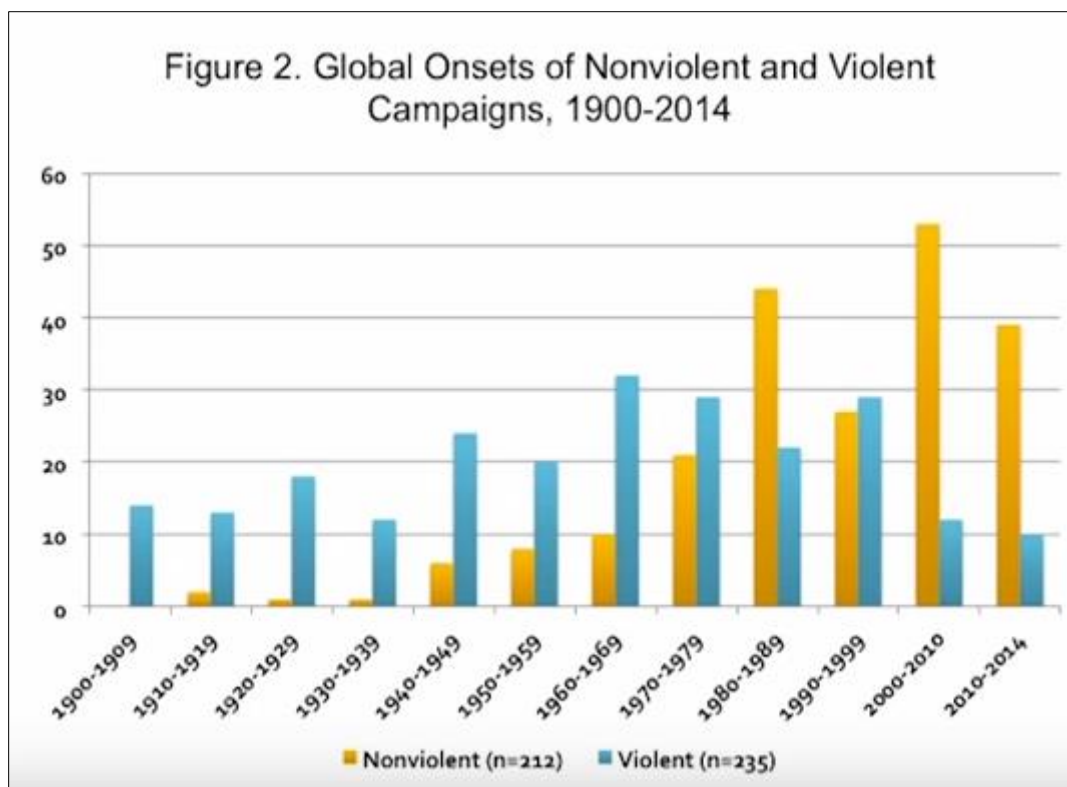
sitting governments for the purpose of self-determination, the removal of an incumbent leader, or the expulsion of foreign military occupation.[3] The authors see civic protests as important contributors to the quality improvement in contemporary democracies, where nonviolent resistance has higher possibility to lead to peaceful democracies, thus diminishing the risk of unleashing civil war. From 1900-2015, about 50 percent of the campaigns of nonviolent struggle succeeded, compared to about 25 percent of violent insurgencies, and since 2010 alone, world have seen well over 50 new major nonviolent uprisings globally, including the Arab Uprisings of 2011.[4]

Figure 1. Global Success Rates of Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns, 1900-2014
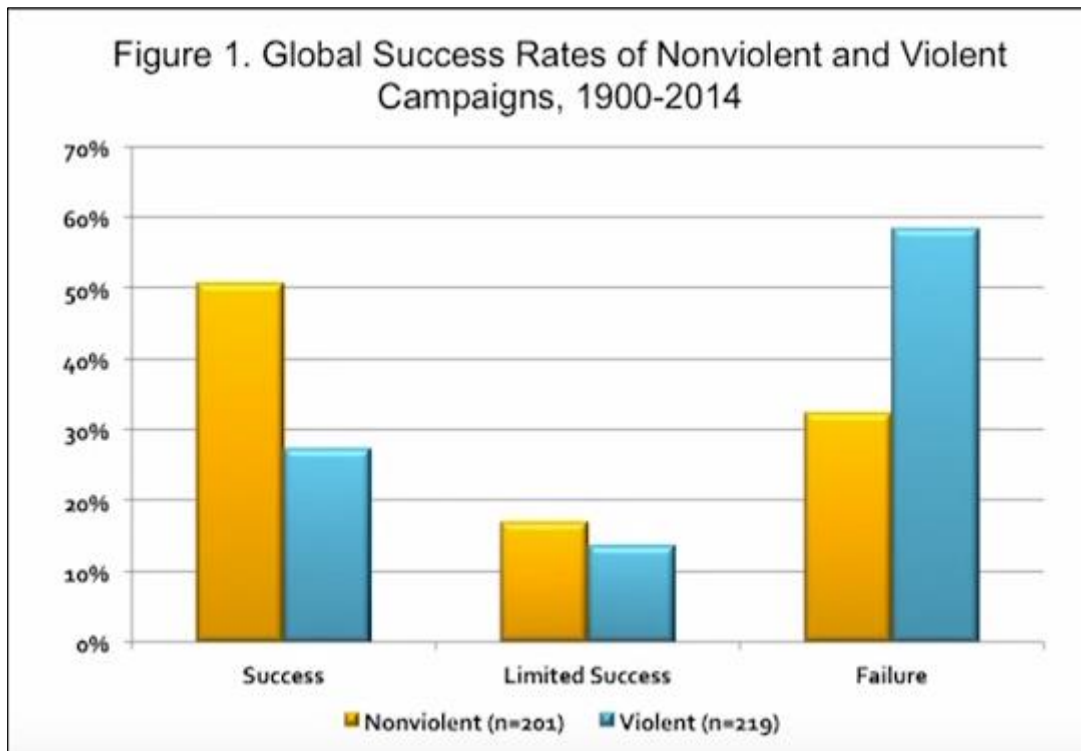
Source: MEC Dataset

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[3] Chenoweth, Erica, and Maria J. Stephan, Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
[4] Erica Chenoweth, "Why is Nonviolent Resistance on the Rise?", June 28, 2016, in Diplomatic Courier, available at < https://www.diplomaticcourier.com/nonviolent-resistance-rise/>. (accessed February 6, 2019).

Figure 2. Global Onsets of Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns, 1900-2014

Source: MEC Dataset

Another quantitative study conducted by Adrian Karatnycky and Peter Ackerman on the main actors and forces behind the transition from authoritarian regimes prioritizes civil resistance as a "key factor in the majority (fifty out of sixty-seven) of transitions from authoritarians".[5] Moreover, transitions driven by peaceful "bottom-up" resistance were more likely to lead to the establishment of the democratic government in comparison with transitions launched by force or led by elites. [6]

Russell Dalton and Irvine Christian Welzel, who investigated the causes behind the value change underpinning democracy using the massive cross-national database of the World Values Survey Association, made a valuable contribution to the study on active civic participation.[7] Their research linked the value change and the emergence of new forms of political action such as protests, petitions, sit-ins, and various other manifestations of civic resistance undertaken by the citizen activists.[8] According to these authors, a number of 'assertive citizens' preferring more assertive participation in political life is rising worldwide. 'Assertive citizens', being more distrustful of political institutions and their representatives, have a higher motivation to organize grassroots movements to address their demands,

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[5] Adrian Karatnycky and Peter Ackerman, How Freedom Is Won: From Civic Resistance to Durable Democracy, Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2005.
[6] Adrian Karatnycky and Peter Ackerman, Ibid.
[7] Russell J. Dalton and Christian Welzel, The Civic Culture Transformed: From Allegiant to Assertive Citizens, Cambridge University Press, 2014.
[8] Russell J. Dalton and Christian Welzel, Ibid.

thereby, keeping their governments' accountable and contributing to the improvement of democracy performance in their countries.[9]

The development of civil society in the post-Soviet transitional period was one of the biggest challenges for Armenia. After the collapse of the Soviet system, Armenia chose the path of democratization, but the democratic transformation did not meet the expectations of the vast majority of society. In contrast to many Western countries, the process of civil society formation and evolution from "ordinary" authoritarianism with developed market relations in Armenia, like the other former Soviet states, started from totalitarianism. Over the years of reforms, the number of people living below the poverty line has significantly increased. According to Asian Development Bank, 29.4 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line in 2016.[10] In 2017, that number has improved, dropping to 25.7 percent.[11]

Instead of strengthening democratic institutions, the system of post-Soviet power in Armenia was reduced to a vision of a narrow political elite, headed by the former ruling Republican Party, which controlled a closed political and economic system for over a decade. As a result, the ruling party established the domination of the bureaucracy and power structures over the business sector in the absence of organized and responsible opposition. Despite the constant promises of the government to fight against corruption, it failed to present any significant progress. Over time, this only fueled discontent and fed a wave of dissent.

Armenia Poverty Rate, By Urban and Rural Communities, 2008 and 2017 (percent)
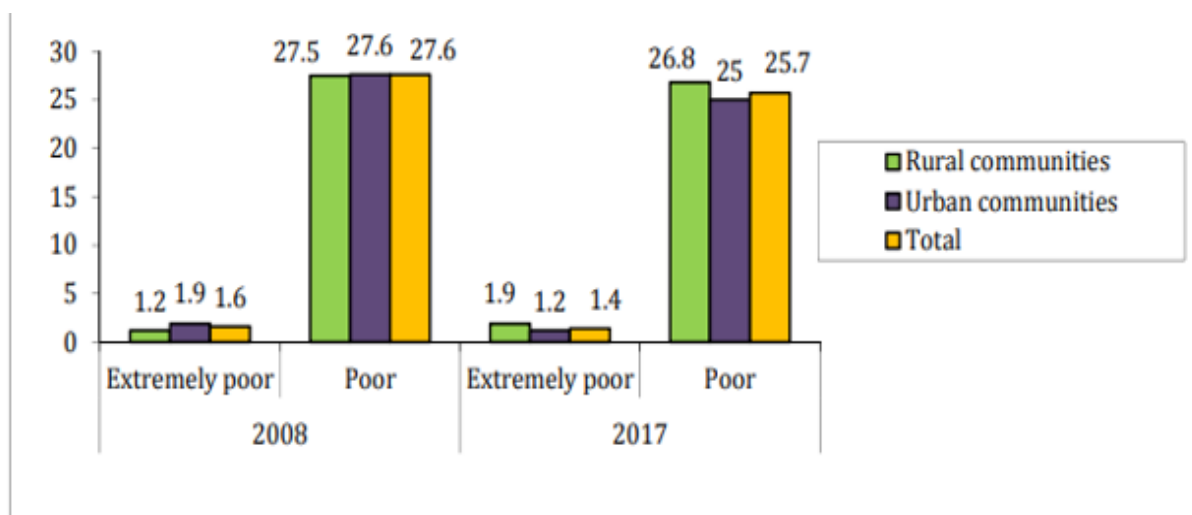
Source: LCS 2008 and 2017.

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[9] Democratic Audit UK, "The secret of better government? Citizens who complain", 2016, < http://www.democraticaudit.com/2016/12/02/the-secret-of-better-government-citizens-who-complain/> [accessed on 19.09.2018].

[10] Asian Development Bank, Poverty in Armenia, Statistics 2016.

[11] Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia (ArmStat), Social Snapshot and Poverty in Armenia, 2018.

Apart from the ineffective leadership of the former governments, external factors such as the Karabakh conflict, the catastrophic 1988 Spitak earthquake and a blockade of all transport and energy links by Azerbaijan heavily affected the economic situation in Armenia. Instead of celebrating the obtainment of post-Soviet national independency, the country appeared in the middle of ethnic war with Azerbaijan over a mountainous area of Nagorno-Karabakh, resulted in heavy human loss and social, political and economic isolation.[12] Apart from that, the catastrophic 1988 earthquake resulted in approximately 25000 fatalities with the second and third largest cities of the country (Gyumri and Spitak), being destroyed with their industrial facilities.[13] The continuous transport and energy blockade from Azerbaijan and Turkey (who joined the blockade from April 1993) had negative impact on living conditions in Armenia, resulted in the negative external migration balance of the country (emigration exceeds immigration).[14] The highest wave of emigration took place in the first years of transition because of an extraordinary economic and social situation.[15] During the last 35 years the total cumulative migration (number of immigrants minus number of emmigrants) from Armenia has constituted more than 1 million people.[16]

Net Migration in Armenia and in a number of select countries (thousands), 1950-2015
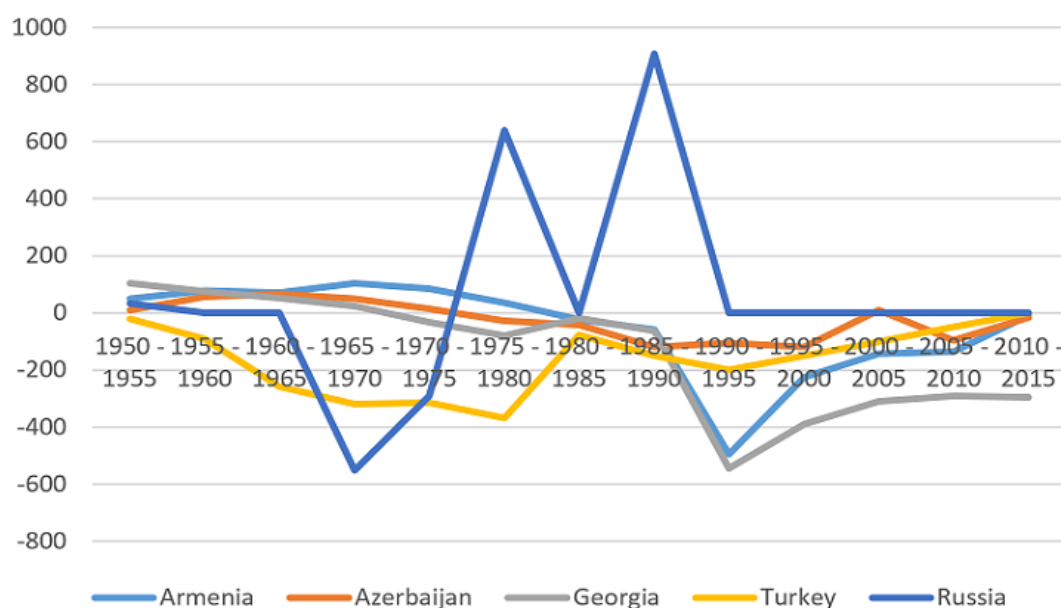
Source: UNFPA Armenia.

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[12] Raymond Bonner, "War, Blockade and Poverty 'Strangling' Armenia", New York Times, April 16, 1994, available at < https://www.nytimes.com/1994/04/16/world/war-blockade-and-poverty-strangling-armenia.html> (accessed February 1, 2019).
[13] Taline Papazian, "State at War, State in War: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and State-Making in Armenia, 1991-1995", *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies*, Issue 8, 2008.
[14] Heghine Manasyan and Gevork Poghosyan, "Social Impact of Emigration and Rural-Urban Migration in Central and Eastern Europe", Final Country Report, April 2012.
[15] Heghine Manasyan and Gevork Poghosyan, *Ibid.*
[16] UNFPA Armenia.

The role of public organizations was increasing, transforming civic activity and contributing to the formation of a responsible citizen. With Soviet memories fading away, a new post-Soviet generation came to the forefront of the civil society platform. Many Armenians, born on the eve of the collapse of the USSR were unfamiliar with the Soviet realities. It was not by chance that the critical masses of the Velvet Revolution were comprised of the youth.

In recent years, more Armenian citizens started resorting to civil protests as a form of articulation of demands, and some of them were quite successful in forcing the government to make concessions. Since 2010, civic activism became common in Yerevan and, to a lesser extent, in the smaller cities of Gyumri and Vanadzor. In recent years, the activists organized several small-scale peaceful protests, centered on human rights, women's rights, environmentalism, and labor and employment issues.[17] With active participation in non-violent civic activism, the young citizens started perceiving activism as a form of 'self-determined' citizenship, implying responsibilities toward their communities and their country, turning them from passive bystanders in society into active agencies of change.[18] According to the findings of the Caucasus Barometer[19] in 2017, the number of Armenians citizens ready to express the disagreement with the politics of the government through civic protests has increased to 16 percent in the last ten years.[20]

Question: Do you think that people like yourself have the right in Armenia to openly say what they think? (CB 2010-2017)

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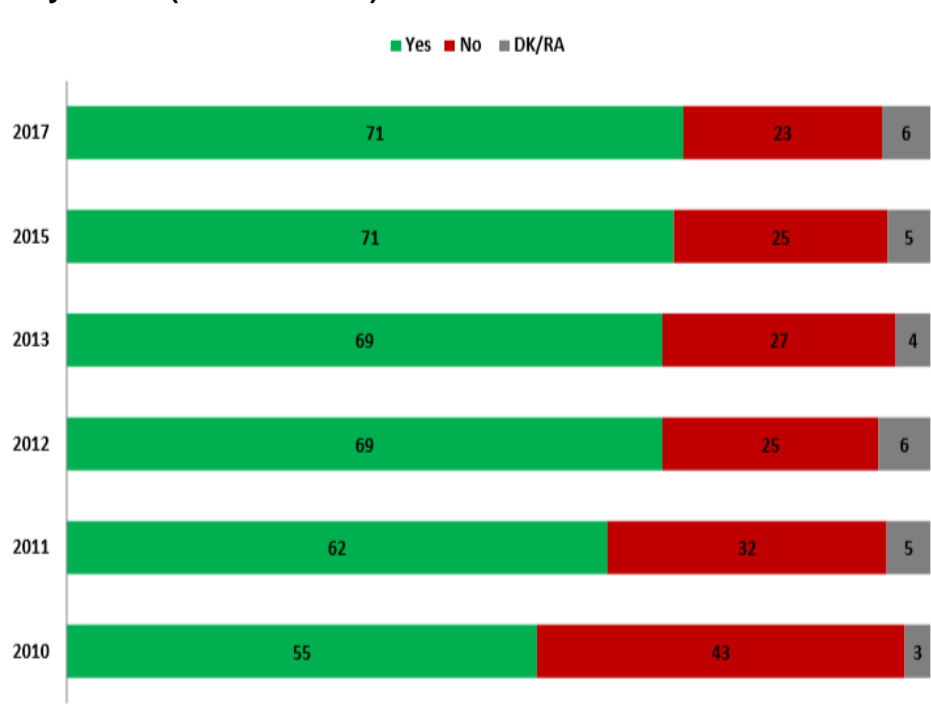
[17] Anna Ohanyan, "Armenia's Democratic Dreams", *Foreign Policy,* November 7, 2018, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/11/07/armenias-democratic-dreams/> (accessed on February 1, 2019).
[18] Armine Iskhanian, "Self-determined citizens? A new wave of civic activism in Armenia", *Open Democracy*, June 16, 2015, available at < https://www.opendemocracy.net/armine-ishkanian/selfdetermined-citizens-new-wave-of-civic-activism-in-armenia>, (accessed February 1, 2019).
[19] An annual survey by the Caucasus Research Resource Center.
[20] An annual survey by the Caucasus Research Resource Center.

Question: What do you agree with people should or should not participate in protest actions against the government? (CB 2010-2017)

■ Fullt trust   ■ Rather trust   ■ Neither trust not distrust   ■ Rather distrust   ■ Fully distrust   ■ DK/RA

Institution	Fullt trust	Rather trust	Neither trust not distrust	Rather distrust	Fully distrust	DK/RA
Army	51	26	8	7	6	2
Religious institution	49	25	9	5	6	6
Educational system	12	36	22	14	12	4
Healthcare system	10	30	23	17	19	1
Local government	10	23	21	19	21	6
EU	9	18	26	13	13	21
Ombudsman	8	21	25	13	13	20
Police	7	22	21	18	27	5
UN	7	20	26	12	12	23
President	6	12	15	20	44	4
Central bank	6	20	28	13	14	19
Banks	6	25	25	17	16	9
NGO	5	18	31	14	15	18
Executive government	5	16	17	22	36	4
Courts	4	12	21	23	30	10
National Assembly	3	9	17	26	40	5
Media	3	19	36	21	17	4
Political parties	2	7	20	26	37	7

A crisis of governmental credibility was among the main drivers behind the national civic resistance movement. The public polls, conducted in Armenia throughout the last ten years, point to the critical failures of the former government that contributed to the gradual increase of social distrust towards the main political institutions in the country. The attitude of the population was highly negative, and only a small segment of society approved the policy of the former government and political parties.

Question: How much do you trust or distrust following institutions? (CB, December 19, 2017)

According to Transparency International's report, corruption in Armenia is endemic and deeply entrenched in various layers of the society, where the public administration, particularly the judiciary, the police, and the health sector, are the main targets of corruption.[21] Results presented in 2002 showed that a majority of citizens perceived "bribery and abuse of public office for personal gain as the main manifestations of corruption" and saw authorities as the main source of the corrupted system.[22] Similar results were presented in 2006 by Transparency International's Anti-Corruption Center, that pointed to corruption as one of the major concerns for the Armenian public - around 89.0 percent of the respondents considered corruption as the major problem in the country, with 40.1 percent perceiving it as a crime and 11.81 percent as an immoral behavior.[23] The majority of interviewees (64 percent) believed that the level of corruption has increased during the last three years. [24]

In both 2002 and 2006, the respondents saw the president of Armenia as a figure playing the crucial role in diminishing corruption in the country.[25] The survey's findings also showed a change in the social perception regarding the main causes of corruption in Armenia – if in 2002 respondents mentioned "poor law enforcement, imperfect legislation, and inefficient control and punishment mechanisms", in 2006, a majority of respondents saw public tolerance as the main cause behind corruption.[26]

According to the results of the latest World Value Survey conducted in 2014, Armenians were among the most concerned citizens for possible future problems.[27] The respondents mentioned the personal economic stability and future opportunities in the country as major issues. The deteriorating socio-economic situation and ongoing unemployment have resulted in increased suicide statistics in Armenia. The statistical analysis of the suicide rates in Armenia indicates that economic problems are the main reason pushing people to commit suicide – with over 57 percent of attempted being unemployed and 18 percent being pensioners.[28]

Recent national polls conducted in Armenia after the Velvet Revolution have revealed a degree of widespread optimism about the prospects for the future. A new public poll, conducted by the International Republican Institute's (IRI) Center reveals widespread

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[21] Transparency International, "Overview of Corruption and anti-Corruption in Armenia", 2013, available at <https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/helpdesk/overview-of-corruption-and-anti-corruption-in-armenia>, (accessed January 20, 2019).
[22] Ibid.
[23] Transparency International Anti-corruption Center, "Armenia 2006 Corruption Perception Survey Presented". January 30, 2007. Available at
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] P.2. [27] Democratic Audit UK, "The secret of better government? Citizens who complain", 20's ao16, < http://www.democraticaudit.com/2016/12/02/the-secret-of-better-government-citizens-who-complain/> [accessed on 19.09.2018].
[27]World Values Survey, 2014, p.2.
[28] Victoria Aleksanyan, "Alarm at Rising Suicide Rate in Armenia", 2011, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/alarm-rising-suicide-rate-armenia>

optimism about the country's future and strong approval of Prime Minister Pashinyan's government. The poll also reflects strong approval ratings for anti-corruption efforts (81 percent). Deputy Minister of Education and Science in Armenia Hovhannes Hovhannisyan warns against the possible public frustration followed by the mismatch of high expectations with new government's policy: "A lot of people in Armenia are under the impression that from one day to another they will start to live much better lives. That all the problems that we have had in the last 20 years will be solved right away." [29]

Another public opinion survey, conducted by Center for Insights in Survey Research in October 2018 reveals strong public support for the new government and implemented domestic policies – around 82 percent of the respondents positively assessed the recent change in the government of Armenia. Decreased corruption (37 percent of respondents), democracy (20 percent of respondents) and improved psychological state of people (17 percent of respondents) was mentioned as the biggest successes of the new government, while inappropriate staff appointments, political instability, and political vendettas were mentioned as the biggest failures of the new government.

Question: "Generally speaking, do you think that the things in Armenia are going in the right direction or the wrong direction?" (October 2018)[30]


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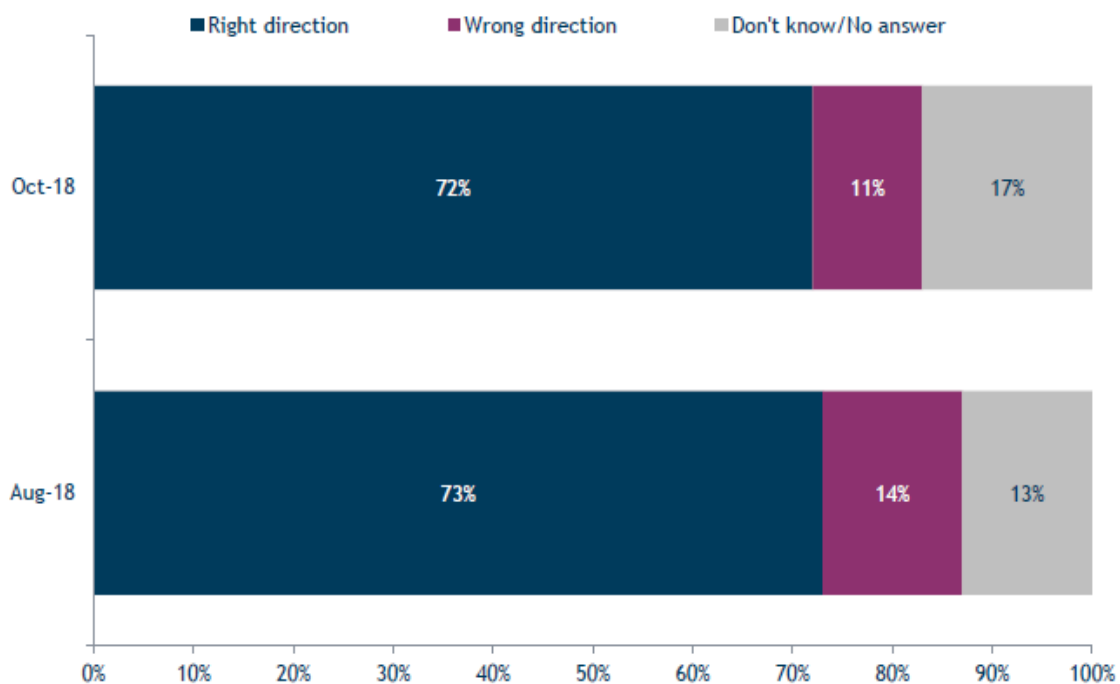
[29] Daniel Heinrich, "Armenia before elections: optimism prevails", in *Eastern Partnernship Civil Society Forum*, Armenian National Platform, December 2018, available at < https://eaparmenianews.wordpress.com/2018/12/07/armenia-before-elections-optimism-prevails/ (accessed on February 4, 2019).
[30] Center for Insights in Survey Research, "Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia", October 9-29, 2018.
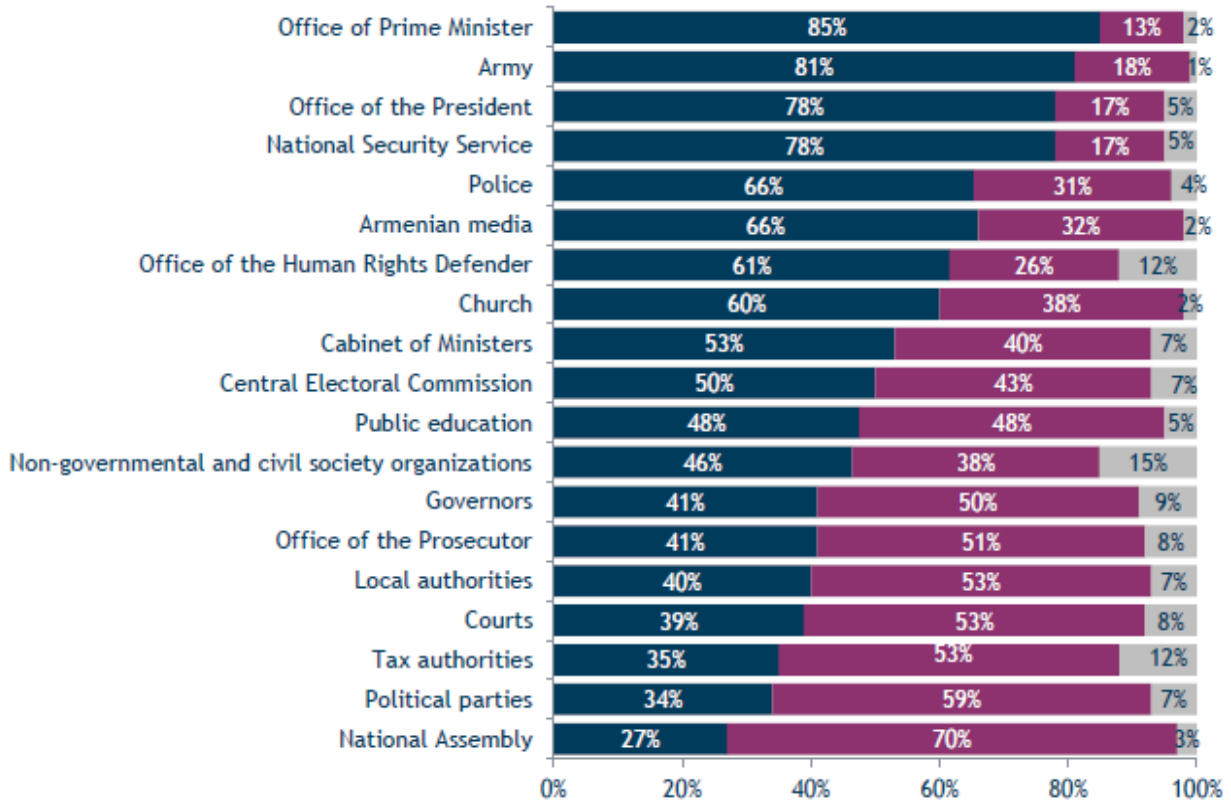
Question: How do you view the recent change in government in Armenia? (October 2018)

Legend: ■ Very positively ■ Somewhat positively ■ Somewhat negatively ■ Very negatively ■ Don't know/No answer

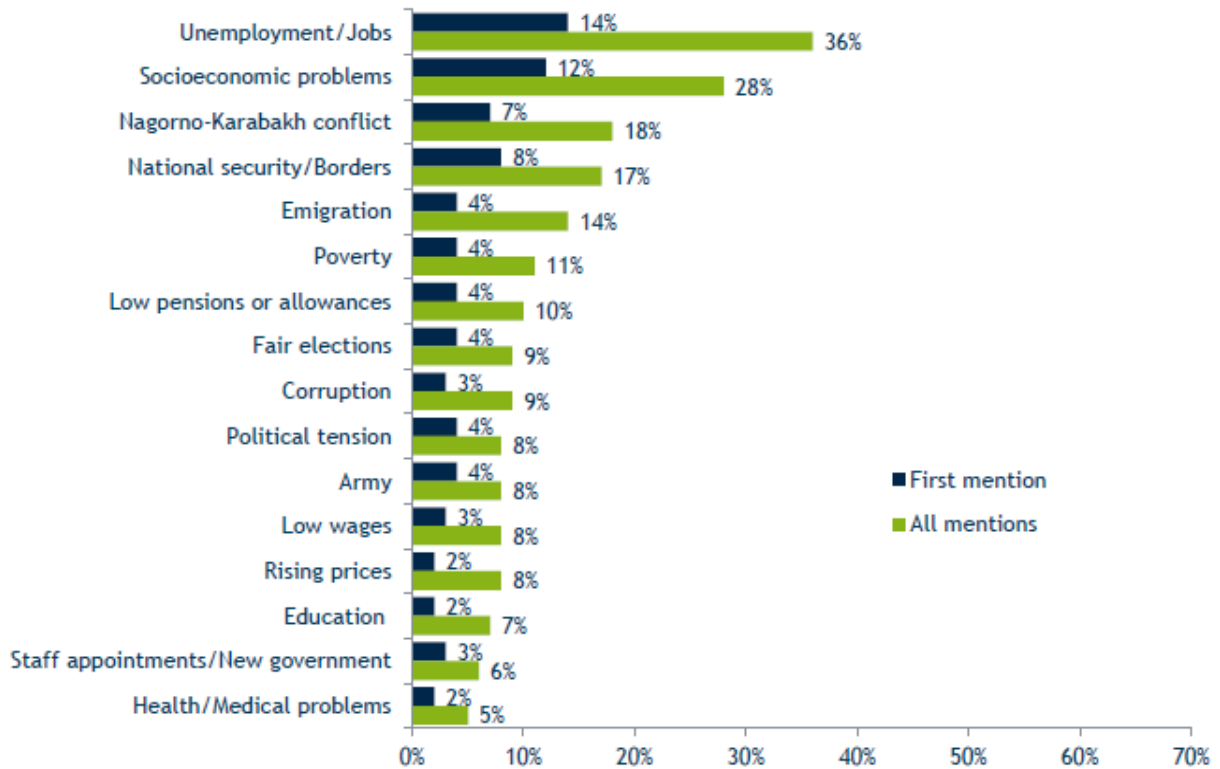|	Very positively	Somewhat positively	Somewhat negatively	Very negatively	Don't know/No answer
Oct-18	41%	41%	10%	3%	5%
Aug-18	39%	43%	10%	3%	5%
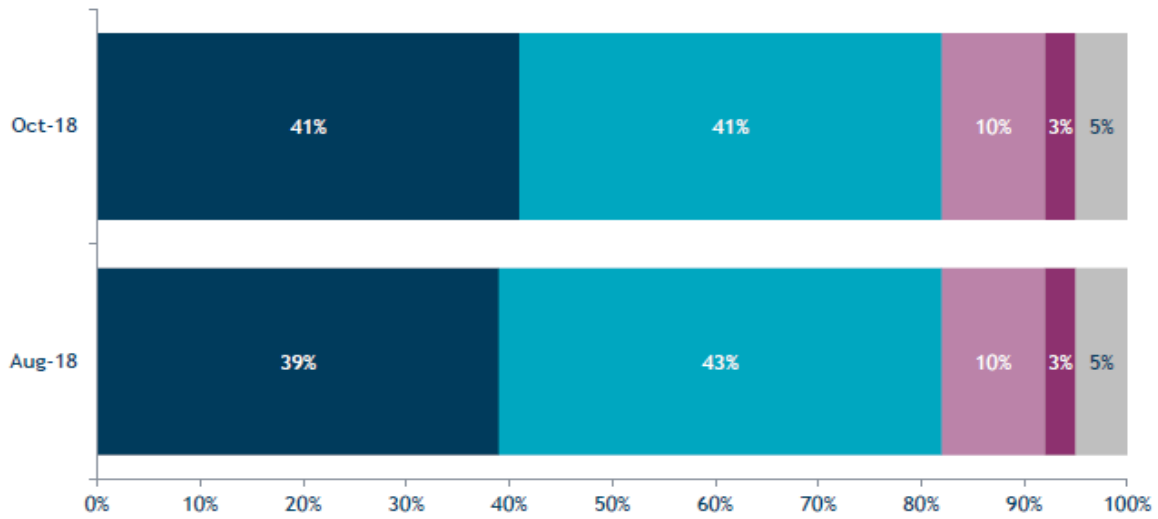
Question: Please tell your opinion about the work of each of these institutions (October 2018)

Legend: ■ Favorable ■ Unfavorable ■ Don't know/No answer

Institution	Favorable	Unfavorable	Don't know/No answer
Office of Prime Minister	85%	13%	2%
Army	81%	18%	1%
Office of the President	78%	17%	5%
National Security Service	78%	17%	5%
Police	66%	31%	4%
Armenian media	66%	32%	2%
Office of the Human Rights Defender	61%	26%	12%
Church	60%	38%	2%
Cabinet of Ministers	53%	40%	7%
Central Electoral Commission	50%	43%	7%
Public education	48%	48%	5%
Non-governmental and civil society organizations	46%	38%	15%
Governors	41%	50%	9%
Office of the Prosecutor	41%	51%	8%
Local authorities	40%	53%	7%
Courts	39%	53%	8%
Tax authorities	35%	53%	12%
Political parties	34%	59%	7%
National Assembly	27%	70%	3%

Question: "What are the main problems Armenia is currently facing?"(October 2018)

Question: "What are the three thıngs you believe the Pashinyan government must achieve in the next six months?" (October 2018)
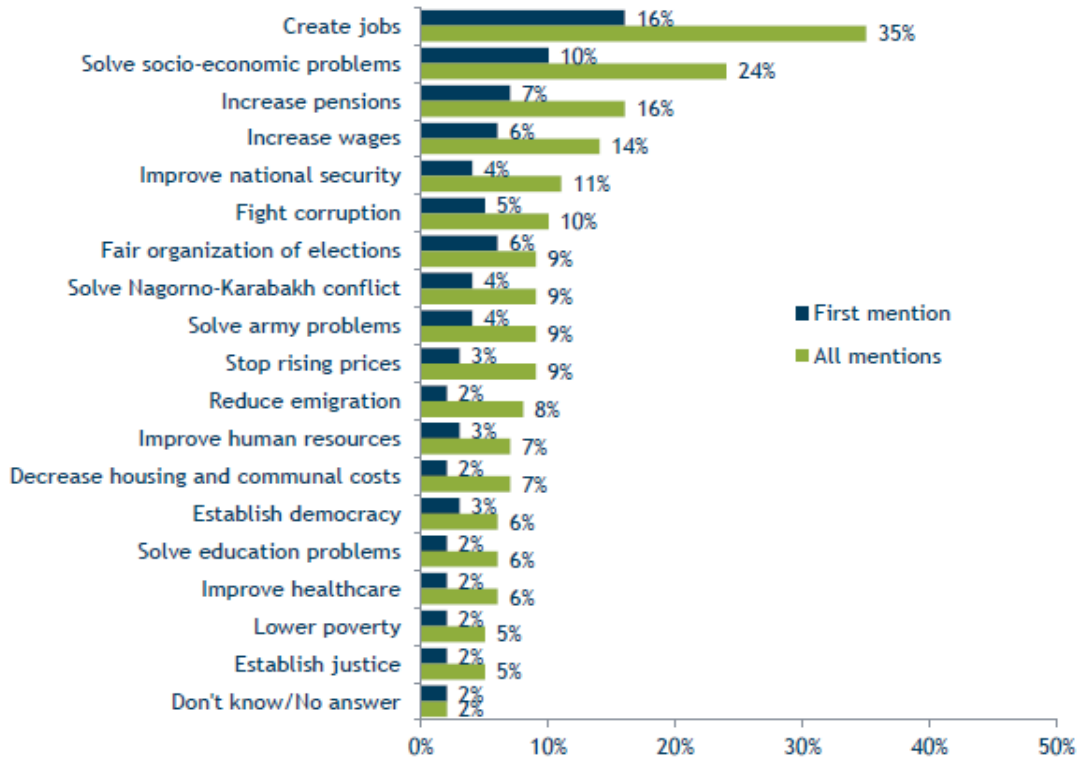
Securing an overwhelming victory (70.4 percent) in Armenia's extraordinary parliamentary election on December 9, acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his party secured an overwhelming parliamentary majority to support his program of tackling corruption and reforming the economy. "After the elections, we will be developing Armenian democracy and make an economic revolution happen," said Prime Minister Pashinyan.[31] Now that Premier Pashinyan has restructured the political elite, a tremendous task of improving the socio-economic situation in the impoverished landlocked country is on the agenda. The public poll results show that the socio-economic situation and particularly unemployment are still the most critical issues for the Armenian citizens, and in case the new government's domestic reforms do not have a tangible impact on the lives of people, its approval rates might gradually decline. While majority of citizens trust the new government and perceive it as not corrupt, it will clearly not be an easy test for a new parliament dominated by new, inexperienced and first-time politicians to govern the country.

Instead of Conclusion

Although this look back at the impressive political transition of 2018 offers a degree of hope and optimism, going forward, Armenia's reformist leader Nikol Pashinyan faces a set of real challenges, complicated by dangerous expectations within society and even among his supporters. Moreover, despite the impressive victory in the parliamentary election, the demands of governance will only continue to challenge the country's still rather inexperienced leadership. Despite a widespread optimism, the situation in post-revolutionary Armenia remains complex. Since the new government inherited the old institutions, improving governance, revising judicial and legal reforms, reforming the education system, creating equal opportunities for all, improving better business environment are all among the important tasks of the new government. It will also mean that the next challenges to come, as priorities in the post-election period, will be to manage high expectations on the government to deliver results, to recognize the necessity for compromise and consensus and, perhaps most notably, the need to develop and formulate public policy that offer real ideals and alternative ideas beyond an appeal of personalities.

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[31] France 24, "Armenia PM's bloc wins by landslide in parliamentary elections", December 12, 2018, https://www.france24.com/en/20181210-armenia-prime-minister-nikol-pashinyan-bloc-takes-clear-lead-parliamentary-elections>, [accessed on 15.12.2018].