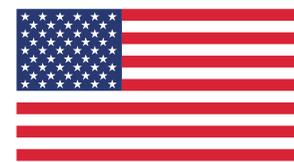




Mock Parliament Toolkit



The U.S.Embassy in Armenia



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This is a toolkit for planning, organizing and implementing a Mock Parliament – a parliament simulation game. The toolkit relies on practical experience: in winter 2018-2019, the Caucasus Institute designed and conducted a Mock Parliament simulation game in Jermuk, Armenia with support from a Department of



State Public Affairs Section grant. For four days, a group of thirty-five young Armenians discussed, drafted, lobbied and adopted legislation in a variety of areas including education, healthcare, social welfare, economics and defense. Thirty-two players played the roles of members of the parliament and three, of members of the cabinet of an imaginary country with a parliamentary form of government and a unicameral parliament. Throughout the game, the players worked to achieve the goals set by their political parties and their goals as MPs or cabinet members, while also addressing the problems faced by their country and their constituencies.

The goal of the game was to give participants hands-on experience of lawmaking and help them better understand the parliamentary form of government to which Armenia recently transitioned. In the course of the game, participants built their debating, presentation and negotiating skills, and improved their understanding of political ideologies, political parties and the legislative process. They also learned important lessons about the challenges and constraints of law- and policy-making.

The Mock Parliament was an interesting and instructive experience, and the Caucasus Institute is eager to share it with potential organizers of similar games in Armenia and other countries.

This toolkit contains simple step-by-step instructions on inventing, designing, preparing and conducting a Mock Parliament adjusted to the specific needs of your country and target groups.



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Conducting a Mock Parliament: preparation

Preparation for a simulation game typically takes several months and requires teamwork. At the Caucasus Institute, a team of four met every week to make the decisions, allocate assignments and review progress. Over the space of four months, the team defined the target groups, the goals of the game, the number of players, the breakdown into MPs and cabinet members, the breakdown of the parliament into parties,



the regulations and procedures for the parliament, the topics and thematic areas of the bills, and finally, the full agenda of the game.

The team members then worked on preparing game materials, including handouts (country descriptions, party programs, regulations, draft bills), presentation, videos, newsletters, maps, flags and badges.

Identifying the goals and target groups

Preparation begins with defining the goals depending on the overall setting, the target groups and their needs. A lot will depend on the age and educational/professional background of the participants. The minimal age range for a Mock Parliament is arguably 13-14. While secondary school students can be taught the basics of how a parliament operates, university students and young professionals can go more in-depth, whereas games for mid-career professionals can be more narrowly focused depending on the particulars.

As with any educational format, potential takeaways from a Mock Parliament include

- **Knowledge.** This is a wide area that will largely depend on the specific situation in the country and the choice of target groups. Depending on the setting, a Mock Parliament can be used to teach participants about the legislative process, parliamentary regulations and procedures, political ideologies, the concept and operation of political parties, interaction between the executive and the legislature, and so on.
- **Skills.** These can include negotiations, debate, advocacy, lobbying, public speaking, analyzing and drafting legislation. By definition, a game will also serve to build teamwork and communication skills.
- **Values.** In a Mock Parliament, values can include accountability, integrity, transparency, open-mindedness, ability to recognize and heed the needs of minorities, justice, and the concept of the public good.

A game can be designed to focus on imparting the *particular combination of knowledge, skills and values* required by the target groups in the particular setting.

E.g. in the CI game, the setting was the ongoing transition to a parliamentary form of government, and the target group was educated politically active youth aged 21 to 35, mainly with backgrounds in social and political sciences, public service, media and civil society. Therefore, the goal of our game was to cover a lot of ground rather than go in-depth. Players were offered a lot of new knowledge about ideologies and political parties, exposed to the widest possible variety of challenges faced by participants of the lawmaking process, and given the opportunity to try themselves at various activities: drafting and amending laws, arguing their positions in the parliament, lobbying inside and across factions.

With a group of school students, the scope would need to be restricted to the basics, whereas a mid-career group would need to focus on specific aspects of the legislative process.

It is important to *correctly estimate the capacities of the target group* and whether they are sufficient for the game to unfold naturally. E.g. in our case, the participants already possessed negotiation and debating skills, had experience of teamwork and general knowledge of the thematic area. Over the course of two days, they became immersed in the game and experienced the responsibility of real decision-makers. Starting from Day 3, the group managed itself, ensuring adherence to procedure and commitment to values and goals. In a school setting, the organizers may need to remain more involved, whereas in a more advanced setting, self-management may begin at an earlier stage. However, regardless of age and education levels, some groups may lack essential skills such as debating or lobbying, or basic knowledge about politics and law. There may be need for preparatory training sessions, or a first day dedicated to filling the main gaps.

Defining the format of the game

When planning begins, you will need to decide upon the **number of participants**. Simulation games tend to work well in larger groups: the dynamic is more varied, players have more options to choose from, and one can prepare more elaborate storylines. However, a group needs to be manageable logistically. A medium-sized hotel in a rural location not too far from the urban center provides the perfect setting for a game. Participants will not wander off to run their errands the way they would in their home city. There will be small places to have faction meetings – over the years, we have had our breakout meetings in a billiard room, children's playrooms, bars and balconies. In our experience, 35 is a good group: it fits into one large bus or two minibuses, and into an average rural hotel, but it is not too large so most people will learn each other's names over two days.

The breakdown into roles and factions will depend on the approach. A simulation game can be set in the **real** or the **imaginary world**; e.g., a game can model an existing organization or real parliament. International organizations often create and sponsor simulations: the UN thus organizes UN model games and the European Parliament organizes EP model games.



In our experience, games set in an imaginary world have the advantage that participants are able to keep a distance from the reality, which can be helpful if one needs to model an institution in their own country. Participants can stop focusing on their own set of sensitive political problems and adopt a more neutral and open-minded approach. Besides, an imaginary world with invented toponyms, ethnonyms and interesting cultural details makes playing more

fun, invites creativity, and, what may be especially important, promotes ownership. It is easy for players to consider an imaginary country 'their world' and try to make it fair, equal, humane and protected.

All our simulation games were set in imaginary locations. Compared to a real-world simulation, designing a game set in an imaginary country involves additional steps. You need to produce the **description of the imaginary country**, including its name, map, location, information on its culture, economic and political system, its geopolitical situation, domestic and foreign policy. Each political party represented in the Mock Parliament must have an ideology and constituency. You will thus need to produce **descriptions of all the parties**: name, size, a little history, constituent base, economic and political vision and goals. To allow for lively debates among teams, it makes sense to have a variety of ideologies. To enable participants to keep their distance from real-life politics, the layout of the Mock Parliament should differ from the one in the participants' home country or countries. The **allocation of roles** and **breakdown of MPs into factions** needs to happen at early stages of planning. It is good to have factions of various sizes, and one needs to make calculations to ensure that one party or coalition does not get to win all the time, other-



wise the game will be frustrating and end quickly. Thematic areas for the bills can be chosen in a way to create various combinations of coalitions on particular issues.

Faction	Number of Members	Name	Role	Presidency	Minister
PP 1	11	Dendrian Democratic Front	Coalition	1 Speaker	1
PP2	4	New Way	Coalition		1
PP3	3	Ecolo	Coalition		1
PP4	8	The Conservative Party of Dendria	Opposition	1 Vice-Speaker	None
PP5	6	Dendrian Future	Opposition		None

For example, in our Mock Parliament, set in the imaginary country of Dendria, 35 participants played in six teams.

Five teams consisted of **MPs** organized into political party factions: three in coalition (18 MPs) and two in opposition (14 MPs). The **coalition** included social democrats (Dendrian Democratic Front), 11 MPs; social-liberals (New Way), 4 MPs, and the Green Party (Ecolo), 3 MPs. The **opposition** included the Conservative Party of Dendria, 8 MPs, and the nationalists (Dendrian Future) with 6 MPs. Although the coalition had an absolute majority, it could not pass all the bills initiated by the Democratic Front because New Way and Ecolo had very specific ideologies and lined up with the opposition on some of the bills.

One team consisted of three **cabinet members**: minister of health and social welfare; minister of economics and finance; and minister of education. Each minister was affiliated with one of the political parties in coalition. Although Mock Parliaments are usually played entirely by MPs, we added the cabinet members for two reasons. One was that, in the first two days, cabinet members presented bills on behalf of the government. We drafted those bills in advance; this way, players learned the structure of a bill and the procedure for presentation, discussion and voting. On Day 3, the MPs were ready to initiate their own bills, and from that point onwards, the role of cabinet members was to express the position of the government with regard to the bills and to participate in discussions in their factions.

While devising the ideological and numerical layout of the parliament, we tested it on particular bills, figuring out how the factions can vote based on their ideologies and roles in the coalition or opposition. One of the things the players learned from the game is that solutions might not be easy or obvious, and that decision-makers experience conflict between their personal values and their political loyalties. Many MPs



reported feeling torn apart by their commitments to the coalition or opposition, to their party's ideology and political goals, and to their own perceptions of integrity. Besides, there are personal relationships and group dynamics. There will be tensions between the factions within the coalition and opposition. Some players and leaders build relations and negotiate win-win solutions, while others are more confrontational. Some play tactically, focusing on the short-term perspective and the problem in hand, others strategize, planning for the longer term.

Once the parliament is laid out and structured, the next step is to devise the rules and procedures. We used the Armenian Law on the parliament as a blueprint to write up a simple set of **regulations for the Mock Parliament**. While the procedures will need explaining to the participants at the beginning of the game, it will take up to two days for players to learn them. The initial presentation needs to cover the basic aspects, such as



- The main rights and duties of an MP;
- The Speaker and Deputy Speaker, their rights, duties and election procedure;
- The works of a party faction;
- The course of the first session and of a routine session;
- Submission, presentation, discussion and revision of bills;
- The voting procedure;
- Plenaries, faction meetings and breaks;
- Possible disciplinary measures with regard to an MP.

We had to simplify many things, e.g. we decided against having standing committees, although some simulations successfully use them. We kept the main procedures

that make the process feel realistic, starting with the appointment of interim Speaker and Deputy Speaker, followed by elections of heads of factions in the faction meetings. Since most players met for the first time during the game, we decided to hold off elections of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker until Day 2, giving players some time to become acquainted and get a feel of the game. The roles of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker were simplified versions of their real-life roles, including roll call, handling Q&A, registration of presentations, building the agenda, initiating voting. It may be possible to find software for electronic voting but in our game, MPs voted by raising their badges. The Deputy Speaker was in charge of counting votes and announcing voting results; throughout the plenaries, it was her duty to pull up the agenda, the lists of presentations, the bills and the voting results onto the screen.



Putting together the agenda

Compiling the agenda is the most time-consuming and challenging process during the preparation of a simulation game. Calculating how long an activity will take often requires rehearsing it, if it's a presentation, or doing a test run if it's the presentation of a bill or a round of voting. The activities planned for a day must be short enough to be fun and long enough for the participants to understand the concepts and learn the skills. Too much work during the day is exhausting; too little can be boring and might not provide the stimulation needed for players to dive into the game and take ownership. It is best to rely on experience of previous activities; having done simulation games before, we succeeded in planning the Mock Parliament well and getting feedback that is was "exciting but not exhausting."

Day 1 is typically a half-day because the players need to travel to the location and then have lunch. This half-day will be dedicated to presentations and coaching. It begins with a detailed presentation of the game, its goals, rules and procedures, as described above. Since players cannot remember all the details at once, they will need to practice. An **exercise** also serves as an icebreaker during which players get to know each other.

In our game, we broke the participants down randomly into 5 groups of 7. We told them that the parliament of their imaginary country is discussing a bill to introduce obliga-

tory universal franchise by means of on-line voting. Each group had to decide, by consensus or majority vote, whether they supported the bill, and to draft their own amendments to the Election Code. Then they presented their drafts to the plenary, followed by Q&A. The exercise was useful for learning and getting acquainted but had a side effect: the next day, when players were allocated roles in the parliament, some of them stuck to the roles they had played during the exercise.



Based on this experience, we recommend the following sequence of events on Day 1:

- Presentation of the game, its goals and concepts
- Handing out of folders and roles
- Going into factions and electing of faction heads
- Going back to plenary, presentation of the regulations of the parliament
- Appointing the interim Speaker and Deputy Speaker
- Conducting an exercise

The exercise can be the discussion of a particular bill prepared in advance by the organizers, or the reaction to a problem or event, such as minor natural disaster (e.g. heavy rainfall) or a public protest due to bankruptcy of a large company. It should not be very dramatic and should last less than two hours.

For the game to start smoothly on Day 2, some coaching will need to be done at the end of Day 1. One of the organizers can sit down with the heads of factions, another with the interim Speaker and Deputy Speaker, and a third, with the cabinet members who will need to present bills in the morning. They will need to go over the agenda for Day 2 and the roles of each of these key players.

On **Day 2**, the MPs can discuss bills proposed by the government and presented by the cabinet ministers, and gradually start working on their own bills. The goal is that by the end of Day 2, at least one of the factions has a draft ready for presentation the next morning. The cabinet members can help with this; in our case, they all came from parties in coalition, so that the first bills were initiated on Day 3 by coalition MPs. However, other options are possible too.



For the first two days, participants must get a full agenda describing activities and times allocated for them. Starting from **Day 3**, the agenda can be a blueprint, just showing the times for plenary sessions, discussions in factions, coffee and lunch breaks. Even these times can change if the MPs want more time for Q&A, speeches, or work in factions. Once the players are in charge of the game, they will manage their own time effectively.

The organizers will benefit from preparing a more detailed agenda for themselves for the whole game, showing the actions needed at each stage and the distribution of responsibilities and roles amongst the team of organizers. They will need a list of potential bills that can be proposed to the players during breaks in the event that they do not come with their own ideas.

The agendas are best prepared well in advance of the game and reviewed several times, including at the very end when all materials are ready and all roles distributed.

Selecting participants

The call for participants needs to be made at least a month in advance of the game, leaving time for applications and selection. An open online call is a good method for reaching wide audiences, although some target groups such as school students or representatives of a particular occupation (e.g. educators) can be reached directly. An *online questionnaire* helps organizers to assess the interests and knowledge of the applicants. Personal or skype interviews mostly serve to weed out confrontational applicants who may create unnecessary conflict and reduce the motivation of other players.

For our game, the *eligibility criteria* were being a student, journalist, public official, scholar or civil society representative aged 21 to 35. The *selection criteria* were as follows

- Interest in the topic, as reflected in the resume, questionnaire, interview and sometimes also Facebook profile;
- Motivation to learn and be an active participant of the game, as expressed during the interview and through previous experience of attending workshops, games etc.;
- Generally cooperative attitude reflected in the interview.

Allocation of roles to participants

There are several methods of allocating roles to the players, including

- Random distribution, e.g. players' folders with all materials and badges inside are stacked on a table; players pick them up and write their name in the badge;
- Pre-allocation based on the resume, questionnaire and interviews. This way, the organizers can try to build teams (factions) that are balanced in terms of proactivity and skills such as speaking or negotiation. One can also take players' ideological preferences into account;
- Allocation at the end of the first day of the game, after players get all the instructions and do an exercise in presenting and debating bills. This allows organizers to assess players' performance before breaking them up into teams.

In our game, we used a combination of the last two approaches: we pre-allocated some of the roles to players whose personality and preferences were more apparent, and then decided on the rest at the end of Day 1. However, in the course of our game we noticed that many players only started expressing themselves in the course of the game. Later, they admitted many things surprised them, including their own ambitions and actions. E.g., the player appointed interim Speaker because he was the oldest in the group did not want the job and generally wanted to keep in the background. However, by the time of the elections on Day 2, he began to enjoy this new activity, put up his candidacy for the post of permanent Speaker, campaigned actively, won the election, and did an excellent job. Contrastingly, some players who came across as proactive in fact lacked the qualities needed for good leadership, such as the ability to compromise and think big. As a result, some of the smaller factions in our parliament did not have strong leadership and failed to use their position to their best advantage.

Therefore, we believe **allocating the roles randomly may be the best approach**; it is certainly perceived by players as the fairest. Some teams will end up stronger than others, but this also happens as a result of careful selection.

The role of the organizers during the game

For the success of the game, the players need to take ownership of it. For this to happen, **organizers must not interfere in the game**, so that the players can get into their roles and take charge. The role of the organizers is to present the goals and ground rules, facilitate the first sessions, and then be there to help when needed. During the first two or three days, one may need to keep in touch with the Speaker, helping them to implement all the procedures and get the process going.

The organizers can use an online file sharing platform, such as *google docs*, to enable participants to share the bills they are working on. The Deputy Speaker pulls the law

bills up on the screen during presentations, while the organizers print some copies of the bills and hand them out to the factions.

This said, the organizers cannot entirely leave the players to their own resources. It has been our experience in the Mock Parliament and other simulation games that the organizers need to have at their disposal a set of tools that they can use in order to tweak certain aspects of the game. They cannot interfere in their capacity of organizers, but they can generate external events. If there is insufficient dynamic and everyone tries to cooperate with everyone else, which is often the case at the beginning, a divisive event needs to happen, such as a fight between members of the constituencies, or protests by supporters of the party who disapprove of their MPs behavior in the parliament. An outbreak of violence on nationalistic grounds or a big ant-government protest can help the opposition and coalition to get a better idea of their respective roles. Later in the game, if there is too much conflict, something can happen that requires synergy, e.g. a natural disaster or a foreign invasion. If one faction stays entirely passive, there can be an external event directly relevant to their ideology, e.g. the dumping of toxic waste in a river will make the green party more proactive.

The best way to generate external events is by means of *news*, delivered by various methods depending on capacity

- Video or audio, pre-recorded or made on the spot, resources permitting, projected onto the screen as a TV program or broadcast as a radio program;



- Print newspaper/newsletter, designed and laid out in advance, partly prepared in advance and partly written by the organizers in the course of the game and handed out to the players as necessary or at fixed times (e.g. at the start of the morning session).



In our case, four CI team members were present at the game. They conducted the initial presentations and did the coaching on Day 1 after dinner. During Day 2, they helped the interim Speaker and Deputy Speaker handle their duties. Once the permanent Speaker and Deputy Speaker were elected, the organizers helped them take over. They were available at all times to deal with logistics, including printing, and answer questions. They followed the course of the game closely, deciding if interventions were necessary, and edited that day's TV/radio news and the next morning's newspaper accordingly.

Awards and feedback

Our practice shows that even though the game is satisfying in itself, players want there to be some formal winners. It creates additional stimulation and adds to the sense of fairness. We have tried various ways of selecting winners and the best is by universal closed ballot of the entire group. As to organizers excluded. In our Mock Parliament, participants voted for the best public speaker, the best leader and the best negotiator. Of course, the choice of awards and categories is up to the organizers.



A feedback form is essential for evaluating the game. Our practice shows that electronic feedback is the best option. In the feedback form must include sections on: personal performance, performance of the organizers, the content of the game and technical framework.

The form must be sent couple of days after the game in order to receive more objective evaluation of the game by the participants, as immediately after the game they have too mixed emotions and impressions that need to be digested so that they will be able to provide an impartial feedback on all the sections.

Game materials

- 1. Participants folders, containing:**
 - a. The ground rules of the game
 - b. A general description of the imaginary country and its parliament
 - c. A map of the imaginary country
 - d. Profiles of political parties and their platforms
 - e. The rules and procedures of the mock parliament
 - f. The agenda of the game
- 2. Participants' badges with their first names and logos of their party**
- 3. List of the participants by factions provided to the Speaker and Deputy Speaker for registration**
- 4. Draft newsletters**
- 5. Flipchart, markers, pens, notebooks**

Setup and equipment

- A hall comfortably seating the group theater-style, preferably with tables, like in a parliament session hall or university lecture hall, or just using chairs and tables or desks;
- A large table for the Speaker and Deputy Speaker placed in front of the theatre-style seats, with a screen or blank wall above it;
- A rostrum for presentations (we improvised with a bar stool);
- A notebook computer connected to an overhead projector and placed on the Deputy Speaker's table so that he/she can register speeches, fill in the results of voting and pull up documents on the screen;
- A sound system with microphones and speakers (ideally, there must be stationary microphones for the Speaker and Deputy Speaker, and one on the rostrum for presentations, plus two portable ones circulating in the hall for questions, or a stationary microphone on every table)
- Room for breaks, ideally at the entrance to the session hall;
- Small rooms for meetings in factions;
- Printer for bills and newspapers/newsletters;
- (optional) If there is staff who can shoot and edit video, a video camera can be used to produce news when an intervention is necessary and to film some of the proceedings (for teaching, reviewing, reporting or promotion). If news is produced on the spot, the editor will need a computer with editing software;
- (optional) A laminator for participation and award certificates; the forms are printed in advance but can only be filled on the last morning after voting for the winners.

You can watch the video on the Mock Parliament at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lotztKpoi50>

To get more information on the Mock parliament and other simulation games, to exchange and share your experience and recommendations, please contact:

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