The 2013 Yerevan Municipal Election Campaign in Online Media Coverage

Monitoring Report

(APRIL 7 - MAY 3, 2013)

Contents

Goals

The goal of the study was to assess the impact that on-line media have on voters' perceptions and knowledge during electoral processes in Armenia, and specifically, to see if the coverage of the municipal election campaign in on-line media enabled voters to make an informed choice. To achieve this, we monitored the media coverage of the municipal election campaign in on-line media.

The information received by voters from online media during the campaign was in fact the result of interaction between two types of actors: the ***political parties*** running in the election and the ***journalists and editorial boards*** of online media. What the parties said and did during the campaign, combined with the way the journalists understood, interpreted and represented the campaign, resulted in the information that voters had to base their choice on. Therefore, the focus of this study was on the way the parties campaigned ***and*** on the way the media covered their campaigns. The report has separate sections focusing on the parties and the media, and separate sets of recommendations to the parties and the media.

Methodology

We used qualitative methodology based on discourse analysis. The sample of online media was put together based on the popularity of the media amongst Internet users from Armenia. To assess popularity, used the data of *www.circle.am* which rates Armenian web resources in accordance with the number of unique visits. We were only interested in visits from the *.am* domain, i.e. readers from Armenia, since only residents of Armenia are eligible to vote in this election, and therefore worldwide visits would have corrupted the sample.

We cross-checked the data of *circle.am* against those of *alexa.com*. Unlike *circle.am, alexa.com* is an international website that collects statistics for all countries. This double-checking was necessary since sometimes data from these two websites do not coincide (there are uncorroborated claims that *circle.am* statistics can be tampered with); however, this time both websites gave the same results.

According to *circle.am* and *alexa.com,* the most visited **Armenian online media** as of 7 April 2013 (the day of the election campaign launch) were the following:

1. *News.am*
2. *1in.am*
3. *Tert.am*
4. *Slaq.am*
5. *Asekose.am*

Originally, there were two more websites at the top of the rating: *Blognews.am* and *MediaMall.am* (rated second and fourth respectively). However, after the test run performed during the first two days of the monitoring, we excluded these two websites from our sample. The test run proved that these websites were not news media but aggregators, i.e. websites that collect and publish content produced by other media; they do not do their own reporting. *Blognews.am* is a blog aggregator, and *MediaMall.am* is a news aggregator.

Once the sampling and the test run was complete, the team began the actual monitoring. In the process of monitoring, the researchers read the entire content of the five websites every day from 7 April and up to 3 May 2013, i.e. the whole duration of the campaign. Whenever a story

mentioned elections to the city council, the campaign or mentioned/involved an actor of the elections (one of the parties or candidates in the party lists), the analyst decided if

- an *attitude* to/an *opinion* of a party/candidate is expressed by any type of actor (journalist, politician etc),
- a *value* is expressed by a party/candidate.

If such attitudes or values were not found, the analyst read on. However, if there was an attitude/opinion or a value, the analyst made a database entry according to the following parameters:

- Basic information on the story: publication date, name of media, headline;
- The specification whether it is an opinion/attitude or a value;
- Source of the attitude or opinion (journalist, candidate, NGO actor, civil servant, citizen etc.) or source of the value (party or candidate);
- Candidate, party or phenomenon (e.g. elections, domestic politics, environment, social issues, construction, etc) to whom/which this attitude/value is addressed;
- The topic of the quote containing the attitude or value (e.g. elections, domestic politics, environment, social issues, construction, etc) in order to see which problems are considered to be most serious and urgent;
- The quote containing the attitude or value, in full, in the original language (Armenian or Russian);
- The link of the original source.

For the analysis to be more accurate, the research team made a list of possible topics that candidates or parties addressed during the campaign. The topics included general ones, such as "Elections", "Domestic Politics", "Social Issues", as well as more specific ones "Constructions", "Landscaping", "Transport" which are typically discussed in the context of urban development.

The author of each quote was not entered in the database entry, i.e. we did not register names; instead, we registered down the general occupation of the author of the quote. We used five categories of quote authors, including "politician", "journalist", "public figure" and "citizen". The "citizen" category was assigned to the database entry in the event that the opinion was voiced by a person in the street or the audience, and it was not possible to establish their occupation. Finally, a fifth category, "candidate", was used to designate one of the candidates for

the position of mayor, i.e. the number one in the party list of a party running in the election. All other members of political parties, whether participating in the election or not, would fall under the "politician" category. The goal of entering the occupation of sources was to see whether in this campaign, the candidates and members of political parties would make very vague and general statements and promises the way they did during the pre-election campaign[1] for Parliamentary Elections, or whether they would be more specific this time and address concrete city issues in detail.

Samples of database entries

325	22.04	1in.am	«Ժառանգություն» ու ՀԱԿ-ը պայքարում են ոչ թե իշխանության, այլ իրար դեմ. Ա. Իսկանդարյան	attitude	փորձագետ		ՀՀԿ	Ընտրություններ		Հանրապետական կուսակցությունը շանի լուրջ մրցակից	http://www.1in.am/arm/a
326	22.04	1in.am	«Ծառուկյանը կոպիտ սխալ թույլ տվեց, բայց երան վախեցրել էին»	attitude	թեկնածու	ԲՀԿ	ՀՀԿ	Ներքին քաղաքական անություն	Ընտրություններ	պետք է կոտրել ՀՀԿ-ի քաղաքական մենաշնորհը, և եթե դա իրենց հաջողվի անել, երկրում լրջագույն փոփոխություններ կիրականանան	http://www.1in.am/arm/a
327	22.04	1in.am	Ընտրություններով անկատարություն հայտնեք իշխանությանը և «այդ՝ Դաշնակցությանը. ՀՅԴ-ն Խարբերդում	Value	թեկնածու	ՀՅԴ	ՀՅԴ	Ընտրություններ	Ներքին քաղաքականություն	Երևանում քաղաքապետ փոխելով, մանավանդ ընդդիմադիր դաշնակցական քաղաքապետ ունենալով՝ Երևանը մեր այցի առաջ կկիրիվի, իսկ Երևանի հետ միասին Հայաստանը կփոխվի	http://www.1in.am/arm/a
328	22.04	1in.am	Ինչո՞ւ ՚ Գագիկ Բեգլարյանը չի մասնակցում Տարոն Մարգարյանի քարոզարշավին	Value	քաղաքական գործիչ	ՀՀԿ	ՀՀԿ	Ընտրություններ	Ներքին քաղաքականություն	Տարոնը երբեք չի օգտվել հոր թողած իրավունքներից	http://www.1in.am/arm/a
329	22.04	1in.am	Ընդդիմությունը պետք է կրակպաշտություններից դուրս գա. Արման Վարդանյան	Value	քաղաքական գործիչ	ՀՅԴ		Ընտրություններ	Ներքին քաղաքականություն	Դաշնակցությունը պայքարի մեջ է իր ողջ ներուժով, անելու ենք հնարավորը, որ միասնասկական համակարգը կոտրվի	http://www.1in.am/arm/a
330	23.04	1in.am	Ստոպա Մաֆարյանի պատասխանած ՀՅԴ նախընտրական շտաբի «արձագանքին»	attitude	քաղաքական գործիչ	Բարի Երևա ն	ՀՅԴ	Ընտրություններ	Ներքին քաղաքականություն	ՀՅԴ-ին չեմ համարել ու չեմ էլ համարելու մրցակից այս ընտրություններում	http://www.1in.am/arm/a

The content of the database was later analyzed in order to (1) identify the attitudes expressed by members of political parties and the values they adhere to, (2) to assess the way the online media in our sample covered the election. Since the methodology used during this monitoring was purely qualitative, no quantitative results were obtained.

Throughout the report, we used citations from our database to illustrate the findings and the conclusions of the research team. Each citation includes the original quote, the name of the medium that published it, the name of the media story/article that contained the quote, and the date of publication. Although most online media now keep complete and regularly updated archives, some do not, and therefore access to the original quotes may not always be possible.

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[1] See the "Pre-Election Promises of Political Parties" Monitoring Results. Caucasus Institute, Yerevan, May 2012, URL: [http://www.c-i.am/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/brief-prefinal.pdf], (in Russian)

The Election Campaign

In this section of the report we will sum up developments that affected the political situation prior to the municipal election, familiarize the reader with the parties that ran in the election, and summarize the content of the media coverage which we monitored.

The Election Year

The period from May 2012 to May 2013 in Armenia is sometimes referred to as 'the Election Year.' During 12 months, Armenia held four rounds of elections: first the Parliamentary Election on 6 May 2012, followed by the Community Council Elections in September 2012, then Presidential Elections on 18 February 2013 and finally the Yerevan City Council Election on 5 May 2013.

Rather predictably, each subsequent election was strongly influenced by previous ones, and vice versa, the fact that another election was upcoming shortly had significant impact on the conduct of the previous one. E.g. the parliamentary elections in 2012 served as primaries for the presidential ones in 2013; the community elections in September 2012 enabled the ruling party to consolidate on its way to the presidential poll early next year, and so on. And while all four election rounds influenced one another in some way, this influence was arguably more directional and more substantial in the case of the two election rounds in 2013: the Presidential Election in February and Yerevan City Council Election in May. Given the different levels of the two – national and city, the crucial importance of the first, and the very short time span between the announcement of the results of the first and the beginning of the campaign for the second, one can state that the outcome and course of the presidential election strongly influenced and in many ways determined the election campaign of Yerevan City Council elections. One can also say that the May 2013 presidential election was the climax of the election year, and the city council elections were much less dramatic in terms of the intensity of the campaign and the political struggle.

In accordance with the Election Code, the election campaign of the parties running for the city council was launched six weeks before voting day, on 7 April 2013. By that time, the

aftermath of the presidential poll was not quite over. While the incumbent president was re-elected for another term, one of the opposition candidates, Raffi Hovannisyan from Heritage Party, won 37% of the votes, an extremely high achievement for the Armenian opposition in general and Raffi Hovhannisyan in particular. In accordance with the political tradition formed in Armenia over the last two decades, the opposition candidate refused to acknowledge his defeat, proclaimed himself the true winner and kept gathering his supporters in Freedom Square for weeks after the poll.

As a result, the last round of mass rallies in support to Raffi Hovannisyan organized by Heritage Party took place on 9 April, two days after the start of the election campaign for city council. These post-election rallies occupied the media sphere not only on April 9 but for a number of subsequent days as well.

Moreover, the same person, Raffi Hovhannisyan, and the Heritage Party that he leads, formed the "Barev Yerevan" coalition for the city council election, albeit led by a different candidate for the position of Mayor. "Barev Yerevan" became one of the key players in the election campaign for city council. Consequently, the media paid a lot of attention to Mr. Hovannisyan and his fellow party members throughout the campaign to city council. However, the majority of the stories run by media in connection with Raffi Hovhannisyan and other members of the Heritage Party discussed the developments of the presidential elections and not of the Yerevan city council ones. To prevent external bias in the coverage from causing a bias in the study, the research team decided to exclude theses stories from the database and only include ones which explicitly mentioned the city council election or the "Barev Yerevan" party alliance.

The Political Parties

The participants of the Yerevan Municipality Elections of 5 May 2013 included 6 parties and 1 alliance[2]. In this part of the report, we will describe the participants in accordance with the number of votes they won in the election, lowest first[3].

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[2] Central Electoral Commition of Armenia, 5 May 2013 Yerevan Council of Aldermen Elections, Registered Candidates, URL: [http://www.elections.am/council/election-25550/#t1] (in Armenian; available in English)

Arakelutyun (Mission) Party

Very little can be said about the Arakelutyun Party. The word 'arakelutyun' means "mission" in Armenian. The party was a new player in the political life of Armenia that appeared right before the city council elections with no prior political history to record. The leader of this party, Mesrop Arakelyan[4], is also rather unknown to the public.

Furthermore, the Arakelutyun Party does not have a website. Their official Facebook page states that they were founded on February 2, 2013, i.e. only three months before the city council elections[5]. According to their Facebook page, "Arakelutyun" Party is a liberal-democratic political party whose main principle is "not the citizen for the power, but the power for the citizen".[6] Mesrop Arakelyan came the first number on the party list of Arakelutyun.

Orinats Yerkir (Country of Legality) Party

The Orinats Yerkir (Country of Legality) Party is well known to the Armenian voter. The party was founded in 1997 and officially registered a year later. Orinats Yerkir lists itself as a liberal party, saying that its ideological base is the human being and his/her values, rights and freedoms. The main and final goal proclaimed by this party is the establishment of rule of law which, accordance to the party manifesto, is the sole guarantee for the development of the country and the insurance of its citizens' wellbeing[7].

Orinats Yerkir was at the time of elections the only party in coalition with the ruling Republican Party of Armenia. The coalition agreement was signed on 30 May 2012 and provided Orinats Yerkir with three ministerial portfolios[8]. This alliance has to some extent harmed the reputation of the party, causing voters to perceive it as an 'appendage' to the ruling

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[3] See the Final Protocol of the 5 May 2013 Yerevan Council of Aldermen Elections at Central Electoral Commition official website, 12 May 2013, URL: [http://res.elections.am/images/doc/05.05.13v.pdf], (in Armenian)
[4] Central Electoral Commition of Armenia, 5 May 2013 Yerevan Council of Aldermen Elections, Arakelutyun Party Candidates List, URL: [http://www.elections.am/council/], (in Armenian)
[5] Arakelutyun Facebook Official Page, URL: [https://www.facebook.com/arakelutyun/info], (in Armenian)
[6] ibid.
[7] Parliamentary Election Voter's Guide 2012, FCSD, p. 141
URL:[http://www.fcsd.am/PDFs/Guide%202012%20%20Armenian.pdf]
[8] "The Structure of Armenian Government will Change after the Presidential Elections of 2013", 21 June 2012, URL: [http://www.newsarmenia.ru/politics/20120621/42683072.html], (in Armenian)

party, especially as it had previously been seen as acting as an electoral spoiler during elections of various formats. The current image of the Orinats Yerkir has forced its candidate for Mayor, Armen Yeritsyan, to actually state that. "Orinats Yerkir is neither an appendage, nor a younger brother for the Republican Party"[9].

Dashnaktsutyun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation)

Armenian Revolutionary Federation is the oldest of all parties that took part in this election, and the oldest political party to be active in Armenian politics at the time of this election. It was founded back in 1890 and became a ruling party in 1918-1920, but was prohibited in the USSR and officially re-registered only after Armenia gained independence in 1991. Dashnaktsutyun is also the only socialist party running in this election[10] and in fact the only ideological party in Armenian politics. Although its ideology is vague, representing a mix of socialism with nationalism, it is still an ideology, or at least a value system, whereas all the other parties participating in all the elections of the 2012-2013 Election Year were various types of catch-all parties, or charismatic one-leader parties. The milestone of Dashnak ideology is "the establishment of independent, strong and united Armenia that has the capacity and development needed to tend to its citizens' needs."[11] Dashnaktsutyun is the most Diaspora-oriented party involved in the politics of Armenia and remains stronger in Diaspora than in Armenia.

In 2003-2009, Dashnaktsutyun was a member of the ruling coalition. However, after the Armenian-Turkish Rapprochement Agreement Dashnaktsutyun left the coalition and became an opposition party. Dashnaktsutyun prides itself on being the keeper of Armenian national interests and a symbol of Armenia's independence. The best result ever shown by Dashnaktsutyun in an election was 13% in 2007. Since then, the party has been steadily losing popularity; in 2012, it got less than 6% of the ballots cast via the proportional vote. In the 2013 municipal election in Yerevan, Armen Rustamyan led the party list of Dashnaktsutyun.

Armenian National Congress (ANC)

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[9] "Armen Yeritsyan Hinted in which Case the Coalition Will Fall Apart". Aravot newspaper, 29 April 2013. URL: [http://ru.aravot.am/2013/04/29/155422/], (in Russian)

[10] Dashnaktsutyun is also a member of the Socialist International,

[11] Parliamentary Election Voter's Guide 2012, FCSD, p. 102 URL: [http://www.fcsd.am/PDFs/Guide%202012%20%20Armenian.pdf], (in Armenian)

The Armenian National Congress started as an alliance formed by 18 parties in 2008 based on a wide opposition platform. The core of the ANC was the Pan-Armenian National Movement (PNM), the first ruling party in Armenia during the 1990-s which moved into opposition after losing its power by the end of the century. The Armenian National Congress is led by Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who was the first president of independent Armenia (1991-1998). The ANC claims to be a centrist constitutionalist party in contrast to several other parties in Armenia which claim to be conservative[12]. However, the ANC is essentially a protest platform, not an ideological group.

During the 5 years that have passed since its establishment, the Armenian National Congress has been a radical opponent of the ruling Republican Party of Armenia. Its main method of political activity has been street politics, i.e. protest rallies and marches. However, the Congress gradually lost its popularity and only won 7% in the parliamentary elections in 2012. In February 2013, the alliance was transformed into a political party with the same name. By that time, many of alliance member parties had left the alliance. The mayor candidate nominated by the ANC was Vahagn Khachatryan.

"Barev Yerevan" Alliance

"Barev Yerevan" alliance was formed in March, 2013 on the "Heritage" party basis after its leader, Raffi Hovhannisyan came second collecting 37% of votes on Presidential elections in 2013. "Heritage" claims to be "national by its roots, liberal in its economic principle, traditional in its values and an advocate of the democratic system of governance".[13] Party is also sensitive to environmental topics and took part in civil society protests in 2012.

"Heritage" was "created in 2002 and since 2007 is represented in the parliament, having its stable electorate consisting 6-8% of eligible voters. In late 2012, two of five members of "Heritage" faction in parliament left and now party has the smallest faction consisting only of 3 members. Party mayor candidate was Armen Martirosyan.

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[12] Naira Hayrumyan. Ter-Petrosyan: Congress suggests following Constitution instead of preaching "ethno-religious ideology". ArmeniaNow, Dec. 6, 2010. URL: [http://www.armenianow.com/news/politics/26300/levon_terpetrosian_armenia_opposition]
[13] Heritage official website, "About us". URL: [http://www.heritage.am/en/about]

Prosperous Armenia Party

Prosperous Armenia has second largest faction in Armenian parliament. Prosperous Armenia was founded in 2004. Party's leader is Gagik Tsarukyan, one of the most influential businessmen in Armenia, who transformed his economic power into political. Party claims to be center-right and conservative but rejects dogmatism[14] and, in fact, is very flexible in ideological issues.

Party's main electorate is located outside of Yerevan: during parliamentary elections in 2012 party got greatest support in rural areas and in Kotayk province of Armenia. Party collected 30% of votes by proportional system and has now 36 out of 131 seats in National parliament. Prosperous Armenia nominated Vardan Oskanyan as mayor candidate.

Republican Party of Armenia (RPA)

Republican Party of Armenia that is often called the ruling party was founded in 1990 and officially registered in 1991. From the ideological point of view it is a conservative party[15]. The President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan is simultaneously the head of the Republican Party.

The Republican Party of Armenia has participated in local and national elections in Armenia since 1995 and won a relative majority in the Parliament in 2003[16]. Ever since 2003, the RPA has been Armenia's ruling party. In 2012, the Republican Party won an absolute majority in the Parliament, whereas prior to the 2012 parliamentary elections the RPA always led a coalition of 3 or even 4 parties represented in parliament. The current mayor of Yerevan, Taron Margaryan, was nominated for this same position by the RPA.

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[14] Prosperous Armenia Party's official website, Party Statute and Program. URL: [http://www.bhk.am/index.php?al=statute]
[15] Parliamentary Election Voter's Guide 2012, FCSD, p. 122 URL: [http://www.fcsd.am/PDFs/Guide%202012%20%20Armenian.pdf], (in Armenian)
[16] Official Website of the Republican Party of Armenia, History of the Party, URL: [http://hhk.am/hy/history/], (in Armenian)

The Media

Our sample included five online media selected based on popularity in Armenia, i.e. the number of visits to their web pages made by Internet users from Armenia. Conclusions concerning the work of the five online media in our sample during the election campaign will be given in the main section of the report. Here we shall only summarize the general parameters shared by all five media in the sample.

1. The media coverage of the election campaign by all five monitored online media was very similar. During almost full four weeks of monitoring we were unable to find any significant specificity to mention. Not only did these online media cover and report the same events and developments of Armenia's domestic politics but they also seemed to share the viewpoint on the manner in which these events should be presented to the public.

For example, when discussing the chances of the Prosperous Armenia Party in the upcoming elections two different media basically used the same words.

> " **…** the state of Prosperous Armenia is alltogether hopeless **…** "
>
> **News.am** / *Money Is Going To Win These Elestions. The State of Parties Is Hopeless* / Author: journalist, Apr. 25

> " **…** the state of Prosperous Armenia is very grave in these elections **…** "
>
> **1in.am** / *Will the Prosperous Armenia be able to Leave the Circle of Failures?* / Author: journalist, Apr. 27

Interestingly enough, these two reports were published just a few days apart.

2. All five online media paid a lot of attention to criticizing the government and its work not only in the period prior to the Yerevan City Council Elections but long before. Here it is important to mention that the amount of criticism would vary from media to media (e.g. significantly more in case of *1in.am* and considerably less in comparison in case of *news.am*) but it was always present and noticeable. Here are a few quotes to illustrate the

point. The first one addresses the work of the Republican Party of Armenia in recent years while the second one relates directly to their election campaign. Overall, throughout the media in the sample, the Republican Party is criticized for abusing power and not caring about the wellbeing of the state or its citizens.

> " ...the Government has given up on Armenia as a political entity "
>
> **1in.am** / *The Moment of Honesty for Armenia* / Author: journalist, Apr. 14

> " ...In essence, the Republican Party of Armenia, having the unlimited resources and spending huge amounts of money on their «advocacy group» is still only plagiarizing "
>
> **1in.am** / *Plagiarism. Did Taron Margaryan Borrow the Idea of Nominative Letters from Nikol Pashinyan?/* Author: journalist, Apr. 24

One could argue that the presence of stories criticizing the government is connected with the fact that these 5 media are at the top of the ratings: in other words, criticism sells well, and opposition media is the most popular in Armenia. However, this study does not give us sufficient data to make such a statement. We can only state the fact that all media in our sample were rather critical of the government although this parameter was not used as the basis for the selection.

3. Finally, the third conclusion refers to the attitude of Armenian online media in our sample towards the oppositional forces. Namely, in contrast to the criticism towards the government, opposition parties receive much less attention in this sense. The criticism toward all representatives of the opposition was limited in comparison with the ruling Republican Party and Orinats Yerkir (Country of Legality) Party that is also part of the ruling coalition. Of course, not all the opposition parties were treated in the same manner. The "Barev Yerevan" party alliance was the target of a certain amount of criticism. However, it was mostly connected, as mentioned, with the party leader and his decisions after the Presidential Elections in February 2013.

Sometimes the criticism was just implied but not actually expressed.

> "...Aghvan Vardanyan did his best to criticize the Mayor of Yerevan Taron Margaryan during the press conference."
>
> **Tert.am** / *Aghvan Vardanyan Served 7 Years as a Minister of Social Wealfare in Taron's Father's Government* / Author: journalist, Apr. 17

However the overall tendency of the Armenian online media in our sample was to dedicate less time to criticizing the opposition parties.

The Political Parties

This section presents the monitoring results that concern the attitudes and values that were expressed by the political parties in the course of the campaign *the way they were reflected by online media.* In each specific case, we cannot rule out that a particular party actually said or did something which was not reflected in the online media coverage. Our source of information was restricted to the 15.000 stories in online media that we read during the campaign. The goal of the study is to assess whether the online media provided voters sufficient information and analysis to make an informed choice.

Attitudes

After looking through nearly 15.000 materials in five online media and the following analysis the research team has grouped the attitudes expressed by political parties, candidates, journalists etc. into several groups in accordance with their theme.

Elections: Political or Apolitical

During the monitoring we have seen two different attitudes towards the Yerevan City Council Elections. Some of the political forces running the campaign went out of their ways to prove to their opponents but most importantly to the voters a deeply political nature of the upcoming Elections.

> "...The authorities behave as if they do not realize the political significance of Yerevan Elections. They behave as if these are village council elections and as if it is public utility issues that we are solving here."
>
> **Tert.am** / *Rearrange to Rethink and Straighten the Movement*/ Author: politician, Dashnaktsutyun, Apr. 19

Here it is important to highlight that those are the oppositional parties that made these claims. It should be mentioned that during these election campaign we spotted four parties that behaved like oppositionist – "Barev Yerevan" party alliance, Armenian National Congress Party,

Armenian Revolution Federation Dashnaktsutyun and Prosperous Armenia Party. The latest also behaved like the potential leader of the opposition since unlike the other three did not voice much critic against other opposition parties.

All of the four parties mentioned above referred to Yerevan as undoubtedly the heart of Armenian politics. And since these Elections are the last in the upcoming 4 years this is their last chance of changing the political situation in the whole country in the nearby future. In their perception Yerevan is the beginning of shaping new Armenian political reality.

> "...Yerevan City Council Elections are a unique chance to change the situation in the country, the opposition's victory will solve 4 problems: 1. will reduce the capabilities of the regime 2. will enable the citizen to govern, 3. will reduce the corruption significantly. 4. system will be much more appealing to citizens, business, entrepreneurship. "
>
> **News.am** / *What Problems Will the Oppositions Victory Solve?* / Author: politician, ANC, Apr. 18

They mainly stress the fact that Yerevan is the biggest city in Armenia and nearly half of the Armenian population currently resides here, which means that its political significance is more than just a capital.

> "...On the 5 of May the destiny of Armenia's capital, of the majority of country's citizens is decided. Yerevan City Council Elections are political elections. "
>
> **News.am** / *Prosperous Armenia MP. Yerevan Municipality Elections are Political Elections* / Author: politician, Prosperous Armenia Party, Apr. 11

The victory in Yerevan will enable them to start the chain of changes whereas the victory of the ruling party will freeze any sort of development for at least four years to come. And this is why it is so crucial to them to win these elections.

> "...If we want to start serious changes which can lead to positive developments in your lives we need to begin with May 5."
>
> **Asekose.am** / *There a Lot of Losses in the City Budget Expenditures* / Author: candidate, Prosperous Armenia Party, Apr. 29

In contrast to this, the ruling Republican Party of Armenia publicly treated these elections as apolitical. They also made references to their importance but solely due to the fact that Yerevan is the capital of Armenia and its development is certainly one of the country's priorities. However they denied its political nature.

> "...Our program is not political, just like the elections themselves."
>
> **News.am** / *I Am Accountable to My Father and His Memory* / Author: candidate, RPA, Apr. 7

> "...On the one hand it is encouraging that political forces have united in their willingness to improve, build, lighten the city, but on the other hand this is a competitions and we have asked from the beginning not to politicize the elections."
>
> **News.am** / *If a Political Force Misses Even One Election It Is No longer a Political Force* / Author: politician, RPA, Apr. 26

Even the slogans of political parties serve to support this argument. The Republican Party chose a very simple slogan "A Better Yerevan" which implies that the changes are going to take place solely in the capital. Unlike them the opposition slogans like "Yerevan, Change Armenia" (Armenian Revolution Federation Dashnaktsutyun) or "Let's Start from Yerevan" (Prosperous Armenia Party) have clear political context and are a call for action on a country level.

The "Political Monopoly" of the Ruling Party

Another wildly discussed issue during this campaign was the political monopoly of the ruling Republican Party of Armenia. These accusations were also voiced by the four opposing

parties. They claimed that Republicans along with their ally Orinats Yerkir occupy all the positions and governmental mechanism thus leaving no place or possibility for alternative forces to interfere with their plans and programs.

> "...It is a catastrophe for the country when one party concentrates the whole power but has such a low rating as the Republican Party"
>
> **News.am** / *Opposition Must Try to Get the Maximum of the Votes* / Author: politician, Dashnaktsutyun, Apr. 16

This in turn has very negative influence on the country as a whole since the government can basically do as they will without taking into account possible consequences. This political crisis results in dreadful social conditions and unhappiness of the population of the country that leads to growing migration. In their opinion, the only thing this government is concerned with is their own wellbeing.

> "...During these years a system was formed that only serves to the absolute monopoly of the government. It seems like the whole country serves to one end only – to provide a carefree life for those who run the monopoly with all their families and relatives."
>
> **Tert.am** / *May 5 Elections Would Have Been simple Community Elections If Armenia Was a Normal Country* / Author: politician, "Barev Yerevan" alliance, May. 1

Here once again the parties stress the extreme importance of the Yerevan Elections since they can change not only the capital but the whole state for the better.

> "...Yerevan Municipality Elections are political elections where it will be decided whether the country will stay in the state of political monopoly, or there will be some serious reforms"
>
> **1in.am** / *I Do Not Believe That the New Government Will Begin Changes*/ Author: politician, Prosperous Armenia Party, Apr.11

Interestingly enough, the problems of political monopoly and migration that were voiced frequently during the campaign relate to the level of high politics and cannot be solved on the level of community. But the sole fact that they are being discussed in the framework of City Council Elections goes to show that the perception of these elections by opposition parties was extremely political.

Ideological Crisis

Another noteworthy feature of this campaign is the obvious ideological crisis of the political parties in general. In the entire course of the monitoring, we were unable to find a single report or story that would somehow refer to the ideological dimension of the campaign.

The research team has seen materials in online media in which party members or candidates talked about their programs or certain specific points of their programs. However, none of the parties presented their program from an ideological point of view – left or right, liberal or socialist.

Here are a few examples to illustrate the point.

> "…We are certain that you will give your vote to free kindergartens, well maintained yard, comfortable public transport, renovated schools, cultural centers…"
>
> **Slaq.am** / *Yerevan Is Our Home and It Must Be Known for Its Cleanness /* Author: candidate, RPA, Apr. 9

> "…We need to add green areas in Yerevan. Nowadays Yerevan leaves an impression of an aging city."
>
> **1in.am** / *You Can't Fight Oligarchs. Neither in Yerevan, nor in Armenia in General /* Candidate: candidate, Prosperous Armenia Party, Apr. 11

> "…We need to get rid of every ugliness that there is in Yerevan now and over time, make the city well-maintained, beautiful and green."
>
> **1in.am** / *Where Were You on May 9? Armen Martirosyan Addressed the Forces that Did Not Join Raffi Hovhannisyan in Arabkir /* Author: candidate, "Barev Yerevan" alliance, Apr. 18

As you can see, the presentation of party's program includes various points, mainly vague and general, but there is no reference to the ideology.

This statement becomes even more obvious when speaking of Armenia Revolution Federation Dashnaktsutyun. This party is known and perceived by public first and foremost as an ideological one, in contrast to all the other parties active in Armenian politics.

> "…Dashnaktsutyun is the only ideological force in Armenia."
>
> **News.am** / *The Only Ideological Force in Armenia is Dashnaktsutyun. Vardan Bostanjyan /* Author: public figure, Apr.26

However when speaking of the city issues that the proposed program could solve, they avoided mentioning anything regarding their ideological viewpoint. Instead they talked about reforms in the government and other city issues that await solution.

> "…The first step Dashnaktsutyun will take after coming to power in Yerevan is liberating the government from illiterates. And all the structures that stopped serving the citizens should anticipate serious reforms."
>
> **Tert.am** / *You Haven't Tried Us Yet. Vahan Hovannisyan Explained Why We Must Choose Dashnaktsutyun /* Author: politician, Dashnaktsutyun, Apr. 29

One could argue that the ideological dimension was excluded from the campaign because of the fact that these elections are not political in nature and we are simply electing a city council. However, as discussed above opposition parties and Dashnaktsutyun is one of them, where going out of their ways to prove otherwise.

Consequently, this tendency shows the belief of parties that the voter is no longer interested in ideology, but rather in the concrete benefits he or she will gain by supporting one candidate or another.

This does not necessarily mean that parties have given up on their ideologies. And it is possible that during the meetings with electorate party members or candidates did speak of ideology. However, even if such an event has taken place, it was probably in relatively small amounts and did not draw the attention of media and most certainly was not reflected in the election campaign coverage. This means that to the least the reader is no longer showing interest in ideological discourses.

The RPA Is to Blame

Another very strong and popular tendency during this campaign was a rough criticism of the ruling Republican Party. Even without voicing specific numbers is it obvious that during this campaign is was the Republican Party that received most of the opponents' attention. And mostly this attention was negative.

Opposing parties were probably trying to get voters attention and secure the votes for themselves by discriminating the Republican Party. On the whole they were blaming the RPA and its members for all the mishaps that have happened to Armenia during the last decade and more. Because the Republicans are the main policy makers in Armenia the opposing parties claimed that it is their policy that has led to the dreadful economic and social situation in the country. This is also closely interconnected with the discussion on political monopoly presented above.

> "**...**It is a very good tactics they have chosen. Create conditions bad enough so a person can think of nothing else but his daily piece of bread..."
>
> **1in.am** / *A Daily Bread Has Become The Only Issue of The Citizen* / Author: candidate, Prosperous Armenia Party , Apr. 25

This in turn leads migration; another issue, for causing which the Republican Party was frequently accused.

> "...Republican Party of Armenia has forgotten its ideology. It not only left its programs unfulfilled but seems like it's trying to free the country from Armenians. I can't withhold from reminding the RPA how disappointed people are with the government which has basically merged with RPA..."
>
> **Tert.am** / *Anahit Bashkhyan Asked to Vote for Real Opposition Forces to Speak* / Author: candidate, "Barev Yerevan" alliance, May 1

Interestingly enough although Orinats Yerkir (Country of Legality) party is also included in the governmental coalition it received a moderately small amount of criticism. At least in comparison with RPA. This fact states to illustrate the claim that Orinats Yerkir, as a separate party, is not being taken seriously by other forces and is mostly viewed as an appendage of the Republicans. Mostly the criticism referred to the populist statementss the party leader made.

> "...Let alone the fact that he can't recognize a normal manly handshake. He has demonstrated his true face"
>
> **News.am** / *Armen Martirosyan on Armen Yeritsyan. He Uses Vile Methods* / Author: candidate, "Barev Yerevan" alliance, Apr. 27

Orinats Yerkir reserved from voicing any fierce criticism against their partners by saying that although they respect RPA as a party there is still a lot more that they can offer to the voters.

> "...Taron Margaryan is a friend of mine but we offer more, we offer our program."
>
> **Slaq.am** / *I Do Not Think I Leave an Impression of Someone Distributing Jam* / Author: candidate, Orinats Yerkir Party, Apr. 8

Journalists did not strip the citizens from the opportunity to share their opinion on the Republican Party and its policy either. The main attitude of people towards RPA was also quite negative. Overall they regarded the RPA as a party that rarely ever keeps its promises. That is why people are profoundly disappointed and would rather leave the country in search for a better living.

> "…The people are disgruntled; the majority of people are tired from lies and deceit. You can't lie to people this much. Everybody is migrating."
>
> **1in.am** / *There Are No Men in Armenia /* Author: citizen, Apr. 9

This and many other quotes to be found in our database show how much attention did media pay to covering as well as voicing the criticism addressed to the ruling Republican Party of Armenia.

The RPA itself certainly does not agree with this sort of accusations claiming that they have fulfilled the majority of their promises and will continue working and realizing the goals they have set.

> "…We stand before our people with an open heart. Our team has worked all these years in the Yerevan Municipality as a Mayor, as a member of a City Council. We are open hearted and we can say that during these years much has been done, the image of the city has changes significantly and each of our Mayors has had a positive influence."
>
> **News.am** / *Heghine Naghdalyan Reminded Aghvan Vardanyan of His Work as a Minister under the RPA Quota /* Author: politician, RPA, Apr. 22

The Opposition

We have already spoken about opposition and its attitude towards the RPA. In this section of the report we would also like to present the peculiarities of the opposition parties and the relations between them.

The main question right before and during the period of the campaign was whether the opposition will unite. Many versions of possible coalitions were voiced. But they all revolved around two parties – Prosperous Armenia and "Barev Yerevan" party alliance.

Just weeks before the start of the campaign, the leader of "Barev Yerevan" Raffi Hovhannisian won almost 37%[17] in presidential elections, which put him in the spotlight during the first few days of the municipal election campaign. "Barev Yerevan" was viewed by many as a party that could potentially unite and lead the opposition during these elections. Indeed, the party started its campaign on a high note; however, it soon petered out. The media named various reasons for this: members of "Barev Yerevan" mostly claimed they were "abandoned" by other parties in their struggle.

> "...Why didn't any of you support us, don't you struggle against authorities? If you struggle against authorities for changes where were you on 18 February, where were you on 9 April? You were not here, not with us, not with the people...."
>
> **1in.am** / *Where Were You on May 9? Armen Martirosyan Addressed the Forces that Did Not Join Raffi Hovhannisyan in Arabkir /* Author: candidate, "Barev Yerevan" alliance, Apr. 18

The representatives of other opposition parties had their own reasons not to join "Barev Yerevan" movement. According to them the events of 9 April clearly showed Raffi Hovhannisyan's inability to lead the opposition since his decisions at a time lacked logic and consistency.

> "...Raffi has become a comedy, it is impossible to make him a leader of opposition, he can't carry the wave, it's beyond him ..."
>
> **1in.am** / *Raffi Has Turned into a Comedy /* Author: politician, ANC, Apr. 13

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[17] Central Election Committee of Armenia / 2013 Presidential Elections Results
URL: [http://www.elections.am/presidential/election-25547/]

Interestingly enough "Barev Yerevan" was the only oppositional force to receive Prosperous Armenia's critic. This is noteworthy since as we already spoke of the fact that the general strategy of Prosperous Armenia was not to criticize possible allies. In regard to "Barev Yerevan" the members of Prosperous Armenia stated that the political line that Raffi Hovhannisyan was untrustworthy.

> **"...**It's a pity that he turned out to be such an unserious man who allows himself to voice unfounded statements **..."**
>
> **News.am** / *Prosperous Armenia Considers Its Campaign Successful /* Author: politician, Prosperous Armenia Party, May 1

The public and journalists also stated their disappointment with Raffi Hovhannisan's actions that ruined the possibility of consolidating the society after gaining so many votes less than a month before.

> **"...**His actions can be described by the slogan "to insanity and beyond" **..."**
>
> **Asekose.am** / *Raffi Hovhannisyan's Actions Can Be Described by the Slogan "to Insanity and Beyond" /* Author: an expert, Apr. 10

But probably what finally ruined the chances of "Barev Yerevan" to become the leader of the opposition was the quarrel with Armenian Revolution Federation Dashnakcutyun. Originally this party was supportive of Raffi Hovhannisyan's initiative, however later on the two of them parted ways.

Mainly the Dahsnak politicians blamed Raffi Hovhannisyan for putting his personal ego above the interest of many and not leading the movement personally (as we know the Mayor Candidate of "Barev Yerevan" was Armen Martirosyan[18]), because he thought that after "winning" Presidential Elections it would be a step back to even consider becoming a Mayor.

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[18] Central Electoral Commition of Armenia, 5 May 2013 Yerevan Council of Aldermen Elections, "Barev Yerevan" Party Alliance Candidates List, URL: [http://www.elections.am/council/], (in Armenian)

> "…By not willing to lead this process personally the leader of "Heritage" ruined it …"
>
> **Slaq.am** / *What Dashnaktsutyun Offers to the Opposition/* Author: politician, Dashnaktsutyun, Apr. 12

The second candidate for opposition leadership, Prosperous Armenia, was also in a quite delicate situation. During the Parliamentary Elections 2012 Prosperous Armenia recorded its first big political achievement by gaining nearly half a million votes[19]. However the leader of the party Gagik Tsarukyan decided not to participate in the Presidential Elections of 2013. And although this harmed the reputation of the party Prosperous Armenia was still considered one of the serious opponents at the City Council Elections.

During the campaign, Prosperous Armenia behaved like a potential leader of the opposition. Firstly, as described above, during the whole period of the campaign the members of the party along with the candidate Vardan Oskanyan were harshly criticizing the authorities, blaming them for causing monopoly, bad economic and social situation as well as migration. They did their best to separate themselves from the authorities despite their former joint history.

> "…Prosperous Armenia is not part of the ruling coalition. This says it all …"
>
> **News.am** / *Prosperous Armenia Is Not Part of The Ruling Coalition. This Says It All. Naira Zohrabyan /* Author: politician, Prosperous Armenia Party, Apr. 22

Not all opposition parties had the same attitude towards these statements and the general policy line of Prosperous Armenia. On the one hand Armenian National Congress along with Dashnaktsutyun has been very supportive of Prosperous Armenia[20]. Moreover, the biggest speculations on a possible union concerned the ANC and Prosperous Armenia. Although the official coalition was not formed the representatives of the parties claimed on different occasion

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[19] See the Final Protocol of the 6 May 2012 Parliamentary Elections Results at Central Electoral Commition official website, 13 May 2013, URL: [http://res.elections.am/images/doc/060512v.pdf], (in Armenian)
[20] "The Step Is Taken. ANC, Dashnaktsutyun and Prosperous Armenia are at the Assembly", 13 April 2013, URL: [http://www.panorama.am/am/popular/2013/04/13/congress/], (in Armenian)

that they are prepared to work together in the City Council[21]. However ANC did not get enough votes[22].

> **"...** We are grateful of Gagik Tsarukyan for leading and independent policy for two years now **...**"
>
> **Tert.am** / *Levon Ter-Petrosyan Compared Gagik Tsarukyan with Sukiasyan /*
> Author: politician, ANC, Apr. 13

In contrast to them "Barev Yerevan" was not excited by the possibility of leaving the spot of opposition leaders to Prosperous Armenia. The party members claimed that Prosperous Armenia is a quasi-opposition at best since not so long ago they have been a part of the ruling coalition, worked with Republican Party and Orinats Yerkir, had ministerial positions, etc.

> **"...** Beware and do not forget what Prosperous Armenia really is. It is just a Siamese twin of the ruling Republican Party **...**"
>
> **News.am** / *"Heritage" Party. People in Yerevan Will Take Power into Their Own Hands /* Author: politician, "Barev Yerevan" alliance, Apr. 17

As mentioned in the previous section of the report all opposition parties have criticized the ruling Republicans during this campaign. And of course they did receive some criticism on their behalf as well. Along with addressing each of the parties separately, the RPA members and representatives said that the opposition in general was disorganized, and their main weakness lay in their inability to unite. RPA speakers also stressed that the entire opposition campaign was basically an attempt to win votes by blackening the Republican Party and its work in recent years.

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[21] "Prosperous Armenia Is Negotiating with Dashnaktsutyun and ANC", 26 April 2013, URL: [http://hayeli.am/բիկ-ն-բանակցում-է-հյդ-ի-ն-հակ-ի-հետ/], (in Armenian)
[22] See the Final Protocol of the 5 May 2013 Yerevan Council of Aldermen Elections at Central Electoral Commition official website, 12 May 2013, URL: [http://res.elections.am/images/doc/05.05.13v.pdf], (in Armenian)

> **"...**Oppositional forces fight each other in an attempt to secure votes for themselves at the Yerevan City Council Elections and they don't differentiate the methods they use much **...**"
>
> **News.am** / *The Main Issue of the Opposition Is Its Disunion* / Author: politician, RPA, Apr. 19

> **"...**Some political forces have shown their true faces. They tried true maneuver, to present themselves as the most oppositional or as alternative choice, criticized the authorities, tried to improve their much suffered image in the eyes of voters, to curse, backbite other parties and praise the things they have not even done **...**"
>
> **Asekose.am** / *Karen Avagyan. Prosperous Armenia and Armenian National Congress Make Unfounded Promises* / Author: politician, RPA, Apr. 29

The public in general also seemed not to put much faith in the opposition. The campaign was named predictable, the methods used insufficient, the inability to unite the voters disastrous.

> **"...**As expected political forces built their Campaign around rough criticism of the Republican Party and current Mayor **...**"
>
> **Asekose.am** / *Struggle Is Not for The Mayor Position. Policy Expert* / Author: expert Apr. 16

Values

In this section of the report, we will present the information on the values that the parties described as important.

Proportional Development

"Proportional Development" concept was probably the most popular at these Elections. Almost all parties spoke about this problem in one way or another. Namely they stated that the

notion of Yerevan as a beautiful city and capital should not and is not limited tothe city center and stressed the importance of developing all the districts simultaneously. These were the main but quite general promises they made.

> " ...The balanced and steady development of the city is one of our main issues, but it should be done not from the center to the suburbs, rather from the suburbs to the center ... "
>
> **1in.am** / *Current Problems Are the Results of Years of Indifference on Authorities Behalf. Oskanyan /* Author: candidate, Prosperous Armenia Party, Apr. 15

The problem with the concept of "Proportional Development" is that it is very vague. The value itself is appealing enough, however there might be different ways of its interpretation and the insurance of this sort of development. And it is essential for the voter to know for which version of Proportional Development he is voting. This is important since it is hard to make a thought through choice without knowing the details. Unfortunately only two parties gave specification to what Proportional Development is in their perception.

In the first case it was proposed to use a widespread model of so to speak dividing the city into two parts. The first one, the center, serves as a business oriented area, while the other districts provide the inhabitants with good living conditions.

> " ...Yerevan Small Center must be a business center; the area around it must in turn serve for the living purposes ... "
>
> **News.am** / *Yerevan Center Must Be a Business Center. Other Districts Must Be Residing Area /* Author: candidate, RPA, Apr. 17

Another candidate spoke about the importance of diversifying the administrative structures in respect to their location. According to him moving them away from the city center might create job opportunities for the inhabitants of other districts.

> **"...**Just like other districts Shengavit must also have Ministries and Departments so that people have a place to work**...**"
>
> **News.am** / *In Shengavit Armen Yeritsyan Was Presented as The Future Mayor* / Author: candidate, Orinats Yerkir Party, Apr. 13

Knowing these few but significant details helps the voter in making a choice. Some might agree with the fact that the center of the city must serve to the business purposes and it is much more convenient to live in the suburbs. Others might respectfully disagree. In the second case a part of the population might think that the main administration of the country should be located in one part of the city rather than scattered around different districts, etc.

Improving the Appearance of Yerevan

The image and outwardly appearance of Yerevan was very widely discussed during this campaign. However, the discussions as reflected in the online media were for the most part vague and unspecific; all parties agreed on a number of pressing issues concerning the appearance of Yerevan, but very few practical solutions or specific proposals were put forward. Discussions around the appearance of Yerevan centered on two issues, which are, unsurprisingly, the two issues relevant to urban development of Yerevan that have been debated by civil society in Armenia in the last few years.

The first of these was the preservation of the ***architectural heritage***, including the pre-Soviet and the Soviet buildings and architectural complexes of Yerevan. All parties running for Municipal Council were unanimous in that the construction of new buildings in the city must be accompanied by efforts to preserve and restore the historical parts of Yerevan, and that steps must be made to prevent the new and old buildings from clashing with each other, or the new buildings to overshadow or distort the appearance of old ones. This has become a point everyone agrees on, but very few specific examples were named or discussed. Most of the time, the actors made general statements like this one:

> "...The construction of the new capital without preservation of the old one is impossible."
>
> **News.am** / *Taron Margarya. We Will Not Build New Yerevan without Preserving the Old One/* Author: candidate, RPA, Apr. 11

The issue that was widely discussed in the context of how Yerevan looks, and on which all the parties agreed, concerned the ***green areas*** of the capital, i.e. its parks, boulevards and any other places where trees grow. While pointing out the vital significance of green areas for the capital and promising to take steps to increase the areas of parks, the parties were not very specific on what exactly they planned to do in this direction, which parks they would increase and how. Here are a few illustrative examples of the discourse on this topic.

> "...It is always possible to find land for green area as long as one really wants to."
>
> **News.am** / *You Can't Save the Situation in Yerevan by Planting a Few Trees. Massive Forest Planting Must Be Organized/* Author: candidate, ANC, Apr. 16

> "...Yerevan is our mutual home. We must take good care of it. Green areas are an inseparable part of the city."
>
> **News.am** / *Yerevan Will Become a Green City Taron Margaryan /* Author: candidate, RPA, Apr. 20

Of all the parties, Arakelutyun was the one that spoke of the appearance of Yerevan in the most general terms (to the extent this was reflected in the online media). The essence of their proposal is to make Yerevan into a European capital, without specifying what this means and exactly which capitals Yerevan would be modeled on.

> " ...“Arakelutyun” wants to turn Yerevan into a city with European standards which will first of all be beautiful and safe for its inhabitants. "
>
> **News.am** / *Arakelutyun Will Strengthen Its Positions. Mesrop Arakelyan /* Author: candidate, Arakelutyun Party, Apr. 19

Overall the discussion on the appearance of Yerevan city was very vague and general. The majority of parties was concerned with the way Yerevan looks, and stated the importance of making it into a very presentable city. Along with the image they also stressed the importance of its convenience for the citizens who leave here. Here is where the discussion on green areas appeared the most.

Improving Infrastructure

Parties admitted of Yerevan having many issues to solve. The infrastructure according to the majority of them is one of the more pressing ones. Here we have different kind of promises ranging from very general to very specific ones.

It is noteworthy that when it came to infrastructure it was the newcomers, Arakelutyun “Mission” Party, that proved to be one of the most active ones. They brought forward different reform proposals. Namely they vouched for the city taxi network to be controlled by the Yerevan Municipality directly and the Subway fee to decrease to 50 drams as it was before.

> " ...this will allow us to make the Subway fee 50 drams again and establish free transportation regime for student, schoolchildren and retired citizens. "
>
> **News.am** / *Smart Management of the Budget Will Save 9 mln Drams /* Author: candidate, Arakelutyun Party, Apr. 13

In turn Republican Party of Armenia also stated the necessity of having a developed infrastructure in the capital, namely to replace minibuses with buses and building a new subway station.

> "...Along with replacing mini buses on the line with the buses there are some serious discussions about building a new Subway station."
>
> **Tert.am** / *Yerevan City Council Elections Are Not Political But City Elections /* Author: politician, RPA, Apr. 16

Being From Yerevan

The monitoring showed that political parties used various types of political technologies in their campaigns. Those technologies varied from more simple ones, such as handing out of t-shirts and hats with party logos and slogans, to more sophisticated and also more questionable ones, like the one used by Orinats Yerkir Party. Namely, this party started its campaign by nominating the candidacy of Armen Yeritsyan, current Minister of Emergency Situations[23], and stressing the fact that their candidate was the best simply because he had been born and raised in Yerevan. This, according to the party, gave him advantage over other candidates, since he was 'more aware of the city's issues'.

> "...We have nominated a candidate from Yerevan which is very important because he is familiar with all the spoken and unspoken rules."
>
> **1in.am** / *Orinats Yerkir Has Nominated a Candidate of Yerevan Origin so That He Is Familiar with Spoken and Unspoken Rules /* Author: politician, Orinats Yerkir Party, Apr.7

This rhetoric was later developed by the candidate himself. During the next few weeks of the monitoring, this campaign tool evolved into a form of political populism. To put it simply, Mr. Yeritsyan was trying to exploit the negative attitude of the 'native Yerevantsi' population towards those Armenians who came to Yerevan from other provinces of Armenia.

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[23] Government of the Republic of Armenia, Ministry of Emergency Situations, URL: [http://www.gov.am/en/structure/133/], (in English)

> " ... You know what, folks. If you have come to Yerevan, become the inhabitant of Yerevan, behave accordingly. Enough impudent behavior, enough comments on our girls. "
>
> **News.am** / *Armen Yeritsyan. It's Time to Pull the cheeky Guy's Ears* / Author: candidate, Orinats Yerkir Party, Apr.23

The candidate of Orinats Yerkir was implying that people from Yerevan lost the favorable positions they used to have and it is time to restore them.

> " ... It is no longer so fashionable to be from Yerevan but we need to restore the traditions, to say that we are from Yerevan and we are proud. "
>
> **News.am** / *Today It Is Fashionable to Be from Karabakh, Aparan, Qyavar, but Not from Yerevan. Yerevan Mayor Candidate* / Author: candidate, Orinats Yerkir Party, Apr.26

One can hypothesize that this populist rhetoric was aimed at getting the votes of the "native" Yerevan population by referring to the possible xenophobic feelings which exist to some extent in Yerevan, as in any capital or large city to which people from all over the country come to work and study.

Although he did get certain support from the voters his demagogy was also criticized by the public. He was accused of intolerant and undignified behavior by members of the public and other parties.

> " ... When talking to the public, Armen Yeritsyan often behaves as "Tough Tony". He confuses the notion of understandable speech with slang. "
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> **News.am** / *Orinats Yerkir Candidate Poses as "Tough Tony"* / Author: journalist, Apr.26

Fair Elections

The political values voiced during this campaign chiefly related to the elections themselves, not to politics on city or country level. Since the most discussed issues were electoral fraud, bribery and pressure on voters, all participating actors mentioned the importance of conducting fair elections.

> "...The main issue for us is the legitimacy of the elections."
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> **News.am** / *Armenian Authorities Must Realize the Importance of Holding Legitimized Elections /* Author: politician, Dashnaktsutyun, Apr. 16

In their opinion, this was essential since the reason for peoples negative attitude towards authorities is often caused by the disbelief that they were elected fairly. According to various actors, once the voters are sure that their voices were heard and counted accordingly and fairly, the public attitude towards government and its actions will improve.

The Media

In this section of the report, we will summarize the information on the media coverage of the election that we obtained in the process of monitoring. Arguably, the strengths and weaknesses of the coverage are not endemic to this campaign; rather, they stem from the general achievements and problems typical for the Armenian media at the current stage of their development. For the purposes of this report, we focused on those issues which (1) were manifest in the samples obtained by monitoring, (2) pertain to the coverage of the election campaign and affect the voters' access to information necessary for making an informed choice.

Although it was not the purpose of this study to measure the extent to which the coverage was fair and balanced, especially since this is a qualitative study, so we do not have the tools to measure bias or balance. We can nevertheless state, based on the contents of our database, that the ***media coverage of the events and activities of the campaign was wide, detailed and concerned all the actors involved in the election***. Even tiny events organized by the apparent outsider, Arakelutyun, such as meetings with a few dozen voters, were covered by all or most media in the sample. Overall, most campaign events of all the parties were covered by all five media in our sample; except for the generally higher amount of criticism towards the ruling party than the opposition parties, there was no visible bias in the coverage by any of the media.

However, attention to events cannot ensure proper coverage of a campaign. Reporting every event is not sufficient and, arguably, not always necessary, or at least, of secondary importance compared with the reflecting content of the campaign. Meanwhile, a key observation made by all analysts who took part in the study was the overall ***superficial character of the coverage of the content*** of the campaign, i.e. the provisions of the party programs, the statements and promises made by the contestants with regard to specific policy areas. Whereas the media in our sample were very meticulous about following every event in the campaigns of all the political parties, their interest in the content of the campaign was not apparent. Media stories describe in great detail the press-conferences given by the leaders and members of the parties participating in the election; the meetings with voters, the marches, rallies, concerts and other campaign events.

Event-driven coverage was apparent throughout the five media in our sample. This shortcoming cannot be fully attributed to the media: the politicians themselves were reportedly most of the time reluctant to participate in debates, and preferred to talk alone or one-on-one with a journalist. When talking, they preferred to speak about the strength of their party, the integrity of its members, and its high chances of winning the election, while also stressing the weaknesses and low moral character of their competitors. The speakers on behalf of the political parties made very little focus on content, i.e. concrete issues and policies in various spheres such as urban planning, waste management, transportation, leisure, crime, employment, environmental health hazards etc.

However, while the politicians seldom had anything profound to say, the journalists were not dedicated to obtaining content either. In the media we monitored, the interviewers and reporters did not ask the politicians difficult questions. They did not doubt, question or analyze the statements the politicians made, or compare them to other statements previously made by the same or other politicians. They were rather passive, or at least not proactive, in relaying statements made at press-conferences or during interviews, without going in-depth. As a result, the overall coverage of the campaign was not in-depth. As can be seen from the sections above, the politicians easily got away with vague slogans such as 'proportional development' and 'improving infrastructure' without specifying what would be done and at what cost.

Given what we know about the environment in which the Armenian journalists and media outlets operate, there are at least several possible reasons for the insufficiency of in-depth coverage.

The first is that in most media, with the exception of a few investigative or civic-oriented ones (which were not in the sample due to comparatively low readerships), *reporters get paid per news story*, which means that they need to produce a certain number of stories a day in order to make an income. This does not allow them enough time or give them incentive to produce in-depth reporting.

The second is that the Armenian *society is not aware* of the importance of campaign content. The readers and viewers of the media do not demand or expect in-depth reporting that would reveal the policy strategies of the stakeholders in elections.

The third is that, given the history of self-censorship, pressure on the media and biased coverage of elections, the media of Armenia are under domestic and international scrutiny for bias during elections. Their coverage is monitored using quantitative methods, to see if all players get the same airtime, newspaper area etc., and if the coverage is biased in favor of one or some of the players. This leads, ironically, to a situation when a reporter thinks twice about asking a politician difficult questions or pointing out inconsistency in their statements, because in monitoring results this could be counted as 'negative coverage' and create problems for the news medium, which may be *accused of unbalanced or biased reporting.* This problem has to do with the quantitative methodology of media monitoring (which is gradually improved over time, as analysts are aware of this issue) but also with the general climate in the Armenian news media, i.e. the absence of a tradition for free speech, open criticism and consistent, open editorial policies.

And, last but not least, in-depth reporting by its very nature may involve risks, since it is invariably – in mature democracies as well as developing countries - about publishing what someone does not want to be published. Taking risks is something Armenian journalists from mainstream media do not usually do; partly because of Armenia's diminishing albeit non-zero record for violence against journalists, partly because of low demand from society (the few media that do investigative reporting do not top the ratings), and partly because of low responsibility and commitment of an average Armenian journalist, resulting from the absence of a tradition.

Two more aspects of the media coverage of the municipal election campaign in Yerevan can be identified based on monitoring results: one positive and one constituting a cause for concern.

The first, positive one, was that media in our sample were overall *critical of unethical populist campaigning*, specifically the type done by Orinats Yerkir. Journalists from various media pointed out the base nature of inciting hatred towards 'non-Yerevanians' and criticized the actors who made statements in this spirit. This rather unanimous attitude reflects the growing responsibility of the media and the presence of a moral standard in their work.

The second, worrying one was that while all media at some point mentioned possible bribing of voters as the key concern with regard for the integrity of the electoral process, and made general statements to the effect that the votes would be 'bought up' by some of the stakeholders, there was – at least in our sample – ***no concrete reporting on concrete cases of bribes*** being offered or given. This specific problem has to do with the general absence of in-depth reporting and general unwillingness to take risks; it also has to do with the voters being afraid of pressure from political stakeholders, and therefore not wanting to talk to journalists about being bribed.

It has been our experience from previous studies that when speaking of elections in Armenia, the media, experts and citizens debate extensively on the issue of corruption and pressure on voters that greatly influence the outcome of every election. When starting the monitoring, the research team anticipated to observe a considerable amount of such reports in the media. As expected, there were quite a few stories on the subject. However, the information included in those stories lacked sources or references. At best, the journalists would elaborate on the possibility of corruption and voice certain numbers or percentages. However, no specific information on the origin of those numbers was provided. This clearly means that when covering the election campaign, the journalists did not perform any sort of in-depth journalist work and did not make an attempt to conduct a valuable investigation on these pressing issues.

In the citation below, the representative of the RPA is accused of using his personal connections and party resources in order to assure the victory of his party in the elections.

> "…Durign the «door-to-door» initiative by Samvel Aleksanyan the «watchers» of the area were asigned to «curate» the «watchers» of the yards, and in turn the «watchers» of the yards were assigned to «curate» the «watchers» of the buildings. They are given the number of votes they must provide and told to make sure the party gets them"
>
> **Slaq.am** / Tough Struggle between the «Curator» of the Republican Party and the Prosperous Armenia Team / Author: journalist, Apr. 26

However, where this information is acquired from, what district of Yerevan is the reporter talking about, and many other questions remain unanswered.

Recommendations

The recommendations of this report are addressed to two types of players: political parties and news media. The recommendations are listed below in the relevant sections. Overall, they are based on the assumption that the media are, ultimately, where the voters get most of their information about the actors participating in the election. Therefore, the quality of the media coverage is an essential component of the quality of the campaign in general, because adequate representation of the campaign in the media is a key prerequisite for the voters' informed choices. To ensure a free flow of information about the players in an election and to achieve progress in conscious, socially responsible voting, the preconditions must be created for the following:

- first, ideologically sound and consistent, technically well organized, responsible and ethical **campaigning by the parties**,
- second, professional, unbiased and in-depth **media coverage** of the election campaign,
- third, the ability **of the parties and the media to cooperate** with each other for the sake of fulfilling their professional duties and ensuring voters' access to information. This point is not as self-obvious as it may seem, because it requires a professional standard on the part of both types of stakeholders.

While an adequate legal and administrative environment is necessary for the conduct of a democratic election campaign and election, it is also the responsibility of all stakeholders to be aware of their duties and to fulfill them properly. In a country like Armenia, where laws remain flawed, practices often fall short of the legal standards, and administrative resources are used to ensure the victory of the incumbent and not the integrity of the electoral process, politicians and journalists tend to write off their own inefficiency, immorality or lack of effort, attributing them to the poor policy environment. However, even a study limited in time and scope such as this one shows that some actors do better than others, and that the environment is no excuse for inciting hatred or failing to do one's homework. The recommendations of this study rely on the assumptions described above and on the data obtained by means of monitoring and stored in our database.

Recommendations to the Political Parties

Based on the monitoring of this campaign, we can make the following recommendations concerning the operation of Armenia's political parties during election campaigns but also in the intervals between elections.

1. Elaborate ideologies, or at least road maps for politics. In the absence of ideologies, politics is heavily personality-oriented and political parties are ephemeral. Having a solid ideological foundation will enable political parties to become sustainable, have a consistent electorate and a recognizable public image.

2. Be open to debates with various stakeholders, including your opponents. Based on a sound ideology, your policy provisions will be argument-proof. Demonstrate openness and readiness to discuss your policies.

3. Make sure your spokespersons have knowledge of the subject matter they are talking about and have debate skills. Hire professionals.

4. Be specific in your promises to the public. Make promises and plans that lend themselves to monitoring and assessment. Speak in concrete terms, engage people in tangible initiatives.

5. Define your moral standard and stick to it. Do not appeal to base instincts such as chauvinism or regionalism. Criticize others who do this, so as to keep this standard high. Discourage discrimination and intolerance.

Recommendations to the Media

Just as with political parties, our recommendations concern the work of Armenian media during election campaigns but not only. The media coverage of political activity, electoral processes, law-making and the implementation of laws affects the politics of Armenia throughout the year. In and out of elections, the role of the media remains crucial is areas such as improving awareness and responsibility of voters, and conducting debates on policy issues and process.

1. Follow the example of the BBC and other major media by elaborating an editorial policy of covering each particular election. Decide which issues are at stake in this election, and make sure you cover them by getting all contestants to answer questions about them.

2. Focus on content of campaigning as well as its events. Read the party platforms. Analyze and compare the statements made by politicians. Get the voters used to thinking about the content of campaigns and the promises made by politicians.

3. Question what politicians say; don't take them for granted. Ask them where they will get the funds to needed to fulfill their promises, who will be in charge of ambitious projects, and how the public can monitor their spending of public funds.

4. Try to get stakeholders to debate issues. Organize debates in any possible formats, one-on-one, with journalists or experts, etc.

5. Take the focus off the gossip and minor events of the campaign, especially where these concern outsiders of the campaign involved in scandals. Get voters used to thinking about politics in terms of policies and technologies not individuals and skirmishes.

6. Go in-depth whenever funds and time allow. Set aside funds for at least some investigative reporting during an election. Cooperate with other media to organize a joint investigation of an important issue, such as organized voting or pressure on voters.

7. Point out unethical behavior and populism. Help voters see when they are being manipulated.