

## THE DIFFICULT PATH OF PARLIAMENTARISM IN ARMENIA'S DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION: HOW DOES THE SEPARATION OF POWERS AFFECT POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY IN AN UNCONSOLIDATED SOCIETY?

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the systems of separation of powers in modern conditions using the example of Armenia, which is of considerable scientific interest and has practical significance for the state-building of both Armenia itself and other states that emerged in the post-Soviet space. This significance is determined, first of all, by the processes that accompany the formation of independent statehood in Armenia. The ability of the Armenian statehood to respond to the challenges of the time and form a state mechanism that will ensure the development of society on democratic principles largely depends on the success of the formation of the system of power relations. The issue of the unity of state power and the separation of powers is a multifaceted problem that includes economic, social, political and ideological relations, and as such has always been and remains the subject of political study.

**Keywords:** *Armenian statehood, democratic transition, parliamentarism, unconsolidated society, political responsibility.*

### Introduction

The relevance of this research is conditioned by the need to reinterpret the role of Armenian parliamentarism in the field of building an independent statehood and develop proposals for the separation and balancing of public authorities. From the study of the experience of building Armenian parliamentarism, it can be concluded that the gaps and shortcomings in the system of public authority, among other causes of conflict instability and war, are also due to the imperfect application of the principle of separation and balancing of authorities (Aleksanyan and Aleksanyan 2021). In particular, the framework of political responsibility and parliamentary parties in the executive and legislative branches of government is not clarified, the balance of different branches of government and their functional autonomy and independence are

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not ensured, etc. In my opinion, the above confirms the need for democratic and constitutional reforms underway in our country, as well as implies the elimination of the shortcomings identified in the parliamentary form of government and increasing the efficiency of the operation of public authority (Ihalainen, Ilie, and Palonen 2018; Wessel 2021).

Thus, it can be stated that for the effective implementation of the functions of the National Assembly, a stable majority and the protection of the rights of the parliamentary minority should become the subject of comparative political and legal research. However, it is important to take into account that for the establishment of parliamentary culture, as well as for the appointment to certain higher positions or the formation of constitutional bodies, the definition of a qualified majority of votes is not an end in itself, but a means of protecting the rights of the parliamentary minority (Szentgáli-Tóth 2025). Therefore, the presence of such a parliamentary majority can be considered more acceptable, which, on the one hand, enables the National Assembly to effectively implement its functions, and on the other hand, forces the stable parliamentary majority to also take into account the positions of the opposition.

### **Parliamentary strategic reforms as a factor of democratic statehood**

A prerequisite for the success of parliamentary strategic reforms in Armenia is the mechanisms of separation and balancing of public powers in the field of statehood construction. An important aspect of this is the definition of the forms of development of the presidential institution, Armenian parliamentarism, the executive branch system and the judicial system. Such a concept should not only contribute to the establishment of the prerequisites for the establishment of a democratic, social and legal state proclaimed by the 1995 Constitution of the RA, but also become an effective guide on the path to building a unified and effective mechanism of public power.

The Constitution of Armenia of 1995 and its subsequent amendments in 2005 and 2015 created constitutional and legal conditions for the formation of a democratic, social and legal state. The study of the concept of separation of powers in modern constitutional and political practice of Armenia creates a special opportunity to analyze the problems of the formation of independent states in the post-Soviet space, the conditions for the formation of their political regimes and forms of government. The article examines such little-studied issues and phenomena of the post-Soviet reality as the mechanism for implementing state power in newly independent states, determining the principles of construction and functioning of the system of state authorities (Baykov and Bolgova 2023). The paper examines the issues of the formation of a model of interaction between authorities in the context of the formation of civil society and the establishment of democratic principles in the functioning of the state apparatus. Researchers of constitutional law are called upon to analyze and comprehend the current stage of development of state power in Armenia, to study the model of separation of powers that was formed in difficult foreign policy and economic conditions. The paper analyzes the principles of construction and functioning of the system of state authorities in Armenia. This problem has not only theoretical and legal and constitutional and legal significance, but also an obvious practical aspect, since the democratic development of the country and the maintenance of its stability largely

depend on the choice of the most suitable model of separation of powers for modern Armenia (Aleksanyan and Aleksanyan 2021).

The beginning of the institutionalization of the political system of modern Armenia can be considered the adoption of the Armenian Declaration of Independence on August 23, 1990, which marked the further development of the country in democratic conditions, thereby laying the foundations of modern parliamentarism in Armenian society. On June 25, 1991, the Supreme Council of the RA, based on the provisions of the Armenian Declaration of Independence, taking into account the separation of powers into legislative, executive and judicial branches, adopted a decision on the establishment of the position of President in the RA. The principle of separation of powers was finally enshrined in the Laws of the RA “On the President of the Republic of Armenia” and “On the Supreme Council of the Republic of Armenia” adopted by the parliament. These two most important acts, along with the Armenian Declaration of Independence, became the legal foundations of parliamentarism. Thus, a transition was made from Soviet parliamentarism to modern Armenian parliamentarism.

The aforementioned period in Armenia, as with other post-Soviet countries undergoing transformation, coincided with a multi-vector, interconnected process of political transformation, full of events. In this sense, since independence, Armenia has been seeking more effective ways to modernize society, accompanied by serious ideological contradictions, the essence of which boiled down to a struggle between liberal and conservative principles. As in other societies undergoing transformation, the issue of choosing an effective model of state governance corresponding to the conditions of one's own country was given particular importance in the Republic of Armenia. The post-independence years were a period of deep, radical changes in the modern political history of the RA, which affected the form of government and the development of the political system through various objective and subjective factors. The important factors determining the process of political transformation were the nature of political relations, historical traditions, the social status of Armenian society, the degree of political participation of citizens and the level of political consciousness, socio-historical, spiritual-cultural, civilizational and other prerequisites. The existence of the mentioned prerequisites also conditioned the implementation of democratic values and ideas in our country. In addition, the complex and contradictory process of political transformation in the RA was accompanied by a high degree of conflict in political life, the personification of power, manifestations of unilateral decision-making by government political leaders in transformation processes, and conflict relations between state bodies and civil society institutions. The above-mentioned features of political transformation greatly influenced the process and results of the establishment of parliamentarism in the newly independent Armenia.

With the radical changes that began in the USSR in 1985, the crisis of the Communist Party began in the Armenian SSR. The fall of the totalitarian regime was accompanied by steps aimed at the development of democracy and parliamentarism. On May 20, 1990, the Communist Party was defeated in the elections to the Supreme Council of Soviet Armenia, and the foundations for the formation of a multi-party system were actually laid in Armenia. In the same year, the RA Law on Socio-Political Organizations was also adopted.

In 1990-1991, Armenia developed as a real parliamentary country. The political weight and legislative functions of the Parliament had significantly increased, the Supreme Council had really begun to manifest itself as a parliament, where heated political debates were taking place, ideas and programs for the country's development were being born. However, the situation that began after the presidential elections in 1991 changed. The country's political elite adopted the concept of strong presidential power, which, despite criticism, had serious grounds. In the absence of democratic structures, a war situation, and a growing socio-economic threat, there was a need for a strong hand. The president was given the opportunity to influence all branches of government, the latter formed the executive branch, headed it, etc. If at the initial stage of transformation, in the first years of the Third Republic's independence, the concentration of superpowers in the hands of the president was acceptable in some respects, then after the establishment of stability in the country, such a tendency negatively affected the establishment of democracy (Aleksanyan and Aleksanyan 2021).

Steps aimed at the development of parliamentarism in the RA since 1995 were mainly associated with increasing the role of the parliament and parliamentary oversight in the Constitution. One of the important directions for improving Armenian parliamentarism was the continuous reduction of the powers of the president constitutionally and the expansion of the powers of the parliament. However, as it later became clear, as a result of the Constitutional amendments of 1995 and 2005, no significant changes actually occurred in the role of the president. It should be noted that under the conditions of both the presidential-parliamentary and parliamentary-presidential systems of government, due to the insufficiently developed political, primarily party system, and the low level of political and legal culture, a truly pluralistic system based on the separation of powers was not formed in our country. The parliament was more of a structure legitimizing the decisions of the executive branch than expressing the interests of citizens. In practice, the President of the Republic influenced the three branches of government. Sometimes this influence was masked by the party of power known in political science. Under the conditions of the presidential system of government, the government has always sought to achieve the formation of a political majority in the parliament, since the absence of the latter could lead to the president losing power. In the history of the Third Republic of Armenia, there was only one case, in 1998, when the president of the republic was deprived of the support of the parliamentary majority, which led to his resignation.

### **The challenges of a new form of governance with old rules of political struggle**

In 2015, following the results of a constitutional referendum held in the absence of public demand, Armenia switched to a parliamentary form of government. The ruling party that initiated the constitutional amendments and the forces supporting them celebrated the opening of new opportunities for democratic progress in the country. On April 2, 2017, parliamentary elections were held in Armenia for the first time under the new form of government and transformation. The elections to the National Assembly were held under a proportional electoral system, which was more reminiscent of a majoritarian electoral system, since the rating of a candidate on the party list was

determined by the number of votes he received as much as possible. Both the majoritarian and this electoral system were based on the authority of political figures. As a result of the parliamentary elections, the ruling Republican Party of Armenia was recognized as the winner with 49.15% of the vote and thus actually received the opportunity to elect the Prime Minister of the republic<sup>1</sup>. The opposition Tsarukyan Alliance party was the second force with 27.36%, followed by the Yelk alliance and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Party with 7.79% and 6.57% of the votes, respectively<sup>2</sup>. The election results showed that the proclamation of a parliamentary republic is not sufficient for the development of the parliamentary form of government and culture in the Republic of Armenia. In essence, there were no qualitative changes in the composition and working style of the parliament, since although the Constitution and the system of government were new, the rules of political struggle and the game remained the same. It is also interesting that the election results were not appealed through rallies and street actions. The experience of previous years has called into question the effectiveness of such a cadre of post-election discontent. In addition, this, to some extent, testified to the indifferent moods of society and its alienation from politics. One of the manifestations of the loss of faith in political parties, as well as the public's indifferent attitude towards the institution of parliament, was the low turnout of citizens in the 2017 parliamentary elections. Therefore, it is not surprising that the sixth convocation of the parliament had a short life. As a result of the civil disobedience of 2018, the situation changed with the formation of a government that enjoyed the legitimacy of the people. Thus, the country got an opportunity to follow the path of real parliamentary democracy. Such an opportunity was also visible to the outside world. It is obvious that the newly elected National Assembly received all the opportunities to establish genuine parliamentarism in Armenia, since the parliament was formed through free, fair and transparent elections.

Before the Velvet Revolution of 2018, the political regime established in Armenia was considered undemocratic by various international organizations, opposition political forces, and some civil society organizations (Atanesyan 2018). For example, Freedom House characterized Armenia as a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime, and international election observation missions noted that there was a convergence of the ruling party and the state in Armenia<sup>3</sup>.

On December 9, 2018, the snap parliamentary elections resulted in a parliament that enjoys the legitimacy of the people. This view was shared by both the government and the opposition, as well as international observation organizations. The OSCE/ODIHR Observation Mission report emphasized that the elections were held with the observance of fundamental freedoms and enjoyed the trust of a wide range of society, which should be maintained through further electoral reforms (OSCE/ODIHR 2019).

The Second Karabakh War of 2020 could not but affect the measures aimed at developing the political system. During the war and the period following it, the parties

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<sup>1</sup> OSCE/ODIHR. 2017. "Armenia, Parliamentary Elections, 2 April 2017: Final Report." July 10, 2017. Accessed November 10, 2025. <https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/6/7/328226.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Freedom House. 2020. "Nations in Transit 2020." Accessed November 10, 2025. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/armenia/nations-transit/2020>.

that had a great influence on the establishment of parliamentarism played a minor role in the political decision-making process in the seventh convocation parliament (Hakobyan and Mollica 2025). The parliament was sometimes used to legitimize the decisions made by the executive branch. The opposition factions “Bright Armenia” and “Prosperous Armenia” used their mandates to criticize the authorities, but they did not have any real leverage. According to the Constitution of the RA and the Law on International Treaties, in the event of the signing of any document related to political, military, as well as human rights, the said document must be ratified by the Parliament of the Republic of Armenia. Meanwhile, the opposition factions of the parliament were informed about the provisions of the November 9 agreement only after its signing. Thus, it should be emphasized that although the parliament was constitutionally endowed with broad powers, in practice the practice of unilateral decision-making, which contradicts parliamentarism, continued.

The path of holding early parliamentary elections was chosen as a consensus solution to resolve the political crisis following the Second Karabakh War in 2020 (Hakobyan and Mollica 2025). The parliamentary elections, which met the standards of democracy, were held under a new, simple proportional electoral system. After the elections, the political struggle moved from the streets to the legislative body, and thus opportunities again opened up for the implementation of policy in the parliament and at the institutional level. Currently, a constitutional amendment commission has been established, which does not ultimately imply holding a constitutional referendum and changing the system of government, but rather correcting the gaps in the constitution. The ruling political force and Prime Minister N. Pashinyan are also convinced that the parliamentary system should remain and new opportunities should be created for its development<sup>4</sup>.

Former President of the RA Armen Sarkissian also noted in his resignation text, emphasizing the issue of improving the system of government: “We are a parliamentary republic in form, but not in content<sup>5</sup>.” He does not see the solution to the problems in the political system in the transition from a parliamentary form of government to a semi-presidential or presidential one, but rather emphasizes the importance of creating a state system based on checks and balances.

I also believe that we should not take a step back and return to a semi-presidential system. Instead, we must address the obstacles hindering the development of a parliamentary form of government. In this regard, the need to develop a culture of political dialogue in the process of strengthening democracy should be addressed. For this reason, A. Aleksanyan notes that it is impossible to imagine democracy, democratization, and domestic and international procedures for protecting human rights and freedoms without civilarchical mechanisms—that is, without the improvement of

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<sup>4</sup> The Office to the Prime Minister of the RA. 2021. “Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's speech at the presentation of the Government Action Plan at the National Assembly.” August 24, 2021. Accessed November 10, 2025. <https://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2021/08/24/Nikol-Pashinyan-Speech/>.

<sup>5</sup> The Office of the President of the RA. 2022. “The Statement of the President of the Republic Armen Sarkissian.” January 23, 2022. Accessed November 10, 2025. <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2022/01/23/President-Armen-Sarkissians-message/>.

civil society (Aleksanyan 2020, 35-38). Furthermore, the parliamentary system of government has historically been considered a superior form of organizing political and state power in Armenia compared to others. This stems from the high capacity of parliamentarism, as a system for organizing state power, to govern in both a two-party and a multi-party system.

The analysis of the evolution of modern Armenian parliamentarism, the study of the activities of the eight parliamentary convocations have made it possible to reveal some factors hindering the development of Armenian parliamentarism, as well as to point out positive trends (OSCE/ODIHR 2021).

The tendency towards a patriarchal state model characteristic of the political culture of the Republic of Armenia can explain the phenomenon that even under the conditions of the parliamentary form of government, citizens make their choices by pinning their hopes not on parties, but on the Prime Minister, who embodies the role of the ‘father of the family’. As a result, due to the dominant role of the head of state, which is characteristic of the political system of the RA, in the conditions of the semi-presidential system, the President assumed this role, in the case of the parliamentary system, the Prime Minister assumes it. Thus, the small political influence of the parliament, the fact that key decisions affecting the development of the state are mainly made outside the parliament, are primarily due to the desire for a strong centralized government, a low level of political culture and consciousness.

One of the factors hindering the development of Armenian parliamentarism in the post-independence period is the absence of a strong parliamentary opposition. As the experience of developed democracies has shown, the presence of a well-established opposition in the legislative body of power has a positive, stabilizing effect on the political life of society and prevents the possibility of acute political crises and conflicts or, no less dangerously, apathetic moods in society (Börzel and Pamuk 2012). The existence of a strong opposition in parliament is one of the most important features of parliamentarism<sup>6</sup>. The weakness of the parliamentary opposition is most clearly expressed in the conditions of the dominant party in power. As a rule, in parliamentary countries, the opposition is a minority, consisting of parties that have not occupied the majority of parliamentary seats. The latter’s task is not to govern, but to put forward real alternatives that counterbalance the views of the government and the parliamentary majority<sup>7</sup>. Of course, it is positive when the opposition criticizes the government, but when we evaluate the effectiveness of these criticisms, we see that they have little impact on the final outcome of decision-making if alternative, effective mechanisms are not proposed. The absence of such an opposition in parliament can lead to the emergence and activation of extra-parliamentary opposition forces that consider the street to be the main place for expressing discontent. Naturally, this cannot but negatively affect the work of the parliament and reduce the importance of

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<sup>6</sup> European Commission for democracy through law (Venice Commission). 2010. Report on the Role of the Opposition in a Democratic Parliament adopted by the Venice Commission, at its 84th Plenary Session (Venice 15-16 October 2010), by Angelika Nussberger, Ergun Özbudun, and Mr Fredrik Sejersted. CDL-AD(2010)025. Strasbourg, 15 November 2010. Accessed November 10, 2025. <https://rm.coe.int/report-adopted-by-the-venice-commission-at-its-84th-plenary-session-de/1680b17bca>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

parliamentary debates. As a result, in the perceptions of the Armenian public, the street is considered the center of change. For example, in 2016, a situation was created when a large part of the public trusted not the political forces represented in parliament, but the armed uprising launched by the extremist group ‘Sasna Tsrer’, and the public’s support for the latter was, in some sense, also an expression of a loss of trust in state institutions.

The weakening of the parliamentary opposition institution in Armenia was significantly influenced by formal coalitions on the one hand, and the lack of consensus between opposition parties on the other. A study of the history of coalitions formed in Armenia shows that their goal was largely to increase the legitimacy of the policy pursued by the government.

One of the most important principles of parliamentarism is the rule of law, which is guaranteed by the Constitution of the RA, but is sometimes ignored in reality. Real democracy is possible only in conditions of equality before the law. No person, be it the President or the Prime Minister, can be above the law.

As a serious problem of parliamentarism in the RA, it is necessary to emphasize the low level of trust of the population in the representative government, which, among other factors, is due to the fact that in the period since 1995, contradictory opinions have been expressed about the results of almost all elections, and elections have not always been an expression of public preferences. Since the parliament is formed as a result of elections by the population, the attitude of citizens towards the institution of the parliament is of great importance. According to the results of the 2022 survey by the International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Assembly has the lowest rating among state institutions in the RA<sup>8</sup>. The low percentage of political activity of the population in parliamentary elections can also be explained by the lack of trust in the National Assembly.

The development of Armenian parliamentarism is complicated by the fact that parliamentarians do not treat their work as a profession. The vicious tradition of regularly skipping sessions of the National Assembly dates back to the formation of the first convocation of the National Assembly. The awareness of participating in parliamentary activities only through physical presence has also hindered the development of the institution of parliament. In both cases, we are talking about the incomplete performance of representative, legislative functions. Unlike Western political culture, where politics is viewed as a calling and profession, such a perception is largely alien to Armenian political culture. The specialization of parliamentary activities has required a long period of time and has not yet reached the completion stage. One of the reasons is that for many deputies, parliamentary activities are a second job and are not a permanent source of income. For years, the government’s tendency to take on the legislative function, sometimes coming up with more

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<sup>8</sup> IRI. 2024. “Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia, December 2023.” March 11, 2024. Accessed November 10, 2025. <https://www.iri.org/resources/public-opinion-survey-residents-of-armenia-december-2023/>; IRI. 2023. “Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia, January-March 2023.” May 1, 2023. Accessed November 10, 2025. <https://www.iri.org/resources/public-opinion-survey-residents-of-armenia-january-march-2023/>.



legislative initiatives than the parliament, has also significantly weakened the weight of the legislative body.

Currently, a positive trend is observed in the professionalization of the parliament. Individual deputies are distinguished by their skills in legislative activity, political management and political communication, and public political activity. Over the years of independence, various parliamentary customs and traditions have been formed. It is obvious that the modernization and specialization of legislative activity have greatly enriched parliamentary traditions. Individual deputies of the National Assembly have learned to cooperate with the mass media and the civil society sector, are distinguished by their abilities to engage in legislative activity, and are well-organized.

There is a tendency to rejuvenate parliamentarians. The age limit of the current parliamentarians is the lowest compared to others. In terms of women's involvement, the greatest representation is also ensured during this convocation. From a quantitative point of view, this is certainly a commendable fact, which, however, would be desirable to be manifested qualitatively as well. It is noteworthy that even in the First Republic in the parliamentary elections held in 1919, women had not only active, but also passive suffrage.

The first parliament of newly independent Armenia, the Supreme Council, continues to remain unsurpassed in terms of the educational level of its deputies, as well as the effectiveness of its discussions. It was composed primarily of intellectuals who initiated the Karabakh movement of 1988, who disseminated ideologies united around ideas. Analyzing the activities of parliaments formed since then, it is clear that inexperienced politicians, with their equally banal ideas and habits, have emerged. The principle of political tolerance and dialogue has given way to an intolerant, yet already empowered, complacent, and self-sufficient common sense. And in this case, the fates of millions of people depend on the competence of parliamentarians and their public decisions. Legislative work is a complex process that requires political culture and party work. Without a parliament composed of knowledgeable members, genuine democracy in the country cannot develop. Beginning with the first convocation of the National Assembly of Armenia, the number of scientists, artists, and human rights activists has declined. Another not so positive trend can be recorded. Currently, the parliament is mostly staffed with representatives from the humanitarian sector. In this regard, it is possible to establish both certain educational censorship and sectoral quotas so that politicians with different professions can enter the parliament. As a result, the composition of the parliamentary corps will be improved and the level of competence of parliamentarians will increase.

Regarding ethnic and religious representation, it should be noted that, aside from quotas for representatives of national minorities, the remaining seats are generally occupied by Armenians. Furthermore, there are no political parties in the Armenian parliament that emphasize religious affiliation, as is the case in several EU member states or in political groups within the European Parliament (Wessel 2021; Silander 2023).

Studying the social composition of deputies of different convocations, we see that starting from the activities of the seventh convocation of the parliament, there has been a tendency to increase the number of representatives of the middle class, which means

that the influence of the class owning large capital on political processes has somewhat decreased. The number of representatives of big business in the parliament has also been significantly reduced.

When assessing the political experience of the current generation of parliamentarians, we discovered that some politicians do not go through the hierarchy of power, which sometimes leads to a lack of deep knowledge of the personnel policy of deputies. Following the Velvet Revolution in Armenia in 2018, the mechanism for recruiting the political elite underwent a transformation, becoming more entrepreneurial and open (Abrahamian and Shagoyan 2018). This, on the one hand, led to a change in the model of recruiting the political elite, bringing it into line with the democratic system of governance. On the other hand, young leaders who have not undergone a normal political socialization process and lack sufficient experience pose a certain risk in terms of political decision-making.

Numerous studies of parliamentarism show that its economic basis is a highly developed market economy, which allows for maximum decentralization of state power. In this regard, the development of parliamentarism can also be facilitated by an increase in the number of representatives of the middle class of society (Davidsson 2025).

The development of parliamentarism in the RA has certain European tendencies, which is conditioned by Western support and inter-parliamentary ties. The amendments to the Constitution in Armenia, among other factors, were conditioned by certain obligations assumed before Europe. It should be noted, however, that the formation and rooting of the liberal values necessary for modern parliamentarism in Western developed democracies took place gradually (Davidsson 2025), and in the difficult socio-economic and political situation in the RA, some time will still be needed. At the same time, one of the most important tasks of the development of the modern Armenia is the maintenance of political stability, the strengthening of democratic institutions and the organization of their effective functioning. The problems facing Armenian parliamentarism should be considered in the context of the problems facing society, therefore, their solution should be systemic.

The solution of the problems hindering the development of parliamentarism is possible only through the joint work and efforts of the government, the opposition and civil society (Aleksanyan 2020). The mentioned parties must be ready to cooperate with each other and realize their responsibility in the development of society (Bruder 2020). In addition, a system of checks and balances is necessary, under which none of the branches of government will be able to dictate its will to the other. In this case, a transition will be made to a qualitatively new political system, political behavior and culture (Börzel and Pamuk 2012). The theory of separation of powers stems from the principle of equality of the three branches of government. Parliamentarism is the interaction of all branches of government for the benefit of the people and the prosperity of the state. It is the development of law and legislative power in conditions of a high level of independence and responsibility of the other branches of government, the executive and judicial (Lavrelashvili and Van Hecke 2023). Parliamentarism implies and means not the opposition of the branches of government, but, on the contrary, cooperation for the benefit of the state and the people. Therefore, it is

necessary to increase the cooperation between the different branches of government and the effectiveness of the legislative process. In this matter, the parliament, repeatedly emphasized by representatives of the theory of separation of powers, can play a special role, since it is the body that expresses the will of the people who hold sovereignty. It is necessary to strengthen and deepen the unicameral parliamentary system, especially if we take into account that Armenia is a monoethnic homogeneous country with a small territory. A bicameral parliament is acceptable and widespread for federal and large-area and population, multinational, multiethnic countries, such as the Russian Federation.

Parliamentarism aims to ensure maximum participation of the people in the governance of the state, since in the transitional regime of representative democracy the legislative power is obliged to exercise its powers. In this regard, parliament plays a central role in the system of public power, especially in ensuring the political majority. For all models of parliamentary government, the issues of ensuring a stable parliamentary majority are of particular importance. Such stability is a necessary prerequisite for the effective implementation of its functions by the parliament. In addition, the stability of the parliament is a mandatory prerequisite for ensuring the stability of the government (Lebanidze 2020). Therefore, it is very important to strengthen the mutual connection between the deputy and the elector, especially when a certain gap is currently observed. Under a simple proportional electoral system, parliamentarians sometimes lose political responsibility and a sense of obligation to the voters. Meanwhile, one of the main goals of the National Assembly is to ensure bilateral communication between the state and society. Ensuring representativeness should not begin and end with elections. Deputies must understand public sentiments, the people-parliament connection must be strong throughout the convocation. To solve the problem of elite-society disconnection, deputies can divide their functions by regions.

We can talk about the existence of parliamentarism in the political system of society only in the case when the parliament, the legislative and representative body, is formed on the basis of competitive struggle between political parties, therefore it is very important to implement actions aimed at holding free, fair and transparent elections (Silander 2023).

The presence of a mature civil society in the country can serve to increase the legitimacy of the parliament, since every parliament is a mirror of its people. In order to stimulate the political participation of citizens, their electoral activity, it is necessary to work to raise their level of political awareness (Lebanidze 2020). It is necessary to contribute to the acquisition of elementary knowledge about politics by citizens, which will reduce the likelihood of the latter becoming victims of manipulation. One of the measures aimed at improving the image of the parliamentary institution in public perceptions could be the tightening of penalties in case of violation of the rules of parliamentary ethics (Börzel and Pamuk 2012).

The electoral system has a great influence on the formation of a quality parliament. The parliament is a representative body and must express the interests of the majority of the people, the main strata and social groups. During the years of post-independence, the electoral code has been amended and improved several times.

However, the problem of imperfection of electoral legislation continues to remain one of the shortcomings of the RA political system. As an example, it can be noted that under the conditions of a simple proportional electoral system, territorial representation has suffered to some extent.

One of the greatest meanings of parliament is control. It is no coincidence that parliamentarism is often identified with responsible governance. The Armenian parliament should strive to make maximum use of its supervisory capabilities as a democratic center of power over other branches of government.

One of the greatest obstacles to the development of parliamentarism in Armenia is the non-existent party system. Although the party system of Armenia resembles pluralism more than multi-partyism, the more parties there are in Armenia, the greater the pressure on the ruling power, which sometimes strives for sole rule. Accordingly, a larger number of parties will have the opportunity to present alternative strategies. Over time, the plurality of parties will make it possible to choose parties of different ideological orientations, ensuring real pluralism. In this case, extra-parliamentary parties will also have certain opportunities to influence the decision-making process. In addition, in the case of a multi-party system, the publicity and accountability of political decision-making can be more effective (Pascariu and Clipca 2025).

The study of the Armenian party system from independence to the present day shows that it is far from perfect. The reasons are different. First, the legacy formed under the conditions of one-party rule prevailing during the Soviet years could not but leave its negative imprint on the further development of the party system. At present, politics is sometimes still based on the inertial tradition of unicentric decision-making. Second, in the absence of historical experience, presidential and semi-presidential systems of government have had a negative impact on the formation of the party system (Raunio and Sedelius 2020).

The development of the party system in the RA has been adversely affected by the so-called 'government parties', known in political science literature, whose parliamentary activities have been more aimed at supporting the government's policies. The latter's policy of monopolizing the political field has created unequal competitive conditions for other parties. As a result, the party elite has become oligarchized, and expressions of party populism have emerged instead of clear concepts. Representative democracy sometimes loses to nomenclature democracy, which is expressed in the rise of the authority of populists, whose speeches are far from being substantive. As a rule, in countries known for their established party system, cases of politicians changing party affiliation are rare. In the RA, numerous examples of renunciation of party membership and conjunctural changes from one party to another can be cited. One reason is that politicians are united not by ideology, but by personal interests or a desire to be closer to the ruling party. Theoretically, political parties claim to adhere to a particular ideology, but in everyday Armenian political life, they are driven by situational interests. An example of the lack of unity based on real ideological grounds is the withdrawal of various major parties, such as the Prosperous Armenia Party, from the active political arena. Furthermore, in a transitional party system oriented toward individuals, the departure of a party leader from politics can lead to the decline of the party. Clearly, in our political culture, individualism is particularly noticeable in an

underdeveloped political elite, where political units are formed and act on the initiative of individuals. This creates a political situation where ideological struggle gives way to a struggle arising from the clash of personal and group interests (Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2021). This negative phenomenon also impacts the activities of parliamentary factions and the political majority. The formation of numerous political parties is based not so much on the imperatives of satisfying national interests, but on the narrow group interests and ambitions of party leaders.

This is precisely why I have the feeling that Armenia's political system is dominated by elite groups backed by big business, and the legislature is gradually turning into a venue for representing oligarchic, rather than economic, interests. In my opinion, this is one of the reasons why political parties lack real party strategies and their ideological ambiguities. This tendency significantly hinders the consolidation of Armenian society, social groups, and the organization of civil societies. In April 2017, the final report of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) election observation mission published it was noted that party campaigns were more focused on individual candidates than on party programs and policies<sup>9</sup>.

Parliamentary elections play the role of a unique indicator of developed parliamentarism and party stability in any country. Dozens of parties have participated in the eight parliamentary elections held in the RA since independence. Many of them, having failed to achieve success, have been completely expelled from the political field. There have been cases when parties secured a respectable presence as a result of the elections, but subsequently disappeared from political life after failing to enter parliament. Under the conditions of independence, in 1995, according to the results of the elections to the National Assembly of the RA of the first convocation, for example, the "Shamiram" party was in second place, which did not even enter parliament in 1999. The series of such examples can be continued. As a result, parties have never been able to strengthen and become traditional. The latter imagine their political activities mainly in parliament, and outside of it they forget about the representation of politics and public interests. In addition, the parliamentary elections held in the RA, unlike the presidential elections, were not distinguished by a high degree of competitiveness and citizen participation. Meanwhile, modern democracy is based on party competition. Before the transition to a parliamentary system of government, as a rule, the political force that enjoyed the president's trust and patronage won. Now, when the only national elections constitutionally are parliamentary elections, on the one hand, the level of responsibility of parties has increased, and on the other hand, citizens are also obliged to familiarize themselves with their programs.

### **Intra-Party Democracy: Against or for Leadership and Group Interests**

Ensuring intra-party democracy is an important issue, as is why party leaders and groups are often reluctant to implement mechanisms of responsibility, accountability, and self-control. In this context, it is noticeable that many political party members unquestioningly follow the orders of the party leader, sometimes even neglecting the

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<sup>9</sup> OSCE/ODIHR. 2017. "Armenia, Parliamentary Elections, 2 April 2017: Final Report." July 10, 2017. Accessed November 10, 2025. <https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/6/7/328226.pdf>.

critical voice so essential to parliamentarism. The absence or weakness of intra-party democracy, coupled with the principle of a stable majority, can create opportunities for central government figures to become uncontrollable. To avoid such a scenario, political parties:

- must be guided by democratic principles,
- allow party members to express their views freely,
- create conditions for the involvement of all party members in the decision-making process,
- demonstrate a tolerant attitude toward dissent,
- recruit active members and dedicated party leaders.

Among the problems associated with Armenia's underdeveloped party system is the fact that parties, as crucial elements of the political system, enjoy low legitimacy in the public's perception. One reason is the presence of pseudo-opposition parties sponsored by the government, which has led to a decline in public trust in political parties. Beyond the leader's image, party members play a crucial role in enhancing a party's authority, as they should represent not private but public interests. It's no coincidence that, since Aristotle, good forms of government are those in which those in power pursue interests aimed at the common good, while in bad forms, they pursue personal interests. It's crucial that Armenian society perceive political parties not as associations serving narrow group interests, but as important political structures capable of addressing public policy issues. In the context of the democratization of Armenia's political system, improving the constitutional and legal mechanisms<sup>10</sup> governing political parties is an insufficient but necessary condition. Following the Velvet Revolution, seven amendments were passed that pursued a number of key goals, including:

- encouraging a multi-party system and ideological pluralism,
- increasing transparency, openness, and accountability in party financing, improving public oversight tools over party finances,
- reducing corruption risks,
- separating political activity from business, reducing the influence of private interests on party activities, etc.

Regarding the revision of the party financing mechanism, in order to make party financing more transparent and balanced, and to prevent the circulation of funds of unknown origin in politics, we prohibit businesses, essentially legal entities, from financing parties in any way (Feldman and Alibašić 2019). From the perspective of ensuring financial transparency, it is important to make donations and membership fees, as well as any other monetary payments, in kind. It should be noted that the Constitutional Law on Parties coordinates their activities in Armenia and their participation in elections, but cannot change their political affiliation. This is why party legislation is a decisive factor in the development of a multi-party system.

Thus, the party system of the RA needs modernization. It is stable, but Armenian parties are still weak and do not have a clear social and ideological basis. Parliamentary parties are perceived by society as non-independent forces dependent on the executive

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<sup>10</sup> Constitutional Law of the RA on Political Parties. Adopted on December 16, 2016 (with amendments and additions). Accessed November 10, 2025. <https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/110534> (in Armenian).

branch, and extra-parliamentary parties do not have sufficient resources and public support to influence state policy. As a result, political competition suffers, and problems arise with personnel, as well as with ensuring feedback between the party and the society. In order to avoid such dangerous phenomena that threaten the development of the party system, it is necessary to implement deep and consistent, rather than cosmetic, steps aimed at its modernization (Feldman and Alibašić 2019; Pascariu and Clipca 2025). Parties should become the central actors of political debates, developers of the country's development programs. They should be the most important bodies for training political personnel. The most important prerequisite for the maturity of any political system is a multi-party system with the presence of responsible politicians, who are activated not during elections, but put forward long-term goals and alternative paths for the development of the state. Parties should take on the burden of political socialization of members of society. They are the political formations with the greatest potential to act as a bridge between society and the state, therefore it is necessary to develop new mechanisms ensuring mutual communication between parties and citizens (Djankov 2021). The more qualitative the modernization of political parties, the more successful the political modernization of the state will be. Parliamentary governance is party governance, therefore, the more organized the parties are, the more successful the governance within that system will be.

In summary, the modernization of political parties is closely related to the broad transformation of society: the institutionalization of the political system, the improvement of the electoral system and the constitution, value-normative, socio-cultural and other factors, changes aimed at improving the governance system and political regime. Accordingly, the parliament in the RA is established in terms of form and institutionalization, rich traditions and experience have been accumulated in a short period of time, but there are many problems that require solutions in terms of content. Parliamentarism in the RA still has a certain way to go in development.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

The strengthening of parliamentarism and the public authority system in Armenia, and their relationship, are being realized in the complex context of democratization and European integration. For Armenia's political elite, it is important that the Armenian experience of parliamentarism and democratization has its own mechanism for implementing the principle of separation of powers. Differences between modern forms of government are revealed by comparing the relationships between the highest state organs. In constitutional and legal practice, the organization of public authority is reduced to an unusual model depending not only on the form of government but also on the complex conflict situation and post-war consequences.

The relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government is one of the fundamental characteristics of Armenia's political regime. In a democracy, this represents a certain balance of power; in an authoritarian regime, the power of the executive branch is significantly strengthened by encroaching on the prerogatives of the legislative branch, while totalitarianism implies depriving parliament of its true independence and turning it into a body strictly controlled by the executive organs of state. Key trends in the development of state authority in the modern world. A number

of the most characteristic tendencies have been identified in the scientific literature. In socio-political terms, tendencies toward totalitarianism and democratization can be identified. In terms of the specific methods for achieving unity, tendencies toward concentration and centralization of state power, as well as toward its deconcentration and decentralization, can be identified. It should be noted that these tendencies manifest themselves in various combinations and sequences and alternate under the influence of various factors.

The degree of centralization of public power in Armenian society depends on the level of economic development; the democratic qualities of political leaders and public decisions; legal consciousness and legal culture; as well as the specific content of the tasks that the political majority addresses in a particular period of its development. Therefore, in the history of the Armenian nation, one can find both periods of high concentration of power and periods of its sharp deconcentration, even to the point of complete disorganization.

It is extremely important to understand the reasons for such sharp fluctuations in the state of public power, which are equally dangerous for any society. To determine the specific content of power during such periods in order to create the necessary database for forecasting the state of power and determining its objective models and parameters adequate to the given state of society and the state, taking into account the diversity of types of public authority and the importance of ensuring their harmonious interaction. The need for decentralization of public authority is dictated by the importance of aligning the mechanisms for satisfying people's needs and interests with the conditions under which they are formed. Thus, the general significance of decentralization of public authority boils down to the problem of constructing a system of political authority more adequate to a developed state, one in which human rights and freedoms in all their manifestations, their strengthening and implementation, determine the internal organization, meaning, and content of its activities, taking into account the growing trend toward expanding the spectrum of human rights and freedoms, specific differentiation, enrichment of their content, a commensurate growth in human needs, and a qualitative differentiation of people's interests, which are recognized and enshrined in the form of special human rights. If a highly centralized government in any state, as a rule, remains irresponsible, then decentralization of power makes sense only when the government, as a result, ceases to be irresponsible, thereby using every opportunity to responsibly achieve a socially useful result.

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**Conflict of interests**

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

**Ethical standards**

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.



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