

THE PURPOSES AND CHALLENGES OF SUPPLEMENTARY HEARINGS IN THE CRIMINAL PROCEDURE CODE OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

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Abstract. Procedure Code (CPC) of the Republic of Armenia, in force since 1 July 2022. Focusing on supplementary hearings held after a guilty verdict, it explores the legislature's aims, the mechanism's doctrinal foundations, and implementation challenges. Drawing on comparative criminal-procedure (United States, United Kingdom) and interdisciplinary findings from psychology and behavioral science, the authors argue that a bifurcated model that separates adjudication of guilt from sentencing decisions is valuable even without a jury, because it mitigates cognitive biases, particularly confirmation and hindsight bias, that can otherwise contaminate punishment. While the CPC's tripartite structure (preliminary, main, supplementary hearings) aspires to balance public and private interests, current rules permit character and sentencing-related materials to surface during the main hearing, weakening the intended procedural barrier. The article proposes targeted reforms to operationalize the separation: (i) amend Article 102 to allocate facts strictly between the main hearing (event, attribution, elements, guilt) and the supplementary hearing (aggravating/mitigating factors, character, harm, civil claims); (ii) introduce a "two-envelope" mechanism requiring the prosecution and parties to submit guilt-related and sentencing-related evidence in separate sets; and (iii) revise Article 319 to bar the submission or examination of character/sentencing evidence before the verdict. Alternatives such as different judges for verdict and sentence are noted but assessed as impracticable. Properly implemented, supplementary hearings can more effectively safeguard fundamental rights and enhance the legitimacy and accuracy of sentencing in Armenia's criminal justice system.

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Introduction

This article seeks to explore **supplementary hearings** - a newly introduced institution in the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) of the Republic of Armenia, by examining the legislative motives, objectives, and practical challenges surrounding their adoption.

Because supplementary hearings are traditionally associated with Anglo-Saxon legal systems, the article scrutinises the underlying concept of integrating them into Armenia's CPC.

In the authors' view, codifying supplementary hearings constitutes one of the key mechanisms for realising the fundamental principle of balancing public and private interests within criminal proceedings. While the CPC's two-stage hearing structure already offers an additional safeguard for individual rights and fundamental freedoms, a combined theoretical and practical analysis reveals several issues and proposes ways to address them.

Specifically, although enshrining supplementary hearings is an important step toward reinforcing the procedural barrier between adjudicating guilt and determining punishment, ensuring that the finding of guilt does not unduly influence sentence severity, comprehensive analysis highlights further measures whose incorporation into the RA CPC would enable the full and effective implementation of this legislative reform.

Supplementary Hearings in the Criminal Procedure of the Republic of Armenia

The Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) of the Republic of Armenia, which entered into force on 1 July 2022, introduced a number of new procedural structures in both the pre-trial and trial stages, taking the balance between public and private interests as its guiding principle.

Under the current CPC, the trial (court) phase is divided into three successive sub-phases:

- Preliminary hearings
- Main hearings
- Supplementary hearings

Within this tripartite framework:

- Preliminary hearings serve a preparatory function.
- Main hearings focus on examining evidence and resolving the question of guilt.
- Supplementary hearings are devoted to clarifying issues of punishment and liability.

According to the CPC, supplementary hearings may be held after either an acquittal or a guilty verdict. The present article, however, discusses only the conduct of supplementary hearings following a guilty verdict.

When the court renders a guilty verdict, the examination of circumstances that may aggravate or mitigate the defendant's responsibility and punishment, as well as factors **characterising the defendant's personality**, becomes critically important. By their nature, these issues derive from the verdict itself, and a guilty verdict is an indispensable procedural precondition for their consideration. Absent such a verdict, for example, if only personal characteristics of the defendant were debated, the discussion would be largely devoid of substantive meaning.

Although the two-stage hearing system is new to Armenia's criminal-procedure landscape, its expediency and its constitutional and procedural underpinnings has been debated for decades in jurisdictions such as the United States and the United Kingdom.¹ One core issue is whether a defendant's prior convictions should be disclosed to the decision-maker (judge or jury) before the verdict is reached.² Both case-law and legal scholarship have warned that jurors may be inclined to punish the defendant not for the specific act charged, but for the mere fact that he or she has demonstrated criminal behaviour in the past.³

¹ *Michelson v. United States*, 335 U.S. 469, 475 (1948), Seth Gurgel, *Bifurcated Trials: Eligibility and Selection Decisions in Capital Cases*, page 1.

² *Old Chief v. United States*, 519 U.S. 172, 180–81 (1997) (explaining that exposing the jury to a prior conviction could lead to “unfair prejudice,” *id.* at 180, by suggesting to the jury that the defendant has a bad character and therefore is more likely to have committed a bad act again), *United States v. Moccia*, 681 F.2d 61, 63 (1st Cir. 1982) (“Although . . . ‘propensity evidence’ is relevant, the risk that a jury will convict for crimes other than those charged — or that, uncertain of guilt, it will convict anyway because a bad person deserves punishment — creates a prejudicial effect that outweighs ordinary relevance.”).

³ *Michelson*, 335 U.S. at 475–76 (“The inquiry is not rejected because character is irrelevant; on the contrary, it is said to weigh too much with the jury and to so overpersuade them as to prejudge one with a bad general record and deny him a fair opportunity to defend against a particular charge.” (footnote omitted)), Dennis J. Devine & David E. Caughlin, *Do They Matter? A Meta-analytic Investigation of Individual Characteristics and Guilt Judgments*, 20 *Psych. Pub. Pol’y & L.* 109, 122 (2014); Edith Greene & Mary Dodge, *The Influence of Prior Record Evidence on Juror Decision Making*, 19 *Law & Hum. Behav.* 67, 76 (1995); Roselle L. Wissler & Michael J. Saks, *On the Inefficacy of Limiting Instructions: When Jurors Use Prior Conviction Evidence to Decide on Guilt*, 9 *Law & Hum. Behav.* 37, 38 (1985).

We agree with S. Herman's observation that the importance of the sentencing phase should never be underestimated, whatever legislative or precedential philosophy underlies it.

Reflecting the diversity of national legal systems, a range of solutions has been proposed, among them the formal adoption of the **two-stage trial** model.⁴

The Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Armenia embraces a two-stage (bifurcated) trial model, establishing a clear procedural barrier between (i) determining guilt and (ii) deciding punishment or other legal consequences.⁵ As noted above, two-phase trials are most familiar in common-law jurisdictions such as the United States and the United Kingdom. This raises the question: *Does bifurcation make sense only where a jury system exists?* After all, with a professional judge, the fear that impressions formed during the guilt stage will spill over into sentencing might appear less acute.

Our view is that the structure of a two-phase trial is not causally dependent on the presence of jurors. To substantiate this claim, we conducted an interdisciplinary inquiry examining not only legal scholarship but also sociological and anthropological findings.

One frequently cited "classic study," carried out at Stanford University in the 1970s, illustrates the point. Two groups of participants were recruited: one favoured the death penalty, the other opposed it. Each group was given a packet of research papers presenting arguments both for and against capital punishment. **Participants tended to rate as "more convincing" those studies that confirmed their pre-existing views.**⁶ Subsequent scholarship labelled this phenomenon *confirmation bias* - the tendency to give greater weight to information that supports one's initial position.

The same dynamic can arise when judges (or jurors) determine punishment and liability. Before the sentencing stage, a defendant's character should play no role; yet confirmation bias can lead the decision-maker to rely on early impressions inappropriately. A bifurcated procedure therefore remains valuable *even without* a

⁴ Susan Herman, *The Tail that Wagged the Dog: Bifurcated Factfinding Under the Federal Sentencing Guidelines and the Limits of Due Process*, Brooklyn Law School BrooklynWorks, 1992, pages 292-294;

⁵ *Gregg v. Georgia*, 428 U.S. 153, 190-92 (1976) (plurality opinion), Nancy J. King, *Juries and Prior Convictions: Managing the Demise of the Prior Conviction Exception to Apprendi*, 67 SMU L. REV. 586;

⁶ Charles G. Lord, Lee Ross, & Mark R. Lepper, *Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization: The Effects of Prior Theories on Subsequently Considered Evidence*, 37 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 2098 (1979).

jury system, because it erects a procedural safeguard that helps keep sentencing decisions insulated from earlier judgments about guilt.

In 2010, a study by Eric Rassin lent empirical support to the Stanford “classic” experiment. A cohort of legal professionals - judges, law-enforcement officers, defence counsel, and others, formed an opinion about a case after an initial review of the dossier and, in effect, ignored the evidence presented at the final stage of the study, refusing to modify their original stance.⁷

Moreover, in a separate experiment, *inadmissible* character evidence, although omitted from the formal reasoning of the judgment, nonetheless influenced both jurors and judges: under its sway they developed an internal conviction that inclined them toward imposing harsher sentences. These findings demonstrate that, while an early assessment of the defendant’s character may carry no legal weight before the sentencing phase, comprehensive research confirms its potent psychological impact.⁸

Confirmation bias is **not** the only anthropological or behavioural factor that can shape procedural decisions. Equally relevant is hindsight bias: when evaluating events retrospectively, individuals, including seasoned legal professionals, tend to judge the defendant’s conduct not as it appeared *in the moment* but in light of the consequences already known.⁹ The heavier those consequences, the more severe the perceived liability is likely to be.¹⁰

The examples and their manifestations presented above are described by theorists from legal and other scientific perspectives as heuristics. In essence, heuristics are the mental shortcuts or bypass routes in cognitive activity that allow decisions to be made on the basis of incomplete information. Among the leading scholars of heuristics are Amos Tversky and Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman,

⁷ Eric Rassin, Anieta Eerland, & Ilse Kuijpers, Let’s Find the Evidence: An Analogue Study of Confirmation Bias in Criminal Investigations, 7 J. INVESTIGATIVE PSYCHOL. & OFFENDER PROFILING 231 (2010).

⁸ Anthony Doob & Hershi M. Kirshenbaum, Some Empirical Evidence on the Effect of s. 12 of the Canada Evidence Act Upon an Accused, 15 CRIM. L. Q. 88 (1972), Joel D. Lieberman & Jamie Arndt, Understanding the Limits of Limiting Instructions: Social Psychological Explanations for the Failures of Instructions to Disregard Pretrial Publicity and Other Inadmissible Evidence, 6 PSYCHOL., PUB. POL’Y, & L. 677 (2000):

⁹ Erin M. Harley, Hindsight Bias in Legal Decision Making, 25 SOC. COGNITION 48 (2007), for a review of hindsight bias in the courtroom.

¹⁰ Susan J. LaBine & Gary LaBine, Determinations of Negligence and the Hindsight Bias, 20 L. & HUM. BEHAVIOR 501 (1996), Leonard Berlin, Hindsight Bias, 175 AM. J. ROENTGENOLOGY 597 (2000).

who showed that heuristic routes can yield biased approaches such as confirmation bias and hindsight bias, which in turn can underlie judicial decision-making.¹¹

A 2023 study indicates that, when imposing a sentence, judges focus on the following factors:

- the defendant's upbringing and social environment,
- family and friends,
- profession and employment,
- persons dependent on the defendant's care,
- intellectual developmental issues, mental illnesses, addictions,
- the crime's impact on victims,
- the gravity of the offence,
- prior convictions or ongoing criminal proceedings,
- whether the defendant shows remorse.¹²

Although this study was not conducted in the Republic of Armenia, it makes clear that, when deciding punishment, judges are concerned less with guilt which has already been established and more with the defendant's personal characteristics. Therefore, knowing those characteristics before guilt is determined can adversely affect both public and private interests. We consider that the two-phase criminal-procedure system is not the sole effective safeguard in criminal justice, yet its inclusion in the Code may call for additional steps to ensure the system's full, genuine, and effective implementation.

Although it is practically impossible to imagine that anyone including a judge can be entirely free of bias, or of influences stemming from social environment,¹³ professional experience,¹⁴ and other external factors, we believe the impact of such

¹¹ Amos Tversky & Daniel Kahneman, Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases, 185 SCI. 1124 (1974); DANIEL KAHNEMAN, THINKING, FAST AND SLOW (2011) [hereinafter THINKING]; JUDGMENT UNDER UNCERTAINTY: HEURISTICS AND BIASES, (Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, & Amos Tversky eds., 1982):

¹² Nir, Esther and Liu, Siyu (2023) "The Influence of Prior Legal Background on Judicial Sentencing Considerations," International Journal on Responsibility: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62365/2576-0955.1102>, pages 12-20:

¹³ George, T. E., & Weaver, T. G. (2017). Chapter 15: The role of personal attributes and social backgrounds on judging. In L. Epstein & S. A. Lind (Eds.), The Oxford Handbook of US Judicial Behavior (pp. 286-302). <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199579891.013.3>:

¹⁴ Berryessa, C. M., Dror, I. E., & McCormack, C. J. B. (2023). Prosecuting from the bench? Examining sources of pro-prosecution bias in judges. Legal and criminological psychology, 28(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lcrp.12226> , Worden, A. (1995). The judge's role in plea bargaining: an analysis of judges' agreement with prosecutors' sentencing recommendations. Justice Quarterly, 12(2), 257-278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418829500092671> , Sisk, G. C., Heise, M., & Morriss, A. P. (1998). Charting the influences on the judicial mind: An empirical study of judicial reasoning. New York University Law Review, 73(5), 1377-1500. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1898693> , Harris, A. P., & Sen, M. (2022). How judges' professional experience impacts case outcomes: An examination of

influences can be mitigated. One procedural tool for doing so is the supplementary-hearing stage, which serves as a barrier between questions of guilt and questions of punishment.

We consider that personal characteristics (for example, positive or negative testimonials, family situation, and so forth) should not carry decisive weight in reaching the verdict. Whatever a person's character may be, the inquiry and decision on guilt must not be influenced by it. To put it differently, a negative portrayal of the defendant does not in itself prove guilt in the crime under examination; conversely, a previously law-abiding record or high reputation does not by itself prove innocence.

A review of the concept behind Armenia's current Criminal Procedure Code shows that this very aim motivated the adoption of the two-stage hearing structure.¹⁵ At the same time, we believe that, to make the two-stage system fully effective, certain legislative amendments are needed regarding the rules for presenting and examining evidence.

Thus, although the participants in the proceedings are not restricted from presenting evidence during the supplementary-hearing stage, evidence confirming or refuting the defendant's personal characteristics may already be found in the criminal case file or may already have been examined during the main hearing.

Under Article 319 of the RA Criminal Procedure Code, during the preliminary hearing the parties, at the court's request, submit proposals on the scope of evidence to be examined in the main hearing, substantiating which circumstance relevant to the verdict is proved or disproved by a given item of evidence. The court may refuse a party's proposal, but in that case it must issue a ruling.

In practice, the public prosecutor may petition the court during the supplementary hearing to examine all documentary evidence, including materials concerning the defendant's personal characteristics. Because the law contains no

public defenders and criminal sentencing. <https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/msen/files/harris-sen-public-defenders.pdf>, Robinson, R. (2011). Does prosecutorial experience "balance out" a judge's liberal tendencies? *Justice System Journal*, 32(2), 143-168, Frankel, M. E. (1972). *Criminal sentences: Law without order*. Hill and Wang, Lefcourt, G. B. (1996). Responsibilities of criminal defense attorney. *Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review*, 30(1), 59-68, Trivedi, S., & Van Cleve, N. (2020). To serve and protect each other: How police-prosecutor codependence enables police misconduct. *Boston University Law Review*, 100(3), 895-934, Liu, S., & Nir, E. (2022). Mission impossible? Challenging police credibility in suppression motions. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 33(6), 584-607. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08874034211057612>:

¹⁵ H. Ghukasyan, D. Melkonyan, A. Nikoghosyan, *A Practical Guide for Interpreting the Conceptual Solutions, Innovative Approaches, and Core Institutions of the New Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Armenia*, 2022, pages 492-494.

clear prohibition, the court's agreement with such a petition or with the prosecutor's suggestion would not constitute a procedural violation. In these circumstances, the defendant's character would already have been scrutinised in the main hearing, and the court would have access to personal information about the accused. Although, within the three-stage hearing structure, such information should not carry decisive weight in reaching the verdict, it can nevertheless influence the formation of the court's internal conviction. Thus, once the court knows of the defendant's established pattern of prior criminal behaviour, an internal belief is inevitably formed.

It cannot be said that forming such an internal conviction is unlawful or that the RA Criminal Procedure Code necessarily requires substantial amendment. On the contrary, the Code has already adopted a two-phase structure that clearly separates questions of guilt from questions of liability. Given this and the matters subject to proof under Article 102 of the Code, an unambiguous statutory consolidation of that separation would be the next logical step in reinforcing the two-phase trial model.

Specifically, we believe the proceedings can be truly two-phase only when the circumstances that characterise the person are presented to the court after the verdict is delivered. A person's positive or negative character has no material relevance to determining guilt, yet it is essential for individualising punishment. Therefore, within the discretionary scope that the Criminal Code grants the judge in sentencing, favourable character evidence may incline the judge toward a more lenient penalty, while unfavourable evidence may lead to a harsher one. This conclusion is supported by both legal theory and behavioural research.

Accordingly, it is necessary, within Article 102 of the RA Criminal Procedure Code, to define the facts subject to proof according to a two-phase logic, separating those to be proved in the main hearing from those to be proved in the supplementary hearing.

During the **main hearing** the following must be proved:

- the event and its circumstances (time, place, manner, etc.);
- the defendant's connection to the event;
- the legal elements of the alleged offence as defined by criminal law;
- the defendant's guilt in committing the alleged offence.

During the **supplementary hearing** the following must be proved:

- circumstances that mitigate or aggravate criminal responsibility or punishment;
- circumstances characterising the defendant's personality;
- the damage caused by the alleged offence;

- circumstances that allow the person to be released from criminal liability or punishment;
- circumstances on which the person bases pecuniary claims during the proceedings;
- circumstances on which a participant in the proceedings or another person bases his or her claims.

In legislatively entrenching the two-phase hearing system, it is also important to stipulate that, during the main hearing, the scope of evidence designated for examination in the main hearing may not include materials concerning character or circumstances that mitigate or aggravate liability or punishment, or related materials. Otherwise, the transition to two-phase hearings would remain somewhat formal: although a barrier is erected between questions of guilt and liability, it is more declarative than practical.

An alternative way to reinforce the two-phase trial would be to have one judge deliver the verdict and another impose the sentence. This would offer greater objectivity, because any internal conviction formed by the first judge would not influence the sentencing decision. However, given Armenia's limited resources, having different judges for the two phases or, for example, introducing a jury system, remains largely hypothetical, and the likelihood of practical implementation is low.

Nevertheless, a solution suited to the resources of the Republic of Armenia and today's challenges is the introduction of a "two-envelope" mechanism as a means of maintaining the procedural barrier. When the prosecutor submits the indictment to the court, the evidence is divided into two sets: evidence relevant to reaching the verdict (that is, which element of the offence each item proves) and evidence relevant to deciding punishment and liability (chiefly materials describing the defendant's character). The same approach must be mandatory for the other parties to the proceedings as well. In practice, these two sets of evidence could be presented to the court in two separate envelopes, preventing the development of inconsistent judicial practice.

The same logic applies, for example, in the United Kingdom and Scotland. There, the court may disclose evidence that portrays the defendant negatively ("bad character") to the jury only if a number of specific conditions are met. In effect, the court itself assumes the role of the "two-envelope" mechanism, taking into account criminal-procedure particularities.¹⁶ Thus, whether it is the prosecutor, who must

¹⁶ Criminal Justice Act 2003, հոդվածներ 101-103, Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995, article 101.

present the evidence underpinning guilt and punishment in sequence, or the court, a procedural barrier is erected. A similar approach appears in Rule 404 of the United States Federal Rules of Evidence. Under Rule 404(a)(1), evidence of a person's character, or a character trait, may not be used to prove that, on a particular occasion, the person acted in accordance with that trait.¹⁷ This point is especially important because, despite such prohibitions, the presentation of such evidence can still occur. Common-law jurisdictions address the need for additional safeguards by, for example, having the judge review the evidence before it is shown to the jury. Notably, this measure benefits not only the defendant's procedural interests but also aligns with the public interest, marking another step toward balancing public and private concerns.

Taking the foregoing analysis into account, we consider that the supplementary-hearing mechanism can be fully integrated into the Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Armenia through, for example, the following legislative change designed to operationalise the "two-envelope" system. Article 206 of the Code should be amended by adding a new Part 1.1 with the following content:

"1.1. When approving the indictment or restructuring it, the supervising prosecutor shall forward the case materials to the competent court in two separate envelopes. The first envelope shall contain the materials substantiating the circumstances set out in points 1 to 4 of Part 1 of Article 102 of this Code. The second envelope shall contain the materials substantiating the circumstances set out in points 5 to 10 of Part 1 of Article 102 of this Code."

It is also noteworthy that this proposal serves not only the procedural interests of the private participant, the defendant, but also aligns with the public interest, representing another step toward balancing public and private interests.

Conclusion

The separation of preliminary, main and supplementary hearings in the Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Armenia has both theoretical and practical importance. The three-tier structure discussed is intended to guarantee a balance between public and private interests during the trial stage in the court of first instance, while also ensuring the implementation of criminal-procedural principles.

Although taking up questions of punishment and liability only after resolving guilt is a significant step forward because the participants in the proceedings do not have to discuss those questions before the verdict is delivered, we believe, based on

¹⁷ Federal Rules of Evidence, Character Evidence; Other Crimes, Wrongs, or Acts, rule 404.

studies conducted among professional lawyers and on contemporary findings in anthropology, sociology, psychology and behavioural science, that it is necessary in the Armenian criminal-procedure context to make the barrier between the main and supplementary hearings more concrete, ensuring that circumstances relevant to sentencing are not addressed earlier than the supplementary hearing.

The following practical proposals could help achieve that goal:

- Introduce a differentiation in Article 102 of the RA Criminal Procedure Code for the trial stage, separating the elements that must be proved in the main hearing from those that must be proved in the supplementary hearing. For this to work, information describing the person or related circumstances should not be available to the court before the question of guilt is resolved. To that end, Article 102 could enshrine a “two-envelope” mechanism that requires evidence establishing the elements of the offence and evidence describing the person to be submitted separately.
- Reword Article 319 of the RA Criminal Procedure Code to create a clear rule that any evidence aimed not at proving guilt but at clarifying the defendant’s character may not be submitted at the preliminary hearing or examined during the main hearing.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.

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