SPECIAL REPORT

ARMENIA'S 2015 CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM

Contents

I. Background

Citizens of Armenia went to the polling stations on December 6, 2015 to cast their vote in the Constitutional referendum proposed by the executive branch. The amendments—which aimed to transform the governance structure from a presidential to a parliamentary system—have been criticized by a wide range of opponents for limiting the rights and political freedoms of citizenry and consolidating too much power in the hands of the ruling party.

The referendum was also seen by critics as an avenue for perpetuating the rule of Serge Sargsyan—who occupies the president's office following two fraudulent elections and cannot run for a third term—by making him Prime Minister with stronger powers for an indefinite period. He is widely expected to be appointed to that position by his ruling Republican Party (RPA), whose grip on the parliament is nearly guaranteed under the new Constitution, thus strengthening the *de facto* one-party system. His recent interview to *Al Jazeera* no longer leaves any doubts about his intentions in this regard.

Sargsyan's rule since 2008 has been marred by an unprecedented degree of systemic corruption, cronyism, and poor economic/developmental decision making (PFA, 2013a). As a result, the latest constitutional reforms spearheaded by him were naturally received with a high degree of skepticism by Armenia's population.

Nevertheless, the Sargsyan administration's ability to get away with a series of fraudulent elections since 1995, and more importantly in 2008 and 2013, may have provided it with the confidence to proceed. As this report demonstrates, on December 6, 2015 the Sargsyan administration used a variety of fraudulent methods—including ballot stuffing; multiple and carousel voting (a process that involves voting with pre-marked ballots); and miscounting—to secure the passage of the amendments with 63.4 percent voting for (henceforth the "Yes" vote) and 32.4 percent voting against (henceforth the "No" vote), with turnout at 50.8 percent of the staggering 2.57 million eligible voters on the government's voting list (see Appendix).

Our discussions with international and local observers as well as numerous eyewitnesses provided strong indication that the integrity of the process was jeopardized and the final outcome did not express the will of people of Armenia. As indicated in PFA Statement of December 4, 2015, the opposition had no chance of winning this referendum, due to the scale and scope of fraud readily available to the ruling elite to secure a desired outcome. International and local observers (e.g., COI-EPDE, OSCE-ODIHR, and PACE) pointed to presence of widespread irregularities and systemic fraud aimed at securing the passage of the Constitutional amendments. On December 8, the United States Embassy in Yerevan said in a statement:

> "credible allegations of electoral irregularities…need to be fully investigated to ensure that the Armenian people can see the outcome of the referendum as credible and legitimate."

Similarly, social media reports contained a massive body of evidence of ballot stuffing, illegal voting, physical assault of opposition proxies and journalists, and other serious procedural violations, including significant interference by RPA proxies in the process (OSCE-ODIHR, 2016). Despite these adverse conditions, some local observers managed to stand their ground and physically defend the final vote tally during the counting process, when much of the violations reportedly took place.

One noteworthy characteristic of December 2015 referendum was that there had been much less voter bribing reported than in previous nation-wide elections of the past decade. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that the Sargsyan administration was well aware of the true sentiment of the electorate toward the proposed constitutional changes and, therefore, thought that using bribes to attract voters would be ineffective in most areas considering the costs and risks.

The timing for the issuance of this report coincides with the October 2016 local government elections in Armenia. It serves as a reminder of the degree and sophistication of election fraud in the country, which may have determined the outcome of the local elections. It should also serve as a critical warning ahead of the parliamentary elections in April 2017 to those who believe in pursuing change in Armenia via elections, that a much stronger monitoring effort is needed to put a dent in the Sargsyan administration's election fraud machine and influence an otherwise predictable outcome. While recent changes in the electoral code (to allow public access to the final voter lists, announcing the results prior to sending them to the Central Election Commission, etc.) appear on paper to be steps in the right direction, without a concerted effort by Armenians worldwide, the opposition and civil society may not be able to materially reduce election fraud in Armenia. The remainder of the report focuses on statistical evidence of election fraud and vote rigging.

II. Statistical Evidence of Election Fraud

The methodology used in our assessment is employed widely in election fraud literature. It was originally developed by Sobianin and Sukhovolskiy (1993) and Sobianin, Gelman, and Kaiunov (1994) in application to Russia's 1993 constitutional referendum and later developed in a series of published papers in application to a number of countries in post-Soviet space including Armenia[1]. More recent quantitative research confirmed that this methodology can usefully predict the extent of ballot stuffing, multiple voting, and fraudulent vote counting (see, for example, Klimek et al., 2012).
This report applies the Sobianin-Sukhovolskiy methodology and its extensions to the official data released by the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Armenia following the December 2015 Constitutional referendum. The remainder of this section discusses the nature of those tests and summarizes the main findings.

[1] See Myagkov, Ordeshook and Shakin (2009) and references therein; Mebane and Kalinin (2009), among others. For Armenia, see PFA 2008, 2009, 20012, and 2013b reports.

1. Voter Turnout: *The officially reported turnout—1.3 million people, or 50.8 percent of some 2.6 million eligible voters—is unrealistic and grossly misrepresents the reality on the ground.*

As shown in detail in PFA (2012), artificially inflated voter list fraud has remained the main source of election fraud in Armenia over the years. Armenia's number of eligible voters is unlikely to be more than 1.2 million, given estimates of a total population of 1.8 million.[2] The overseas voting by Armenian citizens was abolished in 2007 by an amendment to the Electoral Code, citing the introduction of dual citizenship as the reason.[3] Taking these factors into account and assuming a reasonable (albeit still high) participation rate of 60-70 percent, the number of people who actually voted in the referendum is likely to range between 720 and 840 thousand people. Compared with official turnout, this suggests that Sargsyan administration added between 460,000-580,000 additional votes to the final outcome.

Similar results can be obtained by comparing the actual voter turnout with an expected theoretical distribution. In most elections, it is expected that the voter turnout follows a normal (or Gaussian) distribution. In this case, a curve reporting a certain turnout should be shaped like a "bell curve", with the top of the bell representing the statistical average, median, and mode of the distribution.[4]

Figure 1 shows the statistical *frequency* of turnout (that is, the number of polling stations with the same level of turnout across polling stations (solid red line) and compares it with a Gaussian curve (dotted line) with statistical parameters similar to that of the final reported data. While the curve has a bell-shaped form, the right side is much wider than the theoretical prediction, indicating a disproportionately large number of polling stations with high turnout. The difference (or more precisely, the integral of the area) between the two curves is estimated to be in the range of 400,000-450,000, consistent with our conjecture based on the expected total number of people discussed above.

[2] Official population statistics in Armenia are unreliable and believed to be manipulated for political reasons. A US State Department (2002) report cites an unofficial estimate that puts Armenia's population at approximately 2 million people (as of 2002). This and more recent estimates of population are possible ato verify using the official emigration data, which have ranged from 30 to 75 thousand per year since Armenia's independence in 1991. (The 1989 Soviet census, which put the population in Armenia at 3.3 million, can be used as a starting point before netting out the migration numbers). Based on these migration numbers, independent reporters put the number of people who left Armenia through 2014 conservatively at 1.6 million. Therefore, even with 350,000 Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan (who moved to Armenia between 1989 and 1991), the population in Armenia as of end-2015 is unlikely to exceed 1.8 million.

[3] Vehemently supported by the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun, this measure by the Kocharyan administration effectively prevented a large portion of Armenian citizens residing abroad (who happen to be voting predominantly opposition) from taking part in the election.

[4] More formally, a normality of distribution for any large number of variables is followed from Lyapunov's Central Limit Theorem. The latter requires that the random variables in question be independent for their sum/average to be normally distributed..

Given the large gap between the estimates of total resident population and official voter lists in Armenia, it appears that the turnout has been artificially increased (most likely via ballot stuffing and/or multiple voting). The monitors' accounts cited throughout this report support this. Specifically, the monitoring delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe noted in a statement:

"the inaccuracy of the voting lists containing the names of many people residing permanently abroad or even deceased, leading to claims that these identities were usurped by people who then voted several times."

Figure 1: Frequency of Turnout
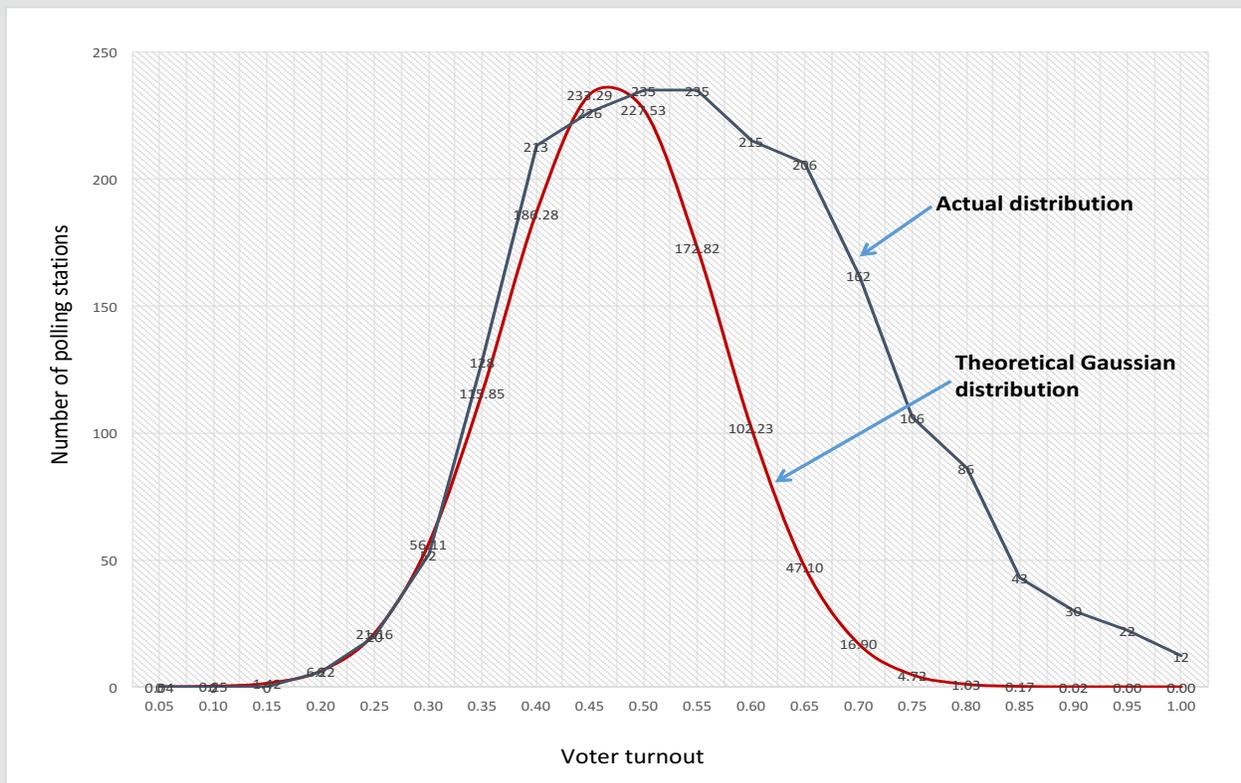
Source: CEC official data for actual distribution; and PFA calculations for the Gaussian distribution. Note: The Gaussian distribution (dotted line) has been anchored on the statistical properties of the left side of the actual distribution (solid red line), which is expected to be fraud-free.

2. Statistical Properties of the Final Outcome: *Statistical distribution of the Yes and No votes are highly abnormal. The distribution of the Yes vote is the most anomalous of any pro-establishment vote cast since 2008.*[5]

Similar to the voter turnout, under normal circumstances the votes cast in favor of both Yes and No should demonstrate statistical properties of a Gaussian distribution (see footnote 6). However, Figure 2 below show massive deviation from that expected pattern, with a significantly larger number of polling stations with high share of Yes votes as shown by the area to the right of the dashed line. Official data point to some 825.6 thousand votes cast in favor of Yes, which is extremely high given the estimates of Armenia's current population, any reasonable range for turnout (typically below 65-70 percent), and public attitude toward the referendum and its objectives.[6]

Figure 2: Frequency of the Yes and No Votes
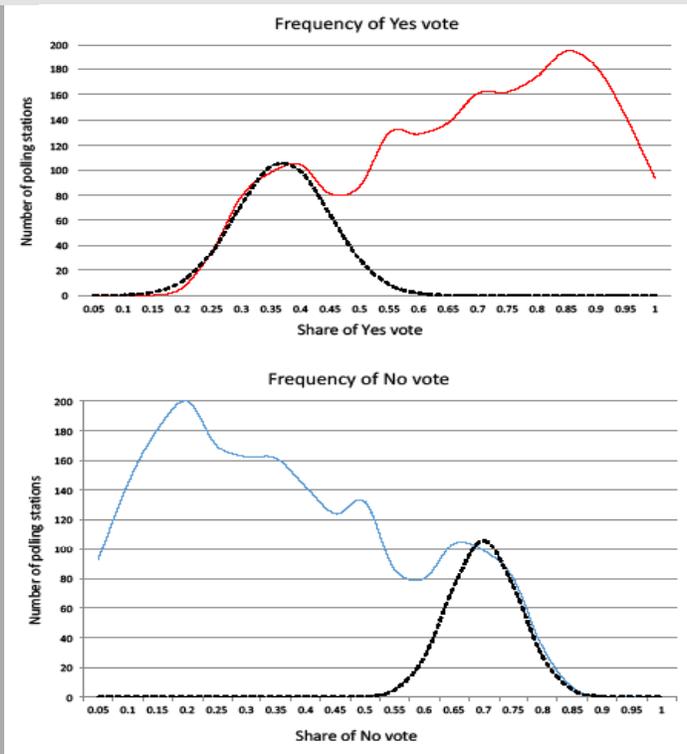
Source: CEC official data (for solid lines); and PFA calculations (for dotted lines). Note: The Gaussian distributions (dotted lines) have been anchored on the statistical properties of the left side (upper panel) and the right side (lower panel) of the respective actual distributions (solid lines), which are expected to be fraud-free

[5] See similar figures in PFA reports form 2008, 2009, 2012, and 2013 elections.

[6] See the European Endowment for Democracy and Armen Grigoryan, "Armenia's Constitutional Referendum," published by the Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, The Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC.

Apart from ballot staffing and multiple voting, it is also possible that fraudulent election officials miscounted votes, that is, counted the No votes as Yes votes or invalidated some ballots on false pretenses. Again, this is consistent with evidence collected by observers on the ground. For example, OSCE-ODIHR (2016) report states:

> "In particular, some valid "No" ballots were removed in an unauthorized manner and then returned as invalid ballots or placed in the wrong piles."

The actual contributions of different types of fraud to the official outcome is difficult to gauge and is likely to vary widely across different precincts and polling stations depending on the difference between the expected outcome and the one desired by the Sargsyan administration. For instance, in areas where both the turnout as well as the share of Yes votes were expected by the referendum officials to be low (and therefore the share of No vote to be high), both turnout-enhancing fraud as well as vote counting fraud were likely to have been used. Conversely, where turnout was not expected to be a problem but the share of Yes votes was, the emphasis would have been put on vote-counting fraud to secure a desired outcome.

The following two results provide support for the role of the turnout-enhancing fraud.

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3. Beneficiary of Fraud: *Abnormally high voter turnout benefited the Yes vote.*

As shown on Figure 3, the share of Yes vote grew significantly as turnout became larger, while the share of No vote declined as turnout increased. In fact, the slope of the linear fitted line for the statistical relationship between share of Yes vote and turnout is 0.93, indicating that for every additional 100 ballots, 93 were "cast" in favor of Yes, significantly higher than average share of 63.4 percent cast in favor of Yes[7]. A possible counterargument that polling stations with higher turnout (a proxy for civic activism) somehow also registered a greater share of Yes vote (i.e., pro-government demographics) does not have any empirical underpinnings to be plausible.

Figure 3: Shares of Yes and No Votes as a Function of Turnout
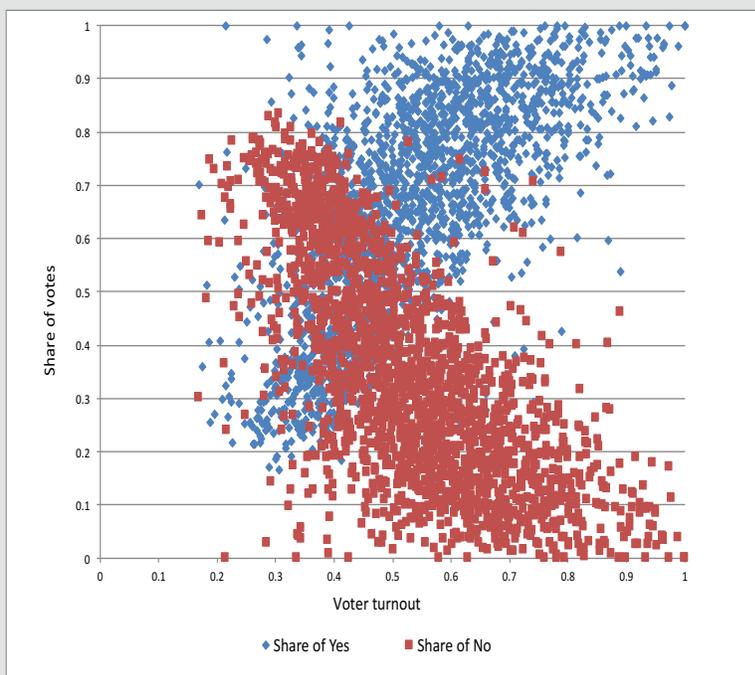
Source: CEC official data.

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[7] The estimated linear relationship between the share of Yes vote and the turnout is **Yes** = 0.93***Turnout** + 0.16 (with t-statistic of the slope coefficient at 42.9).

Interestingly, in 488 polling stations where the No vote exceeded the Yes vote the average turnout was 39 percent, significantly lower than the average turnout of 58 percent in those 1,509 polling stations where the Yes vote exceeded the No vote. In fact, as shown in Table 1, for polling stations with (officially reported) turnout below 50 percent (which is already unrealistically high, given that an estimated 45-50 percent of people have left Armenia since independence; see footnote 3), the share of No votes is neck-and-neck with that of the Yes vote. Adding polling stations with unrealistically high turnout changes the result of the vote in favor of Yes (Table 1).

Table 1: *Share of the Yes and No Votes as a function of Turnout*

Voter turnout (percent)	No. of polling stations	Share of Yes	Share of No
Less than 30	78	0.387	0.613
Less than 40	419	0.439	0.561
Less than 50	879	0.510	0.490
Less than 60	1,330	0.577	0.423
Less than 70	1,697	0.622	0.378
Less than 80	1,889	0.642	0.358
Less than 90	1,962	0.651	0.349

Source: CEC official data.

To show that the excessive turnout is linked to fraud, we further tested for presence of statistical correlations between turnout and various measures that are known to be associated with fraud.

4. Determinants of High Voter Turnout: *Turnout is correlated with factors that are highly susceptible to fraud.*

Regression results presented in Table 2 confirm this assertion. High voter turnout is statistically correlated with factors that are likely to be correlated with: (i) the size of the polling stations (ii) percentage of people who voted with ID cards (see below), and (iii) percentage of people who voted via amended voting lists.

Small polling stations (defined here as those with less than 600 eligible voters) are predominantly located in remote rural areas where the actual population is a much smaller fraction of its pre-independence numbers than in urban centers (due to disproportionate migration). Coupled with little, if any, observer oversight, small stations have consistently been a place for fraudulent election officials to undertake a disproportionate amount of ballot stuffing compared to larger/urban polling stations. [8]

Individuals' ID cards (made of plastic) cannot be stamped with ink (the way that passports are stamped upon voting), a fact that makes multiple voting possible. The Sargsyan administration hastily amended the legislation just less than two months prior to the voting day to allow voting with ID cards (i.e., without passports, which had been the only option prior to the referendum). This move raised doubts and criticism not only from the opposition but also civil society organizations, which warned that this move opened a smooth path toward multiple voting for hundreds of thousands of voters, who as of the time of the Referendum had both ID cards and passports.

Finally, *amended voter lists* are put together for ad hoc voters, such as people in transit and military personnel, both believed to have been a source of abuse and multiple voting since the 1990's (see, for example, NDI (1999) and IYC (2003)).

Table 2: Summary of Regression Results

	Dependent Variable: Turnout ratio			
	Coefficient	Std. Err.	t-statistic	P>|t|
Constant	0.405	0.021	19.27	0.00
Small polling stations (1-0 variable)	0.095	0.008	12.13	0.00
ID card users (percent)	0.658	0.076	8.61	0.00
Voting with amended lists (percent)	0.406	0.107	3.79	0.00
District variables (40) (1-0 variables)	Yes			

No. of observations = 1,997
Prob > F   =   0.000
R-squared   =   0.400

Source: CEC official data; and PFA calculations.

[8] While difficult to quantify, given (1) that they are mostly appointed by the ruling Republican Party and its partner parties—the main beneficiaries of fraud—and (2) presence of massive/systemic irregularities over the years leave little doubt that a large portion of election officials are directly involved in committing and/or covering up fraud in Armenia. Ongoing work by PFA and Transparency International Anticorruption Center in Armenia intends to shed light on this phenomenon.

The results presented above (using Ordinary Least Squares regression) indicate that, other things being equal:

- in small polling stations turnout was nearly 10 percent higher than in other polling stations;

- share of people, who voted using ID cards, is strongly correlated with turnout: a 10 percentage point increase in the share of individuals who voted with ID cards increases the turnout by 6.6 percentage points;

- share of people, who voted via the amended lists, is strongly correlated with turnout: a 10 percentage point increase in the share of amended list voters increases the turnout by 4.0 percentge points.

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5. Observer Effect: *Presence of a sizable and statistically significant "observer effect".*

As shown in connection with the 2003 and 2008 presidential elections (see PFA, 2012, Box 1; and Hyde, 2007), the presence of an election observer can influence the final outcome in a significant way. We conduct a statistical test for the presence of the same effect in December 2015 referendum.

The unconditional mean (i.e., simple average) of the share of Yes vote in polling stations that were visited by observers from the Citizen Observer Initiative (525 in total) is lower by nearly 12 percent compared to those stations where no observers were present. As shown in Table 3 below (column 1), this difference between group averages—the "observer effect"— is statistically significant. To put it simply, the presence of an election observer team may have caused the share of Yes vote to decline by as much as 12 percent in total.[9]

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[9] This analysis assumes that the choice of the polling stations to observe is made by the monitoring organizations randomly, and not in any way correlated with the characteristics of the polling stations. However, as demonstrated on the outcome of 2003 and 2008 elections, the observer effect becomes larger once any possible selection bias in appointing election observers is controlled for (see PFA, 2012; Table A1).

However, this difference could at least partially be a result of other factors at play, such as a difference in socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., education and activism) and emigration rates. In fact, the difference between the two groups declined slightly (to 11 percent) after the regression accounts for the "Yerevan effect" (i.e., difference in the outcome that could be due to the fact that polling stations are located inside vs. outside Yerevan) (see column 2 in Table 3).[10] There appear to be significant peculiarities also at the regional level. Specifically, controlling for potential differences between electoral districts across the country (see column 3)[11] reduced the observer effect to 6 percent, while maintaining its strong statistical significance.

Table 3: Regression Results on the Observer Effect

		Dependent Variable: Share of Yes Vote	
Constant	0.686	0.721	0.570
Observed stations (1-0 variable)	-0.118***	-0.112***	-0.062***
	(-11.56)	(-11.62)	(-6.58)
Yerevan (1-0 variable)	-0.154***		
	(-15.34)		
District variables (1-0 variables; 40 in total)			Yes
R-squared	0.0627	0.1608	0.3616

Source: CEC official data; and PFA calculations.
Note: Variable "observed stations" takes value of 1 if there was an election observer present in the polling station and 0 otherwise. t-statistics are in parenthesis. *** indicates significance at 1 percent level. Number of observations in all three regressions is 1,997.

[10] The results remained largely similar after polling stations observed by a (small and independent) Hayazn party (23 in total) were added to the list of observed polling stations.

[11] To account for potential differences in average values of Yes vote across 41 election districts, 40 binary variables (i.e., 1-0) were added to the regression equation.

Overall, the results confirm the presence of a significant observer effect of at least 6 percent. These findings are identical to that reported by Hyde (2007) in the context of Armenia's 2003 presidential election, who noted:

"…the presence of international observers depressed the incumbent's round 1 average vote share by 6 percent in polling stations that were observed."

The observer effect points to presence of fraud, which the election observers were likely to have reduced by their presence.

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6. Invalid Ballots: *Strong and statistically significant correlation between the share of NO vote and the ratio of invalid ballots.*

The official results (see Appendix) suggest that regions with the highest share of No vote (Yerevan, Shirak, and Lori), have the highest share of invalid ballots (5.6, 5.3, and 4.4 percent, respectively). Conversely, regions where the No vote was the lowest (Vayots Dzor, Ararat, and Gegharqunik) registered among the lowest rates of invalid ballots (3.1, 2.3, and 2.6 percent, respectively).

Regions, which host the country's first, second, and third largest cities and, therefore, have above average education levels compared to the country as a whole, should not—other things equal—have above average invalid ballot shares.[12] The fact that these three regions have the highest share of invalid ballots strongly suggests human interference with the final outcome.

Figure 4 demonstrates this relationship between the share of invalid ballots and the Yes outcome for all 1,997 polling stations (instead of comparing across regions). The results confirm the finding at the regional level: the share of the Yes vote is negatively (and the share of No vote is positively) correlated with the ratio of invalid ballots.[13]

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[12] It is quite possible that higher invalid ballot numbers in cities reflect a greater proportion of protest vote, where voters reportedly expressed anti-government feelings on the ballot, but this factor alone is unlikely to account for these (significant) differences in numbers.

[13] The estimated regression is of the form: Invalid = -0.01*Yes + 0.03 (with a t-statistic of the slope coefficient at -6.75).

Figure 4: Share of Invalid Ballots as a Function of Yes Votes
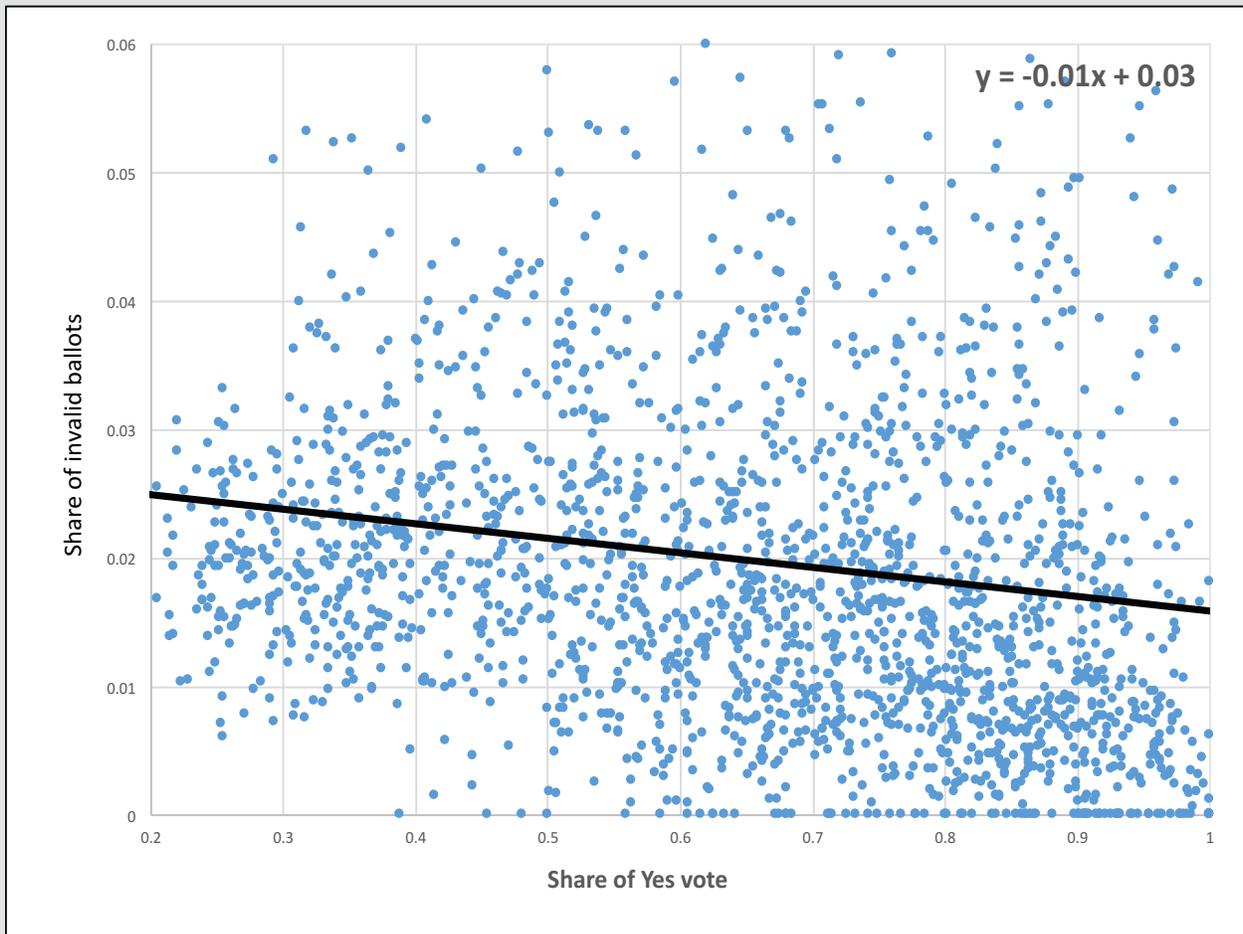
Source: CEC official data (scatter plot); and PFA calculations (regression line).

Based on the above evidence, we assume that two different strategies were used by election fraudsters. First, in polling stations that had a relatively high share of No votes, the strategy was to treat some No ballots as invalid (i.e., invalidating them on false pretenses), thus chipping away at the number of No votes and reporting *higher numbers of invalid ballots*. Second, in stations where the share of Yes votes was already high (but not high enough), the strategy was to count (some) invalid ballots toward Yes, thus inflating the Yes vote and reporting *low numbers of invalid ballots*.

III. Conclusions and the Way Forward

This report provides evidence of election fraud that took place during the Constitutional Referendum held on December 6, 2015. As pointed out by OSCE-ODIHR (2016), the reluctance of the authorities in Yerevan to institute safeguards against election manipulations "undermines public trust in the electoral process".

Similarly, COI-EPDE (2016) states:

"In at least the precincts observed by the Citizen Observer Initiative, violations of law were so widespread as to cast serious doubt on the possibility of the voters having their political will formed, expressed, and registered in compliance with democratic election standards. As to the referendum results, multiple instances of ubiquitous ballot box stuffing and results falsification during the counting sufficiently justify the claim that the results announced by the CRC do not reflect the real voting situation."

The Referendum demonstrated that despite the Sargsyan administration's rhetoric on the issue, the trend performance of elections in Armenia is heading in the wrong direction. Recent moves by the government to criminalize "false" reports of election fraud leave little doubt about their intentions vis-à-vis the upcoming April 2017 elections.[14]

It is impossible to commit fraud of the scale and scope described in this report without having the top election bureaucrats (and beyond) actively involved. Their activities fall into Vickey and Shein's (2012) definition of *electoral fraud* as "[d]eliberate wrong-doing by election officials or other electoral stakeholders, which distorts the individual or collective will of the voters." Therefore, we conjecture— based on the evidence provided here and our systematic research of election conduct in Armenia since 2008—that the CEC is fully complicit in election fraud in Armenia.

While Armenia presents itself as an electoral democracy, the experience of the past quarter century has shown that conventional political mechanisms for change in Armenia are broken. As noted by Schedler (2002), "[e]lections, … have become a tool of authoritarian power holders seeking to legitimize their rule." Using election fraud and an ever-growing police and security apparatus, the Sargsyan administration in Armenia continues to signal that it will not go along with a peaceful change of power. This has so far resulted in an increase in civil protests and social mobilization of the scale that took place in June 2015 and July 2016.

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[14] This, as well as the existence of some dubious and clearly self-serving provisions introduced by the ruling Republican party with the support of their ARF-Dashnaktsutyun partners (most notably, the bonus system that enables a party to form a *stable majority* in parliament without getting enough votes), strongly supports the reproduction of the existing political system.

Unfortunately, the Sargsyan administration has not faced sufficient international criticism for its actions to feel compelled to reform. While nearly all Western observers expressed concerns over the voting lists—the largest source of potential fraud in the Armenian context—all stopped short of calling upon the authorities to publish the list of actual voters.[15] More importantly, despite the overwhelming body of evidence to the contrary, foreign observers have often categorized the Armenian rulers' actions as malpractice *without the intention* to commit fraud. However, as this report was going to print, the US Embassy in Yerevan issued a statement, which—in addition to announcing the Embassy's financial support to election monitoring efforts by the opposition and civil society—noted that the elimination of electoral fraud in Armenia is "a matter of political will."

So far, with some exceptions, the Diaspora too has not done much to support the aspirations of citizens of Armenia to improve the way the country is governed. The Sargsyan administration's Machiavellian moves are largely to blame for this. The signing of the coalition agreement between the ruling Republican Party and the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun—which has an extensive grassroots network throughout North America—in all likelihood dampened the anti-government sentiment in the Diaspora and made it difficult for the Diaspora to deliver a strong broad-based message.

However, we are encouraged by a recent statement by Diaspora celebrities and call upon them to form broad-based partnerships with likeminded groups and individuals to be able to counter the Sargsyan administration's election fraud machine on the ground. However, to be able to have a significant impact, these groups should have a well thought out and planned intervention both on and after the election day. Partnering with already existing local initiatives is crucial to reduce information asymmetries and avoid duplication of efforts.

The German Bertelsmann Stiftung Foundation's recent prediction could not have been more accurate:

> "Given that popular demand for reform remains unaddressed, there is a growing risk of radicalization of political forces."

The July events in Yerevan demonstrated that political and social tensions in Armenia are very high. The 4-day war in April showed that the social contract between the Sargsyan administration and people of Armenia is broken. While the population at large has for years endured substandard social conditions and human rights abuses as the price for peace in Artsakh and some economic growth, it has become clear that the Sargsyan administration is no longer capable of delivering on its part of the bargain. So far the administration's reaction has been to undertake cosmetic moves instead of stepping aside to allow others an opportunity to address the country's problems.

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[15] Recently, the Sargsyan administration changed its position on this matter and announced that it will allow public inquiry into the voter lists for the upcoming parliamentary elections. However, due to logistical barriers that will un-doubtedly be imposed, this move is unlikely to yield any tangible results unless civil society groups in Armenia and in the Diaspora synchronize their monitoring and verification efforts to help collect evidence of electoral fraud, and act on that evidence.

The events also showed that there exist political and societal forces in Armenia, who will go to great lengths—despite the danger to their lives—to stop Armenia's slide towards dictatorship and total control by Russia.[16] The massive popular support that the gunmen enjoyed throughout the events signals in no uncertain terms that this process is not over yet and is likely to intensify.[17] A recent report published by Freedom House expressed a similar sentiment:

"The surprising public reaction to the takeover…has unhinged expectations about what is permissible in the realm of antigovernment mobilization."

The people have already spoken and the ball is in the Sargsyan administration's court. Thus, where Armenia goes from here and how it transforms itself depends entirely on the administration's perception of reality and risk aversion.

To sum up, the legitimacy of Armenia's ruler has reached a new low since December 2015. The overwhelming evidence of fraud presented in this report and other publications as well as the turbulent events of the past 18 months support this claim. Armenia may in fact need a new Constitution—we have specifically avoided a discussion of this issue here. However, blaming its pre-2015 Constitution for the wrongdoings of the past 25 years is akin to blaming the manufacturer of a car for the mistakes of the driver. In reality, if one cannot drive, or worse, if one is regularly drunk, over time one is bound to crash, irrespective of what car he/she drives. More than a new constitution Armenia needs skilled and sober drivers—leaders with education, integrity, and vision—who could turn the existing Constitution (however imperfect) into a mechanism for providing the good democratic governance required for the development, prosperity, and security of our homeland. The current status quo is unsustainable and will undoubtedly lead to new instability and social upheaval.

[16] See "The Kremlin's Grip and Armenia's Slide toward Dictatorship," by D. Grigorian, PONARS Eurasia, IERES, The George Washington University, October 2016.

[17] A recent panel of human rights experts in Washington called this outpouring of public support a "Robin Hood effect."

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Appendix: Preliminary Outcome of the Constitutional Referendum

Region/Marz	No. of Polling Stations	No. of Eligible Voters	Turnout		Invalid Ballots		Voted "Yes"		Voted "No"		Error
			No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Yerevan	471	845,893	392,119	46.36	21,823	5.57	207,507	52.92	161,720	41.24	570
Aragatsotn	141	115,380	61,484	53.29	1,814	2.95	40,866	66.47	18,733	30.47	21
Ararat	153	217,792	144,821	66.5	3,312	2.29	112,858	77.93	28,532	19.7	96
Armavir	168	229,583	128,621	56.02	4,817	3.75	93,758	72.89	29,919	23.26	4
Gegharqunik	155	187,876	99,226	52.81	2,603	2.62	75,974	76.57	20,579	20.74	30
Lori	221	238,055	110,084	46.24	4,810	4.37	61,913	56.24	43,149	39.2	35
Kotayq	166	235,553	124,468	52.84	3,929	3.16	82,865	66.58	37,083	29.79	17
Shirak	220	230,560	95,144	41.27	5,035	5.29	49,492	52.02	40,372	42.43	12
Syuniq	153	109,454	66,916	61.14	2,138	3.2	47,926	71.62	16,815	25.13	18
Vayots Dzor	53	47,149	27,409	58.13	841	3.07	21,515	78.5	5,039	18.38	0
Tavush	96	109,487	52,929	48.34	2,201	4.16	30,948	58.47	19,652	37.13	21
Total	1,997	2,566,782	1,303,221	50.77	53,323	4.09	825,622	63.35	421,593	32.35	824

Source: CEC official data. Note: These data are subject to the fraud and manipulations described throughout the report and should, therefore, be treated with caution.

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