

FPC Briefing: Results of Preliminary Analysis of February 18th 2013 Presidential Election in Armenia from Policy Forum Armenia

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On February 18, 2013, citizens of Armenia for the sixth time since independence went to the polls to elect a president. The ruling Republican Party of Armenia officials and the incumbent himself promised to hold elections that not only would meet the “European standards”, but would also be the best elections in Armenia since independence. While in some areas noticeable progress was recorded (including with respect to candidates’ right to freely conduct their campaign, balance media coverage as well as the orderly voting process²), our analysis would indicate there is sufficient grounds to contest the outcome of the elections. This note discusses the conditions leading to the outcome and focuses on the election fraud and manipulations that the data suggests have been employed.

These elections were different from previous ones in several aspects. They were considered not very competitive from the start, since 3 out of 4 opposition parties present in the parliament (i.e. Armenian National Congress, Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaksutyun, and Prosperous Armenia Party) refrained from nominating a presidential candidate or supporting any other registered candidates. In such a context, the incumbent Serge Sargsyan felt self-assured, and his supporters conducted relaxed campaigns and spared no positive words about their opponents. However, his campaign did not go all that smooth. While speaking off the script, Sargsyan made a number of mistakes which quickly turned into public relations disasters³.

The loudest criticism of his policies of the past five years came not from competing candidates but from the social networks, most notably Facebook. It gradually became clear that the resentment within the Armenian society against a potential second five-year term by Serge Sargsyan was strong and growing. During the final days of the campaign, the situation started to change while reports about vote bribing and intimidation became more frequent.

The level of fraud on voting day (reported extensively via social media) and unbalanced media coverage (especially on TV stations that are under the control of the ruling party) in the aftermath of the unexpected success of Raffi Hovhannisyan cast shadows over the positive trends noted by observers. Moreover, the fact that neither electoral officials nor the judicial system have shown interest in investigating accusations of fraud and persecuting its perpetrators speaks volumes of the depth and quality of the improvements (or lack thereof) that have taken place on Armenia’s election landscape.

Although the European observers were quick to provide these elections a clean bill of health by just referring to concerns about “lack of impartiality of the public administration, misuse of administrative

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² All these achievements were also reflected in the Statement of European observers along with some shortcomings in the joint [Statement of OSCE/ODIHR, PACE, and EC](#) on Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, Yerevan, February 19, 213.

³ The most notorious of these was [Sargsyan’s response to a question](#) posed by a young journalist, inquired about Sargsyan’s campaign strategy in Northern Shirak region. Sargsyan jokingly shrugged off the question and said that “the real question is whether he will hit 90, 80,70, or 60 out of 100”, which to many amounted to an implicit acknowledgement of the ability to manipulate results in his favor.

resources, and cases of pressure on voters”⁴, there is a massive body of evidence shared in social media sites to challenge that overall assessment. Not surprisingly, the public reaction in Armenia to the observers’ report was swift. A group of young activists hijacked the final press briefing by the heads of the OSCE election observation mission and read their own statement instead⁵.

Other observers were less sanguine. The Press Statement by the US State Department⁶, issued on February 20, 2013, stated that the Election Day “was marked by undue interference in the process, mainly by proxies representing the incumbent, and some serious violations, including cases of pressure on voters”⁷. The observers from the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE) noted in their statement that “during election day civic election observers reported on ballot stuffing, multiple voting and intimidation of voters through proxies of one of the candidates, which raises concern on the fairness of the electoral process”⁸.

The balance of this note provides a summary of the quantitative work carried by PFA using the *official election data* provided by the Central Election Commission. Our analysis is consistent with findings of other research⁹ and sheds further light on what actually happened on the Election Day in Armenia.

Quantitative Assessment

Consistent with eyewitness accounts and a large body of local media reports, our analysis indicates the following:

- The presence of a significant and systemic effort to artificially inflate the voter turnout (**Figure 1, Panel 1**). The deviations from the expected pattern (i.e. the normal or Gaussian distribution) are larger than those found in our analysis of the 2008 Presidential Election¹⁰.
- This turnout-enhancing fraud was conducted on behalf of the incumbent, Serge Sargsyan, and against the main challenger, Raffi Hovannisian (**Figure 1, Panels 1 and 2**). The deviations from the expected pattern are massive and exceed the range found during the 2008 election¹¹.
- In addition to artificially inflating the voter turnout, evidence indicated that votes cast in favor of Raffi Hovannisian and other opposition candidates were fraudulently assigned to Serge Sargsyan: in polling stations with artificially high voter turnout, for every 100 ballots cast at the end Serge Sargsyan received 105 votes (as measured by the slope of the straight line on **Figure 2, Panel 1**).
- Voter turnout was inflated by ballot stuffing, among other means. As shown on **Figure 2, Panel 3**, the ratio of invalid ballots declined as the voter turnout increased, a clear indicator of ballot

⁴ [Statement by OSCE/ODIHR, PACE, and EC](#) on Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, Yerevan, February 19, 213..

⁵ You Tube, Young activists interrupted the observers' press conference, February 2013 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5b_P1c1MPyw

⁶ US Department of State, Armenian Presidential Elections, February 2013 <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/02/205035.htm>

⁷ As this brief was being finalized, the US Secretary of State John Kerry issued a congratulatory note to Serge Sargsyan.

⁸ European Platform for Democratic Elections, EPDE Statement on Presidential Elections in Armenia, 18 February 2013

<http://www.epde.org/index.php/newsreader/items/epde-statement-on-presidential-elections-in-armenia-18-february-2013.html>

⁹ Alternative findings showing practically identical results were posted by two Russian statisticians independently (<http://romanik.livejournal.com/718556.html> and <http://abuzin.livejournal.com/114160.html>).

¹⁰ See Figure 1 in PFA’s Report on “[Armenia’s 2008 Presidential Election: Select Issues and Analysis](#)”.

¹¹ See Figure 2 in PFA’s Report on “[Armenia’s 2008 Presidential Election: Select Issues and Analysis](#)”.

stuffing as stuffed ballots do not as a rule include invalid votes hence decreasing the proportion of invalid ballots as turnout grows. This result contrasts with the findings of the 2012 Parliamentary Election, where ballot stuffing was not found by Policy Forum Armenia to be a major factor¹².

- There are indications that invalid ballots were counted in favor of the incumbent (**Figure 2, Panel 4**). The share of votes assigned to Serge Sargsyan is larger in polling stations where the ratio of ballots treated as “invalid” is lower¹³.
- There is strong evidence of vote-counting fraud in polling stations in rural areas. The digit tests (**Figure 3**) reveal signs of human interference in voter counting (e.g. reassigning of ballots from one candidate to another, etc.) as measured by a significant deviation from the uniform distribution (of votes cast in favor of two front-runners) in polling stations outside of Yerevan and Gyumri¹⁴.

All in all, we conclude that in polling stations not affected by falsifications,¹⁵ Raffi Hovannisian had a lead of at least 4 percent of the vote. This, however, is likely to be the lower bound of the difference between the two front-runners, because of the extent of violations in favor of Serge Sargsyan, as mentioned earlier. This analysis challenges—in the strongest possible way—the official version of the events, the statement of the OSCE-ODIHR observer mission, and the reports in Western media outlets about the extent of violations that took place on February 18, 2013. Our results indicate that the final outcome of February 2013 election was subject to massive manipulations and interference and did not reflect the free will of the Armenian citizens.

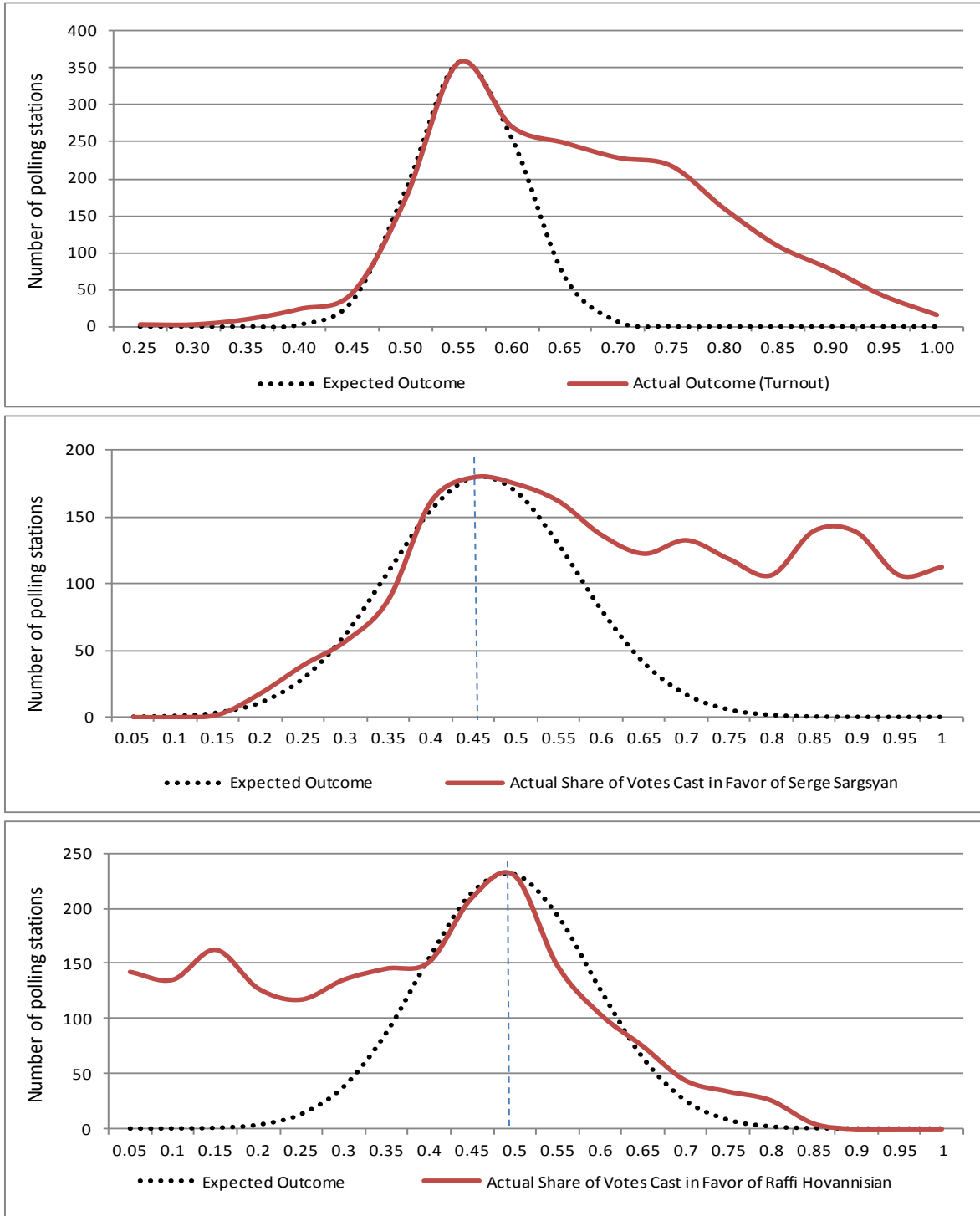
¹² See PFA’s report on [“Armenia’s 2012 Parliamentary Election”](#).

¹³ This is a clear deviation from the expectation that the ratio of invalid ballots should be independent of the ratio of ballots received by any candidate and hence should be on average constant across all polling stations.

¹⁴ Digit tests are used to uncover human interference in number counting. They are based on the assumption that all 10 digits appear in nature approximately evenly, all with 10 percent probability each. A deviation from this norm would be indicative of fraud. Indeed, we have observed abnormally high proportions of 1’s and 0’s which is evidence of arbitrary assignment of vote counts using these digits.

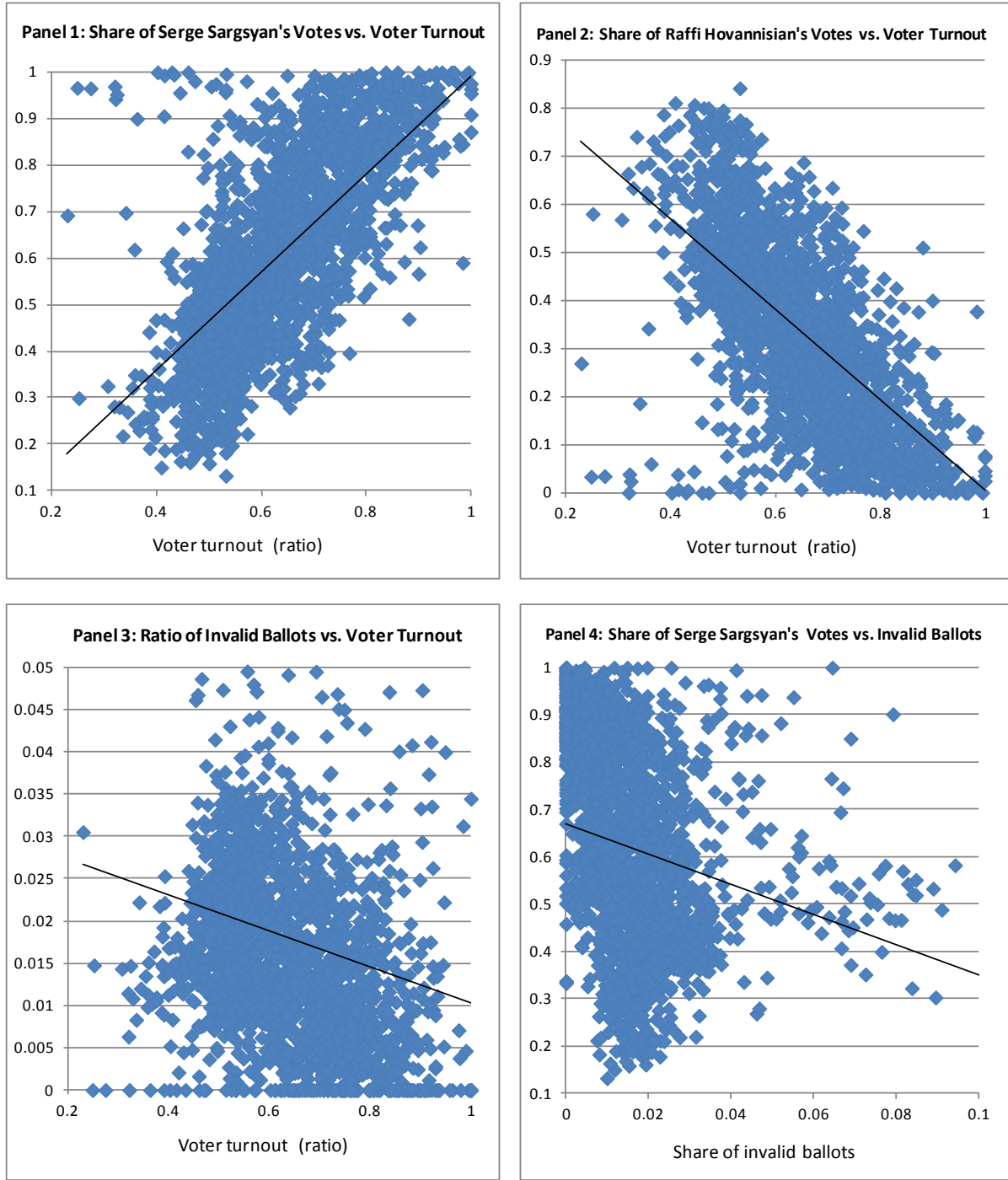
¹⁵ These include an absolute majority of urban polling stations across Armenia. Our report on [“Armenia’s 2012 Parliamentary Election”](#) discusses the reasons behind large scale fraud observed in rural areas of Armenia.

Figure 1. The Frequency of Voter Turnout and of Candidates' Shares



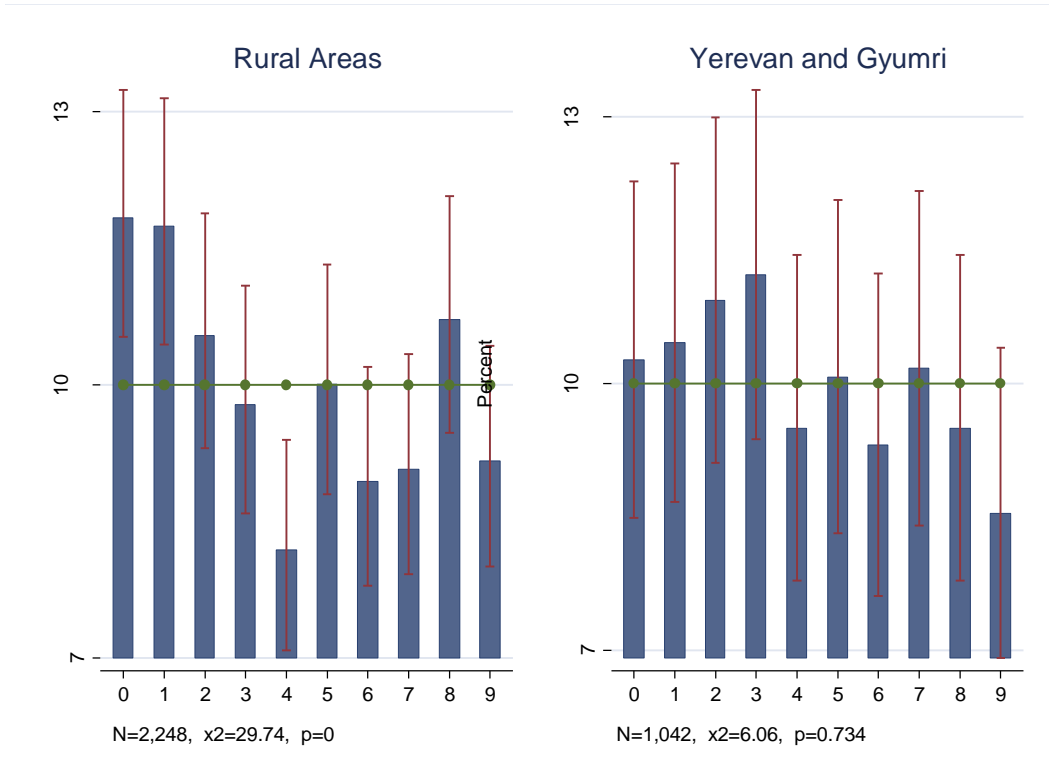
Source: Central Election Commission and Policy Forum Armenia calculations.

Figure 2. Candidates' Shares as Function of Turnout



Source: Central Election Commission and Policy Forum Armenia calculations.

Figure 3. Vote Count Fraud



Source: Central Electoral Commission and Policy Forum Armenia calculations. Only three-digit vote counts are included. The line (with value of 10) indicates the expected uniform distribution under conditions of a clean vote count. The capped spikes indicate the 95 percent confidence interval for each individual digit. The chi-square test statistic for polling stations in rural areas (i.e., those not in Yerevan or Gyumri) has a value of 29.74 (p-value of 0.00), rejecting the hypothesis of uniform distribution at any significance level. In contrast to this, the distribution of last digits in polling stations inside Yerevan and Gyumri is not statistically different from uniform (with a chi-square statistic of 6.1 and a p-value of 0.734).

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