

Governance Structures and Technology Adoption in the  
Post-Communist Caucasus  
Case Study: Armenia

Audrey N. Selian  
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National Center for Digital Government, Harvard University

This poster presentation includes a high level review of my research on institutions of political governance in Armenia. It focuses on the ways in which government adopts and diffuses technologies to change key governance processes and mechanisms. This is specifically undertaken in the context of the transition process between the communist and neo-liberal paradigms; indeed, the goal of progressing toward the objective of democratization is reflective of a very specific ideology inherent to the dominant discourse on development. This discourse was and continues to be encapsulated quite effectively in supranational fora like the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

In the words of Armenia's President Kocharyan at the podium in full plenary session at WSIS, "In our part of world, soviet thinking continues to hamper smooth transition to an engaged society. Technologies help us change old assumptions. We are here as leaders who wish to use the potential to strengthen democratic societies, transparent and accountable government...". Accordingly, this poster depicts the following:

- A review of general political and institutional barriers to good governance and improved standards of 'rule of law' in this area
  - The Caucasus (and Armenia, in particular) faces challenges ranging from an overall deficit of democracy and the predominance of 'strongmen over statesmen', to the dysfunctions wrought by small clan-based ruling elites functioning in a dominant executive, a weak parliament, and a dependent judiciary. With Azerbaijan as a model of dynastic succession and Georgia in recovery from 'failed state syndrome', the region as a whole (including Armenia) suffers from deeply embedded social discontent fueled by expanding networks of official/state/bureaucratic corruption.
  - An accurate conceptualization of governance in this part of the world – aside from looking at the state of institutions and government - must account for relations among and between families, kinship/clan groups, formal and informal social/ economic networks, and non-governmental institutions. Empowering civil society is particularly important to counter instability and the unrest between the small elites and the larger, powerless populations; the differences between them have never been starker.
  
- Broad comparison with other transitioning states – in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; identification of trends in digital government (if any) in post-communist systems

- A map of the key governmental institutions in the executive, legislative and judicial spheres; preliminary attempt (pre-field work) at identifying the foundations of possible existing social networks.
  - Some observers have categorized Armenia as an “ambiguous regime”<sup>1</sup>, a term that no doubt attempts to account for the juxtaposition of its troubled democratic status/mechanisms and the rise of a vibrant civil society. As of 2003, there were nearly 3,500 officially registered NGOs, oriented toward a wide range of issues including human rights and women’s rights, healthcare, peace and conflict resolution, and the environment.
  
- Examples of government adoption of ICT solutions
  - Judicial reform appears to be a process whose success is contingent upon the automation of information in Armenia. Part of designing a modern court administration system – in design and implementation – is developing the IT systems that can support such unprecedented levels of organization. Support for enforcement of court decisions appears to be tied to the means of organizing and presenting information, and an explicit strategy for improved information dissemination (and access to legal information by courts) to the public features prominently on the list of reforms. Technical assistance (from donors like the EU) appears to be a base from which training techniques and advanced monitoring and evaluation processes will materialize, and all aspects of outreach and awareness programs appear to possess a distinct ICT component.
  - UNDP/ICTs for Governance projects
    - “E-Governance System for Territorial Administration” (which has received \$547,765 in funding support from UNDP): designed to create a national web-based E-Governance System for Territorial Administration (E-GSTA) in the regions of Armenia, which will be connected with each other to form one national e-governance system.
    - “Support to Information Society and Democratic Governance” initiative (which has received \$801,954, also from UNDP): designed to support the Government of Armenia in its efforts to strengthen democratic governance by using ICTs to create an enabling institutional environment for sustainable human development.
  - Major achievements: the formation of “Armenia FreeNet” (free internet access), a partnership strengthening the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; a project aimed at export development, partnerships with regional/community authorities to foster sustainable development, and work with election commissions to enhance democratic electoral processes. Also notable is the birth of the Armenia OpenSource movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Giragosian, Richard, Balci, Tania M. 2003. “Report on the Status of Economic and Political Transformation: The Republic of Armenia (1998–2002)” (Draft). The Bertelsmann Foundation. p. 4.