Facebook

as a Campaign Platform in Armenia

Facebook at Post-Election Stage: Results of Monitoring Stage 3 (May 7-20, 2012)

Electronic Bulletin N3

This study of the coverage of 2012 Parliamentary elections by political forces and Armenian electronic media via on Facebook social network has been conducted by Region Research Center within the framework of a project implemented with the financial support of Open Society Foundations - Armenia.

Monitoring idea, methodology and results analysis by the Director of Region Research Center ***Laura Baghdasaryan***

Monitoring group: ***Sona Kyurkchyan, Angela Chobanyan, Anahit Shirinyan, Lena Nazaryan, Vahe Sarukhanyan***

Technical processing, calculations, tables and graphics by ***Shoghik Stepanyan***

English translation of the bulletin by ***Kristine Soghikyan***

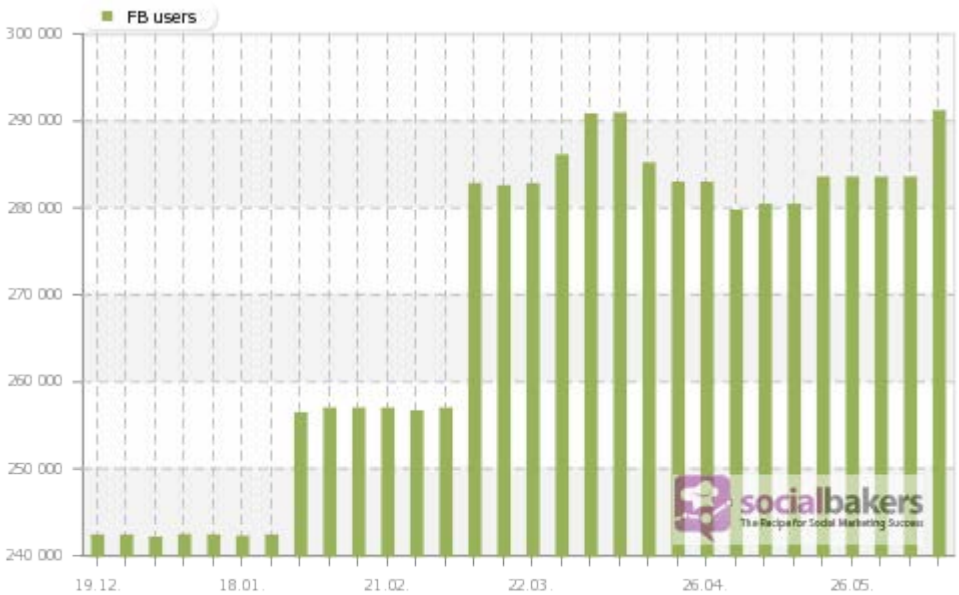
Region Research Center in the Internet
http://regioncenter.info
http://caucasusjournalists.net
http://facebook.com/RegionCenter

Open Society Foundations - Armenia

We proceeded with our study of the Parliamentary elections coverage on Facebook during the fortnight following the Election Day, aiming, on the one hand, to examine the inclinations of the opinions expressed on the results of the elections (the post-election discourse) had and to investigate how interested Facebook users were in the processes that immediately followed the elections, and on the other hand, to understand how Facebook, a platform that enables to freely and publicly react to key processes underway in the countr, was made use of by Armenian political figures after the elections. Eventually, we aimed to answer a question whether the activity of political figures on Facebook was only a one-time occasion (conditioned by the necessity to use this campaign channel on every possible occasion during the campaign period) or the political figures would expand the scope of their activity on the social network in order to reinforce their positions in the future.

Facebook Statistics on Armenia

The previously recorded indices of Facebook users from Armenia started to restore gradually within the monitoring period, in particular starting from the post-election fortnight. This claim can be substantiated by the data, provided by socialbakers.com website and the changes observed in the numbers of Facebook users from Armenia. After the second half of May the number of users from Armenia has incessantly increased, and in June it has exceeded the highest ever index for Armenia, recorded at the end of March (290840 users at the end of March, 291140 users at the beginning of June).



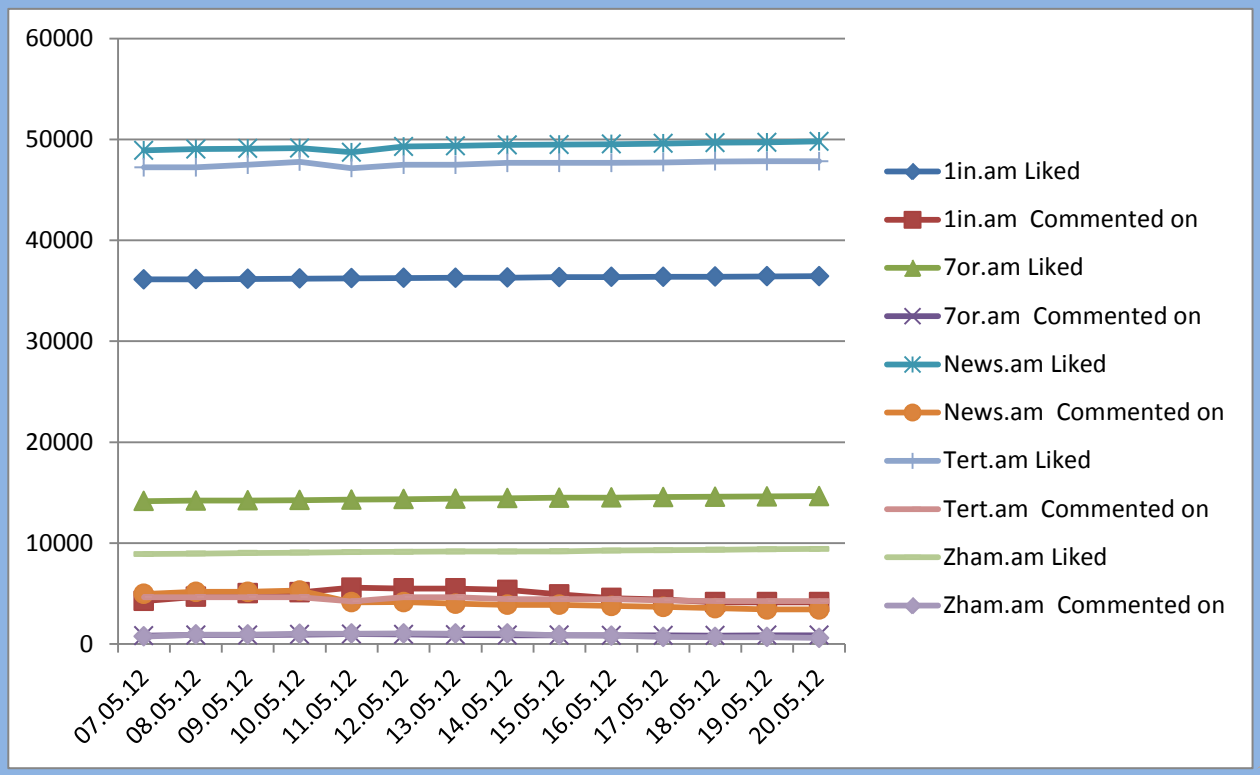
Post-Election Processes on Media Outlets' Facebook Pages

The objects of our study were the same in the period of May 7 – 20: we monitored the Facebook pages of 5 online media outlets in Armenia – tert.am Новости/Медиа (News/Media), news.am Новости/Медиа (News/Media), 1in.am Armenian News & Analyses , zham.am and 7or.am Новости/Медиа (News/Media).

(It should be mentioned that here the names of media outlets Facebook pages are presented in the language of their registration on the social network).

The Facebook activity ratings of all the above-mentioned media outlets continued to grow. However, just as it was at the initial two stages of our study (in February – March, i.e. Stage One, and during the official campaign and on Election Day, i.e. Stage Two), at Stage 3 the number of those who liked the pages of these media outlets (Likes) did not manifest any sharp ups and downs. As to the number of reactions to (comments on) page content, it only insignificantly dropped or insignificantly rose in the monitoring period. News.am was the only exception to the above-statement with its corresponding index dropping by approximately 1533 users in the course of the two-week period. This index, demonstrated by news.am, is the highest of other media outlets' reaction decline rates. However, it should be underlined that the total number of Likes for the Facebook pages of media outlets in Armenia was still ten times larger than the total number of the readers who somehow reacted to (Liked, Shared, Commented on) concrete materials.

Dynamics of media outlets' Facebook page ratings and readers' activity (May 7 – 20, 2012)

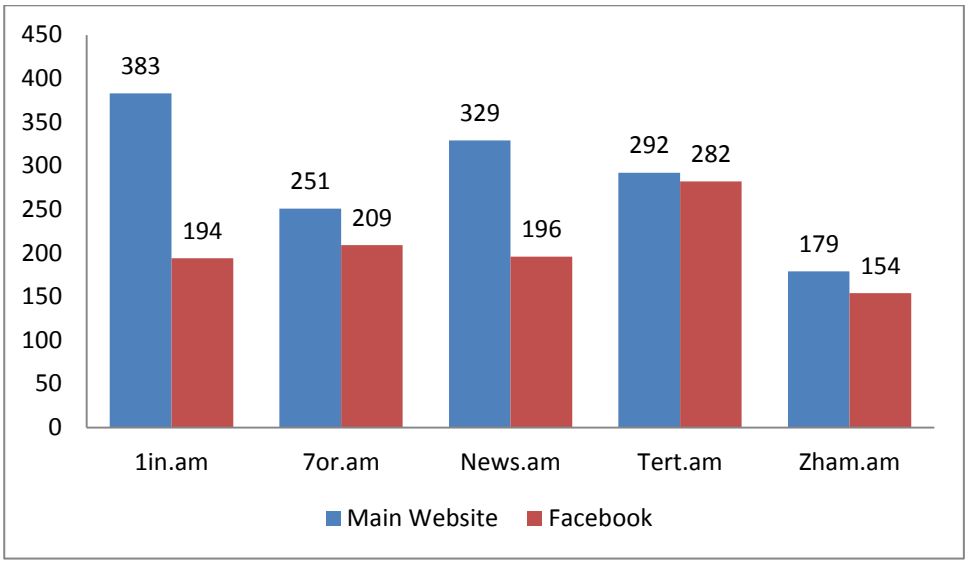


Number of materials covering elections and degree of post-election interactivity

The elections continued to remain the major domestic event within public discourse in the first fortnight following the Election Day. This can be testified to by the frequency rate of materials on the elections in the monitored media outlets.

We observed a relatively high frequency rate of redirecting materials on elections from media's main websites to their Facebook pages. In any case, the materials on elections placed on media outlets' Facebook pages made up 51 – 97% of the content on the same topic placed on their main websites (1in.am had the lowest indicator and tert.am had the highest, respectively) (See Appendix, Table 1).

Frequency rate of materials on elections at post-election stage



Level of readers' interest in materials on elections

The level of the audience's interest in the materials on elections was high during the post-election fortnight. This can be testified to by readers' reaction (Likes, Shares, Comments) indicators. Thus, the readers reacted to all the 196 materials on elections that were redirected onto news.am's Facebook page from its main website. There was not a single story on elections on this page that failed to be reacted to (Liked, Shared or Commented on) by the readers. The post-election content of 1in.am comes second by the criterion of audience reaction rate (readers failed to react to only 6 out of 194 stories on elections). About five sixth of the content on elections published by the other three media outlets was also interactively reacted to by the audience (See Appendix, Table 3).

References to parties running for Parliament in materials on elections (May 7 – 20, 2012)

It is but natural that the peculiar content of stories covering the elections was the main reason, ensuring such a high level of interest on the part of the audience. The study of these materials was conducted along several lines focusing on:

- **The frequency and character (positive, negative, neutral) of references to parties elected into the Parliament or defeating in the elections in stories on the Parliamentary elections,**
- **The authors of these references,**
- **The frequency of covering concrete topics in the materials on elections.**

When studying the total number of references made (considering the indicators of all monitored media outlets altogether), it was possible to conclude that even after the elections the parties that received most votes were still the ones to be referred to most. And vice versa, the parties that received the fewest votes were by far referred to less frequently and only occasionally. Thus, here is the order to parties elected into the Parliament, rated by the criterion of reference frequency – RPA (458), PAP (316), ANC (298), OEK (159), the Heritage (143), ARF (115), and the Free Democrats (11). Meanwhile, neutral references, that is to say such that contained neither positive nor negative evaluations and descriptions, prevailed: this was the case with all the parties ever referred to. When considering the so-called marked references, negative references came second, followed by positive mentions (See Appendix, Tables 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10).

At the same time, RPA was mostly mentioned by reporters (in the media outlet's own publications and reprints from other media outlets). The examination of who spoke about RPA from among the representatives of other political parties revealed that RPA was more often referred to by the members of those parties that were elected into the Parliament than by the members of those political parties who gained no seats in the Parliament. The representatives of PAP and ANC were the ones to make the most negative references to RPA; much fewer negative references were made to RPA by the members of those political parties who have not come to the Parliament.

PAP, the second largest political party represented in the Parliament, was the one reporters referred to with the most negative mentions (here too the outlets made the references in their original materials and reprints from other media). From among the political parties elected into the Parliament, RPA and ANC were the ones whose representatives made the most negative references to PAP. However, the number of the negative references to PAP by these two parties was smaller than that of negatively marked references to RPA made by PAP and ANC.

The number of negatively marked references to RPA and PAP made by the representatives of the political parties which have failed to be elected into the Parliament (a group to which we can also ascribe those political parties which have lost in the elections and have not received mandates – CPA, DPA and the United Armenians) is also smaller than the number of negatively marked references the three political forces elected into the Parliament made to one another's address. The political forces that have failed to gain seats in the Parliament made 6 negative references to RPA and 4 negative references to PAP within monitoring Stage 3.

The representatives of those political parties which have not received mandates in the elections or have not at all run for election were the ones who made the largest references to ANC, with mainly neutral references.

In the post-election period the total number of references to political forces not elected into the Parliament was not small. However, it is interesting to note that in the post-election period they were mostly mentioned by the representatives of non-ruling parties – ANC, ARF, the Heritage, the Free Democrats and the representatives of those very political parties which have not come into the Parliament (See Appendix, Table 11).

Even though organizations that fulfill election observation missions and the representatives of other countries, in general, are usually spoken of in the post-election period, this time the number of such references was relatively small (See Appendix, Table 11).

In other words, in the post-election period no correlation was established between the results of the elections and the quality of any observation mission's activities. In the post-election discourse the evaluations published by different missions were not significantly challenged.

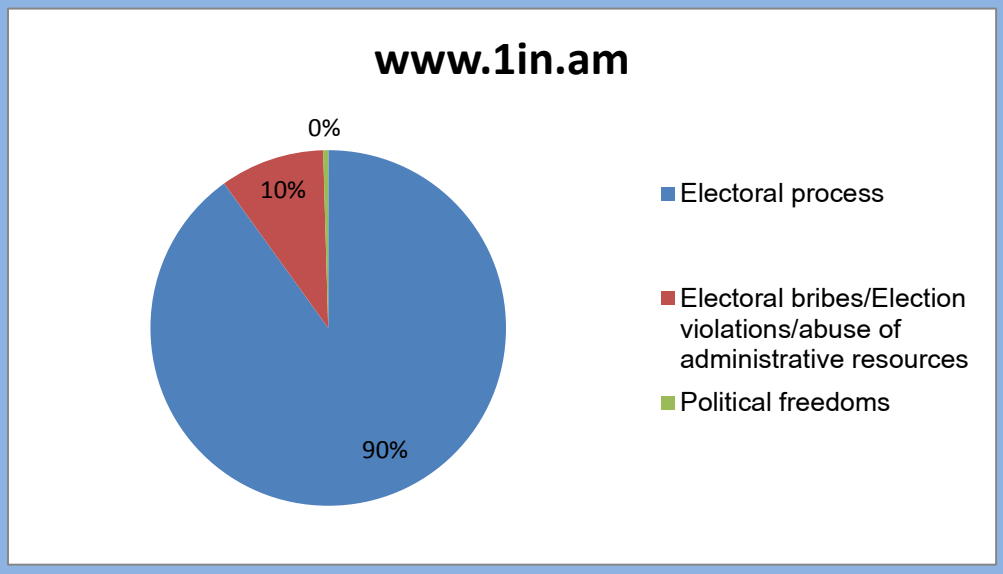
Post-Election Topics on Media Outlets Facebook Pages

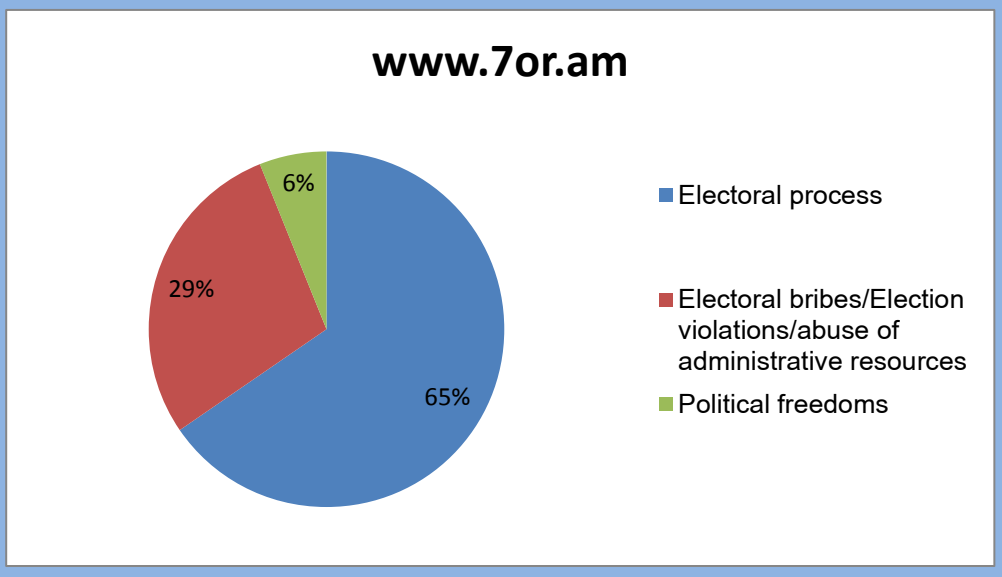
Just as it was at Stage 2 - during the official campaign (April 8 – May 4) and on Election Day (May 6), Stage 3 (during the post-election fortnight, too) the topics dwelt upon in the stories on elections could be divided into three groups: electoral (in this case also post-election) processes, political freedoms and electoral bribes/election violations/abuse of administrative resources.

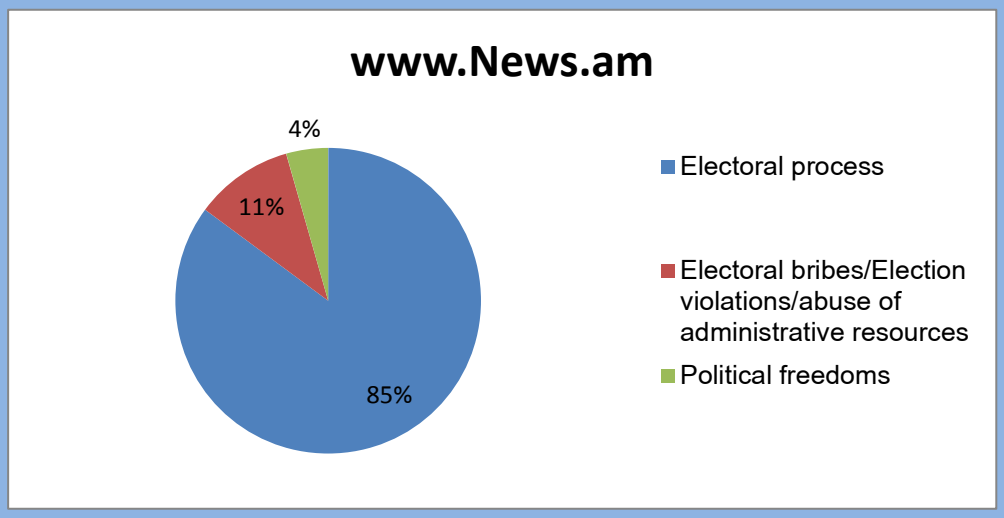
In terms of the frequency of the coverage of these three topics, the picture is similar to the proportions recorded at the pre-election stage and on Election Day. The topic of electoral processes (post-election events and processes, judgments and statements on the formation of a ruling coalition, announcements made by different observation missions and CEC, correlation of forces in the Parliament and so on) was the one to be most frequently addressed (1925).

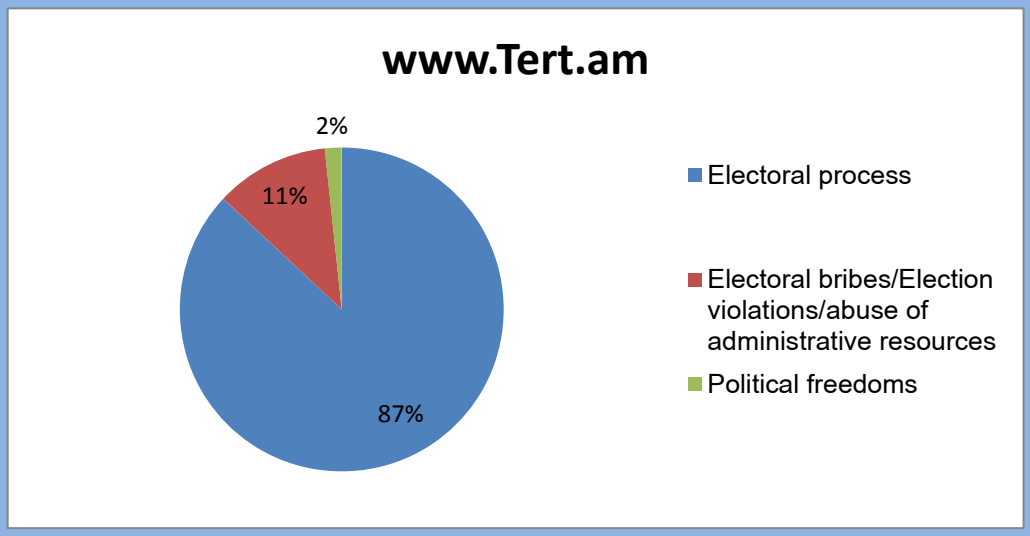
The topic of electoral bribes and various violations comes second (420) and is followed by political freedoms (84) (See Appendix, Table 13). The ratio remains the same also when considering the indicators of individual outlets. During the post-election fortnight the largest number of references to electoral bribes and other violations were made on the Facebook pages of zham.am and 7or.am (31% and 29%, respectively). The other three outlets manifested a roughly identical frequency rate for of the coverage of these topics (1in.am – 10%, tert.am and news.am – 11%).

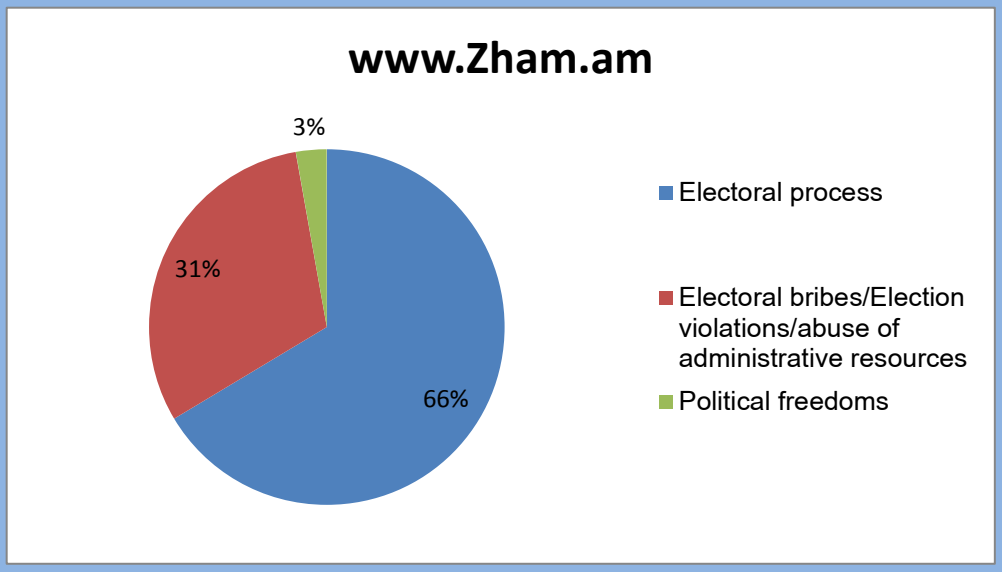
Coverage of elections-related topics by individual media outlets


www.1in.am
0%
10%
90%
Electoral process
Electoral bribes/Election violations/abuse of administrative resources
Political freedoms


www.7or.am
6%
29%
65%
Electoral process
Electoral bribes/Election violations/abuse of administrative resources
Political freedoms


www.News.am
4%
11%
85%
Electoral process
Electoral bribes/Election violations/abuse of administrative resources
Political freedoms


www.Tert.am
2%
11%
87%
Electoral process
Electoral bribes/Election violations/abuse of administrative resources
Political freedoms



The following picture emerges when we consider how frequently these three topics were dwelt upon in the speeches of the representatives of those political parties that have been elected into the Parliament:

The electoral processes were discussed most by the representatives of RPA, ANC and PAP. ANC representatives spoke on electoral bribes and other violations considerably more often than anyone else. The parties elected into the Parliament also made a small number of references to political freedoms.

It is interesting to note that this topic was touched upon only once by the representatives of those political parties which were not elected into the Parliament, a group which, as we have already mentioned, is currently designed to include also CPA, DPA and the United Armenians, i.e. the parties that ran for election but were not elected into the Parliament (See Appendix, Tables 14 and 15).

Level of Party Members' Activity on Facebook (May 7 – 20, 2012)

We monitored the Facebook pages of MP candidates and political parties running for elections (whom we had monitored also throughout the campaign period) in the post-election fortnight in order to detect any possible changes in the degree of activity online.

We would like to emphasize that the period under review was the fortnight immediately following the Election Day: at this time elections-related issues were still believed topical. Rearrangement of forces in the Parliament, transformations in the relations among political parties and other issues were actively dwelt upon both in the media and by different political figures. Consequently, the results of these two weeks could provide sufficient ground to conclude which of the aforementioned political figures and parties has an intention to use Facebook to present his/her own political activity also in the future, and which of them made use of the technical possibilities Facebook provided for only for the campaign in the pre-electoral period.

During the post-election fortnight we observed the official pages of Parliamentary parties and/or the Facebook pages of their members

We monitored the Facebook pages of the following political figures:

RPA members

Armen Ashotyan (Minister of Education and Science)
http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1177137998

Karen Avagyan (a National Assembly deputy)
http://www.facebook.com/avagyankaren

Artak Zakaryan (a National Assembly deputy)
http://www.facebook.com/artak.zakaryan

PAP members:

GagikTsarukyan (a National Assembly deputy)

http://www.facebook.com/GagikTsarukyan

Vartan Oskanian (a National Assembly deputy)
http://www.facebook.com/VartanOskanian

ANC members:

Hrant Bagratyan (a National Assembly deputy)
http://www.facebook.com/hrant.bagratyan

Levon Zourabyan(a National Assembly deputy)
http://www.facebook.com/LevonZourabyan

Aram Manukyan(a National Assembly deputy)
http://www.facebook.com/aram.manukyan.anc

Candidates from the joint slate of the Heritage and Free Democrats

Zaruhi Postanjyan (not elected into the Parliament)
http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100001686206577

Styopa Safaryan (not elected into the Parliament)
http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100000434784551

Karapet Rubinyan(not elected into the Parliament).

http://www.facebook.com/rubinyan

ARF members:

Lilit Galstian(not elected into the Parliament)

http://www.facebook.com/Lilit.Galstian

Armen Rustamyan(a National Assembly deputy)
http://www.facebook.com/armenrustamyan

We also monitored the arf2012.am website that ARF created specifically for campaign purposes, and OEK's Facebook page– http://www.facebook.com/Oek.Party,

Party members	Number of materials on elections on Facebook
Armen Ashotyan	13
Karen Avagyan	11
Artak Zakaryan	5
Gagik Tsarukyan	2
Vartan Oskanian	11
Styopa Safaryan	66
Zaruhi Postanjyan	8
Karapet Rubinyan	20
Lilit Galstian	11
Armen Rustamyan	7
Hrant Bagratyan	8
Aram Manukyan	3
Levon Zourabyan	1

The number of materials on elections, posted on the Facebook pages of former MP candidates in post-election two-week monitoring period, testifies to the general, however disproportionate decline in the level of their activity during the campaign.

Those who were active during the campaign have preserved their position, using Facebook more actively than others also in the post-election period, for example, Styopa Safaryan from the Heritage Party, Karapet Rubinyan, who was running for election being nominated on this party's slate, PAP member Vartan Oskanian, and RPA member Armen Ashotyan. These political figures run their own pages, dwelling upon topical issues, and update their statuses.

In the monitoring period the PAP leader Gagik Tsarukyan's page interactivity indicator (24365 users liked his page, 76 users commented on its content) significantly surpassed the similar data of the other figures' pages, in spite of only two materials on elections posted onto his page during the whole period. The other updates were congratulations to all Armenians on the holidays celebrated in May (May 8, May 9, May 28).

We could state that Levon Zourabyan's Facebook page was not updated with any new posts from May 7 to the end of the month. In the period of May 7 – 20 only one material was posted onto his page in which a member of his team thanked those who had voted for the MP candidate. The other piece is a message posted on May 31, stating that Zourabyan was going to be the head of the ANV block in the Parliament.

Hrant Bagratyan's page also demonstrated a low level of activity. In the monitoring period only 2 of the 8 posts placed on his page were written by him, while the other 6 materials were articles about him shared onto his wall by other Facebook users.

The 3 materials on the ANC representative Aram Manukyan's wall were shared by other users.

The level of activity was low on ARF's Arf2012 page, too.

After May 4 activity on OEK's official page has completely stopped. OEK's official page on Facebook did not stand out by any active updates (there were 24 materials throughout the campaign).

Appendix

Facebook at Post-Election Stage: Results of Monitoring Stage 3 (May 7-20, 2012)

Frequency of coverage after elections

Table 1: Number of materials on elections on the main websites and Facebook pages of monitored media outlets

Media outlet	Main website	Facebook	%
1in.am	383	194	51%
7or.am	251	209	83%
News.am	329	196	60%
Tert.am	292	282	97%
Zham.am	179	154	86%

Intensity of Facebook users' interest in election issues in the post-election fortnight

Table 2: Media outlets'audience and its activity with the general content on Facebook pages (7-20 May, 2012)

Media outlet	Date	Like	Are talking
1in.am	07.05.12	36117	4257
	20.05.12	36444	4132
7or.am	07.05.12	14152	813
	20.05.12	14643	873
News.am	07.05.12	48911	4961
	20.05.12	49792	3428
Tert.am	07.05.12	47225	4646
	20.05.12	47831	4246
Zham.am	07.05.12	8912	733
	20.05.12	9422	598

Table3: Number of materials on elections reacted and not reacted to by the audience

Media outlet	Number of materials on elections that were not reacted to	Number of materials on elections reacted to (Like, shared, comment) by the audience on the Facebook page	Total
1in.am	6	188	194
7or.am	31	178	209
News.am	0	196	196
Tert.am	44	238	282
Zham.am	25	129	154
Total	**106**	**929**	**1035**

References to the parties elected into the Parliament made in materials on elections (7-20 May, 2012)

Table 4. References to RPA

Who was mentioned in the materials on elections?	Who spoke of the elections?	With what implication? (reference mark)			Total
		0	**+**	**-**	
RPA	RPA	39	3	2	44
	PAP	13	0	11	24
	ANC	5	0	20	25
	Heritage	3	1	4	8
	ARF	1	0	4	5
	OEK	1	0	0	1
	Free Democrats	0	0	1	1
	Representatives of other countries	2	1	0	3
	Own reporter	96	1	56	153
	Other media	54	0	37	91
	Other authors	58	2	28	88
	Other parties	7	2	6	15
	Total	**279**	**10**	**169**	**458**

Table 5: References to PAP

Who was mentioned in the materials on elections?	Who spoke of the elections?	With what implication? (reference mark)			Total
		0	+	-	
PAP	RPA	22	0	7	29
	PAP	25	12	0	37
	Heritage	2	0	2	4
	ARF	2	0	0	2
	ANC	7	1	5	13
	Representatives of other countries	1	0	0	1
	Own reporter	100	5	13	118
	Other media	44	0	8	52
	Other authors	51	1	7	59
	Other parties	5	2	4	11
	Total	**259**	**19**	**46**	**316**

Table 6: References to ANC

Who was mentioned in the materials on elections?	Who spoke of the elections?	With what implication? (reference mark)			Total
		0	+	-	
ANC	RPA	14	2	4	20
	PAP	4	1	0	5
	ANC	37	9	7	53
	Heritage	3	0	1	4
	ARF	3	0	0	3
	Representative of other countries	1	0	0	1
	Own reporter	95	1	10	106
	Other media	23	0	0	23
	Other authors	61	1	6	68
	Other parties	19	2	4	25
	Total	**260**	**14**	**32**	**298**

Table 7: References to the Heritage Party

Who was mentioned in the materials on elections?	Who spoke of the elections?	With what implication? (reference mark)			Total
		0	+	-	
Heritage	RPA	3	0	3	6
	ANC	1	0	1	2
	Heritage	13	3	2	18
	ARF	1	0	0	1
	Representatives of other countries	1	0	0	1
	Own reporter	55	0	10	65
	Other media	12	0	2	14
	Other authors	32	0	1	33
	Other parties	2	0	0	2
	Total	**120**	**3**	**20**	**143**

Table 8: References to ARF

Who was mentioned in the materials on elections?	Who spoke of the elections?	With what implication? (reference mark)			Total
		0	+	-	
ARF	RPA	6	0	1	7
	PAP	2	1	0	3
	ANC	4	0	0	4
	Heritage	1	0	0	1
	ARF	9	2	0	11
	Own reporter	52	1	2	55
	Other media	4	0	0	4
	Other authors	27	0	1	28
	Other parties	4	0	0	4
	Total	**109**	**2**	**4**	**115**

Table 9: References to OEK

Who was mentioned in the materials on elections?	Who spoke of the elections?	With what implication? (reference mark)			Total
		0	+	-	
OEK	RPA	4	0	0	4
	PAP	4	0	3	7
	ANC	0	0	1	1
	ARF	1	0	0	1
	OEK	5	1	0	6
	Own reporter	52	0	13	65
	Other media	10	0	8	18
	Other authors	42	1	11	54
	Other parties	1	1	1	3
	Total	**119**	**3**	**37**	**159**

Table 10: References to the Free Democrats Party

Who was mentioned in the materials on elections?	Who spoke of the elections?	With what implication? (reference mark)			Total
		0	+	-	
Free Democrats	RPA	0	0	2	2
	Heritage	1	0	1	2
	Free Democrats	1	0	0	1
	Other media	1	0	0	1
	Other authors	4	0	0	4
	Other parties	1	0	0	1
	Total	**8**	**0**	**3**	**11**

References to the parties that are not in the Parliament and representatives of other countries

Table 11: References to parties not elected into the Parliament

Who was mentioned in the materials on elections?	Who spoke of the elections?	With what implication? (reference mark)			Total
		0	+	-	
Other parties	ANC	1	1	0	2
	Heritage	1	0	0	1
	ARF	2			2
	Free Democrats	0	1	0	1
	Own reporter	105	0	5	110
	Other media	4	0	0	4
	CEC	1	0	0	1
	Other authors	41	1	1	38
	Other parties	11	0	0	11
	Total	**166**	**3**	**6**	**175**

Table 12: References to the representatives of other countries in materials on elections

Who was mentioned in the materials on elections?	Who spoke of the elections?	With what implication? (reference mark)			Total
		0	+	-	
Representatives of other countries	ANC	0		1	1
	Own reporter	2		0	2
	Other authors	0	0	5	5
	Other parties	0		1	1
	Total	2		7	9

Table 13: Topic ratings in monitored media outlets

Media outlet/Topic	Electoral process	Political freedoms	Electoral bribes/ Election violations/ Abuse of administrative resources	Total
1in.am	390	2	41	433
Tert.am	413	8	54	475
News.am	538	28	66	632
7or.am	418	39	182	639
Zham.am	166	7	77	250
Total	**1925**	**84**	**420**	**2429**

Table 14: Topics dwelt upon in speeches on elections made by forces elected into the Parliament (total indicators)

Electoral process		Political freedoms		Electoral bribes/ Election violations/ Abuse of administrative resources	
RPA	119	ANC	13	ANC	49
ANC	110	Heritage	3	PAP	18
PAP	82	ARF	3	Heritage	16
Heritage	56	RPA	2	ARF	16
ARF	38	PAP	2	RPA	15
OEK	10	OEK	0	Free democrats	3
Free democrats	5	Free democrats	0	OEK	2

Table 15.Topics dwelt upon in materials on May 7 – 20 elections and authors of these materials

Who spoke of elections/ topics	Electoral processes	Political freedoms	Electoral bribes/ Election violations/ Abuse of administrative resources	Total
Reporter	722	21	125	868
Other media	203	4	28	235
Electoral commission	15	0	0	15
United headquarters	7	1	6	14
Other authors	463	32	111	606
Other parties	88	1	24	113
Representatives of other countries	23	2	7	32