



# Facebook

## as a Campaign Platform in Armenia

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## FACEBOOK IN THE RA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN, SILENCE AND ELECTION DAYS

The second stage of our study of the RA Presidential elections on Facebook extended between January 21 and February 18, embracing the official campaign stage (January 21 – February 16), the Silence Day (February 17) and the Election Day (February 18).

In this time period we aimed to reveal the Facebook behavior of the three main players of the electoral process – that of the Presidential candidates, the mass media and the so-called Armenian Facebook community, as well as the degree of their activity and the generally formed discourse.

- **What Internet tools did the Presidential candidates use in the course of the official campaign?**
- **How and how actively did they use Facebook social network at the campaign stage and on the Election Day?**
- **How were the campaign stage and the Election Day covered on Facebook by highly rated Armenian media outlets?**
- **What did the Silence Day mean to the Armenian segment on Facebook?**
- **How was the Election Day covered on the Facebook pages of the Presidential candidates, the monitored media outlets and the Armenian users?**

In order to answer these questions, in the above-specified time period we monitored:

### **The Presidential Candidates' Facebook pages:**

The pages of Raffi Hovannisian, Hrant Bagratyan, Paruyr Hayrikyan, Arman Melikyan, Andrias Ghukasyan and Aram Harutyunyan, as well as the RPA members A. Ashotyan and K. Avagyan (as users supporting S. Sargsyan),

### **Media Outlet Pages:**

The highly rated Facebook pages of 5 media outlets (1in.am, News.am, Tert.am, Lragir, am, Zham.am),

### **Pages of Facebook community representatives:**

The pages of a number of users who were active on Facebook and supported different political forces, and the “Facebook Activists” page.

## INTERNET TOOLS FOR THE CAMPAIGN

The 8 Presidential candidates launched their official campaigns with a widely diverse range of Internet tools.

4 of them - S. Sargsyan, R. Hovannisian, H. Bagratyan and P. Hayrikyan-began to operate the websites they launched specifically for the election campaign, starting February 21<sup>st</sup> (<http://www.serzhsargsyan.am>, [www.raffi4president.am](http://www.raffi4president.am), <http://bagratyanpresident.am>, [www.Hayrikyan.com](http://www.Hayrikyan.com)).

All the candidates, except S. Sargsyan, were represented on Facebook. As the representatives of the candidate's headquarters reported to the mass media and asserted in the telephone conversation with us, the younger members of the party would be the ones to represent S. Sargsyan on Facebook. Even though P. Hayrikyan and R. Hovannisian were already Facebook users, they opened new pages, specifically for this purpose (<http://www.facebook.com/hayrikyanparuyr>, <http://www.facebook.com/Raffi.K.Hovannisian>).

5 candidates continued to use their already functioning pages during the campaign:

Those were the pages of Hrant Bagratyan (<http://www.facebook.com/hrant.bagratyan?ref=ts&fref=ts>), Vardan Sedrakyan who had 2 pages (<http://www.facebook.com/SedrakyanVardan?fref=ts>), with a special group, called "Vardan Sedrakyan" (<http://www.facebook.com/groups/308742132551382/?ref=ts&fref=ts>), Andrias Ghukasyan («Ընտրություններ 2013. Ծրագիր ՀՀ Նախագահի համար»/ "Elections 2013: A Platform for the RA President"<http://www.facebook.com/andrias.2013?ref=ts&fref=ts>), and Aram Harutyunyan (<http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100005022541378>).

The candidate Arman Melikyan began his campaign with three Facebook pages, those being his page functioning before the campaign (<http://www.facebook.com/arman.melikyan.33?ref=ts&fref=ts>), the page he opened for a group created specifically for the campaign (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/395336770548625/?fref=ts>) and the one opened for the citizens of the RA living abroad (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Presidentialelection2013>).

Hrant Bagratyan also used his Google+ page, and here he posted content, already shared on his Facebook page.

The teams of S. Sargsyan, H. Bagratyan, R. Hovannisian and A. Ghukasyan actively used the YouTube to post self-produced videos onto the candidates' websites and their Facebook pages.

As the representatives of R. Hovannisian's headquarters reported, the candidate's promotion posters in different places the so-called "QR" code ("Quick Response"), enabling access to the candidate's website via the cell-phone from any location, to learn the latest news.

Besides all this, the Heritage Party disseminated information, related to the campaign through mailing lists.

## THE CAMPAIGN ON PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES', MEDIA OUTLETS' AND ACTIVE FACEBOOK USERS' PAGES

In essence, the scenario of an uninteresting campaign, which was largely announced before, failed. During the 26 days of the campaign unprecedented events followed one another: Andrias Ghukasyan went on a hunger strike in front of the National Academy building since the first day of the campaign and continued his action up to the declaration of the initial results of the vote. As solidarity to that step of his, rather than to his platform, Paruyr Hayrikyan went on a three-day hunger-strike in his house. On the very first day of the campaign, Arman Melikyan announced that he was terminating his campaign in its classical sense and was going to deal only with legal issues, mainly the extent to which Presidential elections could be legitimate if the real number of the RA electorate was misquoted. According to A. Melikyan, a large number of RA citizens, residing abroad, do not take part in the elections; however, their last names are there on the electoral registers and are made use of by the authorities to forge the elections. He created a special Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Presidentialelection2013>) especially for such citizens and called to the RA citizen voters, away from Armenia, to visit that page and mention the fact of their failure to participate in the elections, “thus assisting fair and legitimate elections and preventing the falsification of your own votes.” Later, on the Election Day, A. Melikyan announced that the number of such citizens exceeded one million. However, the page A. Melikyan opened specifically for this purpose brought together only 24 people who liked it.

Aram Harutyunyan addressed calls to all the candidates to withdraw their candidacies ten days prior to the elections and to leave only the incumbent President on the ballot, thus hindering the legitimization of his re-election; however those remained unanswered by the other candidates. On February 7<sup>th</sup> he went on a hunger strike in front of the CEC building and on the next day he submitted an application to withdraw.

On the last day of the campaign (February 16) Aram Harutyunyan addressed the all non-ruling candidates via his Facebook page: “Guys, you are late: you will be there on the ballots” (<http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100005022541378>).

At about midnight on January 31<sup>st</sup> candidate Paruyr Hayrikyan was shot at. This assassination attempt added up some seriousness to the campaign for a while. It seemed probable that Article 52 of the Constitution might be applied for the first time ever in the history of elections in Armenia. This Article established that in case of insurmountable obstacles created for one of the candidates, he/she could turn to the Constitutional Court with a request to postpone the elections for two weeks. As a sign of solidarity with P. Hayrikyan, some of the candidates, including S. Sargsyan, halted their campaign actions for a day. H. Bagratyan was the first to report on Hayrikyan's health condition on Facebook (first providing information, on the next day writing that he visited Hayrikyan in the hospital, saw him in person and that Hayrikyan's condition was satisfactory with nothing threatening his life).

On February 10<sup>th</sup>, contrary to his previously made assertions, P. Hayrikyan submitted an application to the Constitutional Court, requesting to put off the elections by two weeks, however withdrawing it on the next day. During the remaining 7 days the campaign proceeded along the original trends of development, accompanied by unprecedentedly active Facebook reactions.

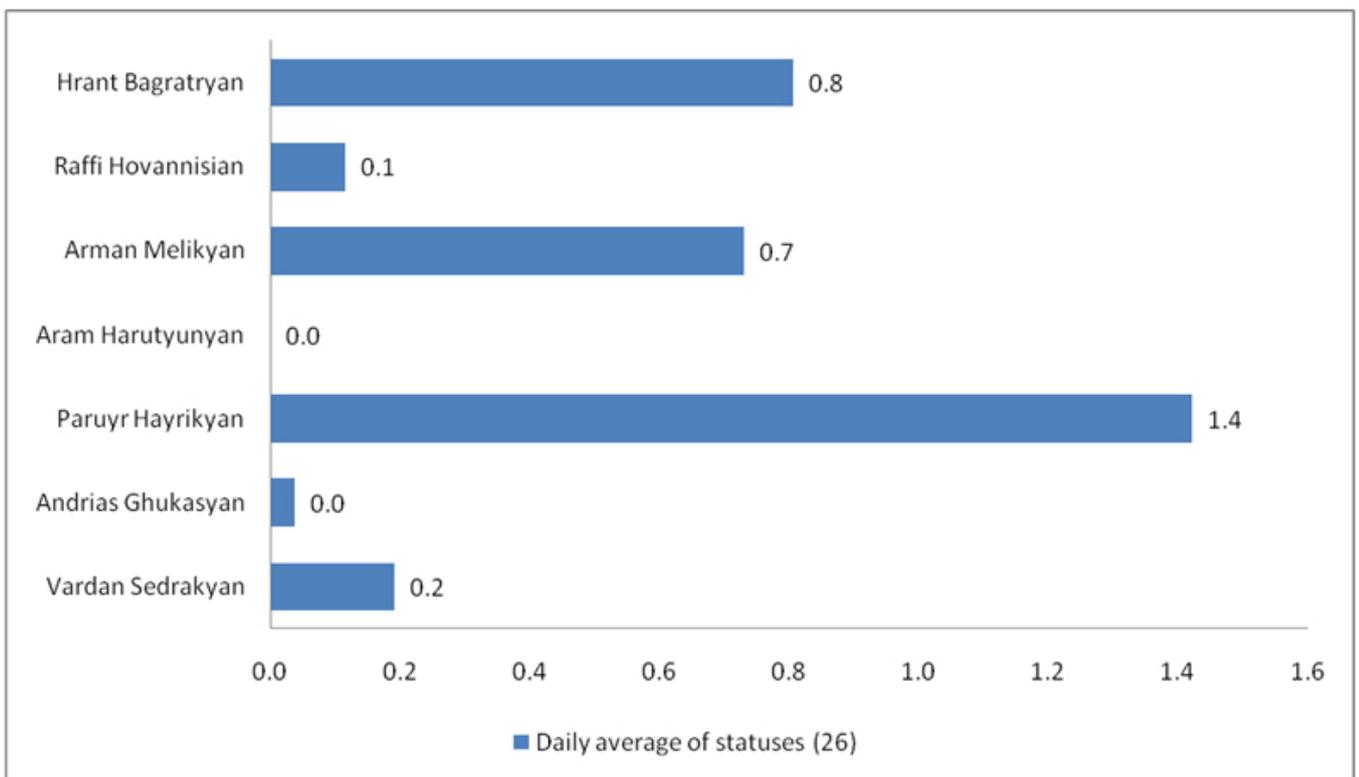
## Candidates' Campaign on Facebook: Degree of Activity and Interactivity

On January 21<sup>st</sup> the official campaign of the candidates was launched.

During 26 days candidates' Facebook audiences grew at different rates (See Appendix 1, Table 1) and displayed varied levels of activity.

If Aram Harutyunyan and Vardan Sedrakyan mainly shared materials about themselves, prepared by the mass media, Paruyr Hayrikyan, Hrant Bagratyan and Arman Melikyan stood out by authoring statuses of independent content.

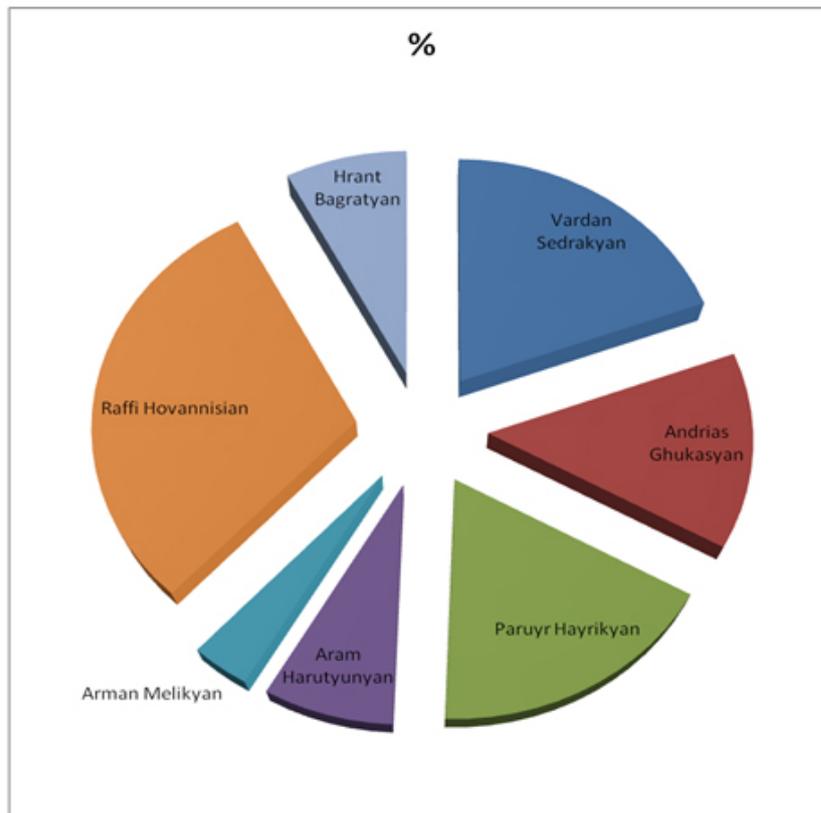
By the number of content pieces posted onto their Facebook pages Vardan Sedrakyan and Aram Harutyunyan had the lowest rates (See also Appendix 1, Table 2).



A different ranking order emerged due to the intensity of discussions unfolding on the candidates' pages and from the perspective of the candidates' participation in those discussions.

## Number of materials discussed on candidates' pages (%)

(January 21 – February 16)



Raffi Hovannisian's page mainly consisted of materials telling about him. The page was administered by representatives of his campaign headquarters. R. Hovannisian never participated personally in the discussions, taking place on his page. However, regardless of all the above, the highest indicator of users' real interactivity through discussions was recorded on his page (See also Appendix 1, Table 2).

The level of interactivity was considerably low in the groups opened by the candidates. We have not recorded any cases of commentary or discussion on any electoral material posted onto Vardan Sedrakyan's page. Comments were rather few in the group opened by Arman Melikyan (See Appendix 1, Table 3).

However, it should be noted that this tendency was quite characteristic of almost all Facebook groups in the previous year. In terms of intensity of discussions, Facebook groups yield to discussions unfolding on the pages of individuals, who are active Facebook users. The groups mainly function for disseminating information, not as a platform enabling discussions.

The candidates, who would go out to meet voters, R. Hovannisian, P. Hayrikyan, and H. Bagratyan, used their pages to inform people on the schedule, venue and time of their upcoming meetings.

## Hayrikyan's Ratings before and after the Assassination Attempt

During the campaign there were extensive opinions that the assassination attempt raised P. Hayrikyan's rating, since in the first 11 days of February he was constantly written and spoken about. In fact, information about P. Hayrikyan circulated intensively; however, this information and discussions related to his unwillingness to postpone the elections, then the actual postponing, and then the return to his original decision and so on. By the way, these discussions mostly happened not on his Facebook pages, but those of other users.

Our observations show that the assassination attempt against Hayrikyan did not acutely raise the number of likes of his page, at least to indicate solidarity with the victim of the assassination attempt.

P Hayrikyan wrote the following on this page on this occasion: "They say Hayrikyan was the one to be most seen on TV, but they forget that I was not sharing my thoughts, I was shown as a victim of a terror act" (February 11).

### Հայրիկեան Նախագահ - Hayrikyan for President

(<http://www.facebook.com/hayrikyanparuyr?fref=ts>) rating before the assassination attempt (January 21-31) and later (February 1-16)

Candidate	Date	Number of materials	Including, number of materials discussed by the users	%	Number of statuses	Average daily number of materials
Paruyr Hayrikyan	21-31.01.13	48	25	52%	21	4.4
	01 - 16.02.13	62	32	52%	16	3.6

Candidate	Number of Fans	
Paruyr Hayrikyan	21.01.13 <b>1903</b>	31.01.13 <b>2358</b>
	01.02.13 <b>2803</b>	16.02.13 <b>4035</b>

## What Were the Candidates' Materials about?

During the campaign 86 different issues were raised on the candidates' pages, all relating to 8 umbrella topics – election process, domestic political situation and freedoms, foreign relations, security/army/Karabakh, economic situation, social security/healthcare, environmental protection, education/culture. It was obvious that all the candidates, without any exceptions, covered the (formal) specificities of the electoral processes rather than the provisions they put forth in their own platforms and which they dwelt upon in their meetings with the electorate (See Appendix 1, graphic: Topics Raised on Candidates' Pages, as well as Tables 4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11).

This was, of course, conditioned by a number of unprecedented, totally unexpected and scandalous events, taking place in the course of the campaign.

Raffi Hovannisian, Hrant Bagratyan and Paruyr Hayrikyan shared their platforms onto their pages. Besides, H. Bagratyan and P. Hayrikyan additionally came up with statuses, referring to the major provisions in their platforms.

## Cross Messages via Facebook

In the course of the campaign the candidates made an extensive use of Facebook to make statements and send messages to each other through the statements made and materials shared on their pages. They used Facebook to evaluate not only their own propaganda tools, but also those of the other candidates, rather than to interact with general users.

Thus, there was a joint statement made by Hayrikyan – Bagratyan – Hovannisian on the electoral registers, followed by the response of the other candidate Arman Melikyan, qualifying this act as plagiarism. As a response to this, on January 31<sup>st</sup> Hayrikyan addressed a unique explanatory note to Melikyan with a bottom-line that they had forgotten to propose A. Melikyan to join it before disseminating that information.

In response to V. Sedrakyan's questioning of the sources H. Bagratyan got his honoraria from, the PR officer at H. Bagratyan headquarters K. Harutyunyan shared a statement onto V. Sedrakyan's page where she reported on the sources of Bagratyan's income and especially mentioned the taxes the candidate paid on those sums.

The hunger strike initiated by Andrias Ghukasyan which at least in the first week was being ignored on Facebook, later brought about actions of solidarity, with other candidates visiting him, but at the same time it raised suspicions that the hunger strike was fake, for it was impossible for a human being to stand hunger and cold for so many days (almost a month). The appeals of the RA Minister of Healthcare to have a checkup at hospital, and the calls and the requests made by different users to stop the hunger strike were useless. He interacted with the public through mass media interviews, and various announcements, posted on his page.

The prolonged hunger strike, initiated by A. Ghukasyan, brought about sarcastic comments by S. Sargsyan's supporters. Tigran Kocharyan, a Facebook user known by the nickname Elephant (Pigh), wrote: "Hayrikyan is not putting the elections off, Andrias, be quick with your hunger strike" (Tigran Kocharyan).

Later, he came back to the issue of the hunger strike: "I suggest that our TV stations should put on subtitles, saying "Don't repeat" when showing Andrias, for someone may be so stupid as to think that he can really go on a hunger strike without eating." (February 14)

On the same day the RPA member Karen Avagyan wrote about A. Ghukasyan's perseverance: "Because Ghukasyan does well at hunger strikes, and the hunger and deprivations are not reflected even in his medical tests, the Presidential candidate has made up his mind to extend his sufferings, taking part in the elections of Yerevan Elders' Council."

The debate on economic issues between Raffi Hovannisian and Hrant Bagratyan failed to take place, and it remained unclear whether Radio Liberty, who invited them to host this debate, had misunderstood the candidates or the candidates had misunderstood each other. Whatever the reason, in the end Hrant Bagratyan put an end to this distance messaging with an announcement on his Facebook page that he was ready to have a debate with Raffi Hovannisian on February 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup>.

Messages on the probability of P. Hayrikyan, H. Bagratyan and R. Hovannisian nominating a joint candidate were shared on Facebook. On his page Bagratyan expressed his attitude towards nominating a single candidate. He wrote: "Once Raffi Hovannisian said that in case he was elected, Hayrikyan would be on his right and Bagratyan on his left. I do not know the reason this statement was made for, but it may be perceived as nomination of a joint candidate, and part of the above-mentioned candidates' supporters may do some calculations and decide to cast their votes for Hovannisian. So, this means a (willy-nilly, whatever) theft of votes" (February 4).

P. Hayrikyan on Bagratyan: "I will not name concrete people, but those who say that we have discussed this issue (that of nominating a joint candidate – L.B.) are lying... Dear friend, who claims to be a scholar, when you get something, please, consider the content, not the quality of the paper. You did not have sufficiently appropriate background to give a substantial answer." (February 11)

In response, Bagratyan reacted on the same day: "It is Hayrikyan's choice to postpone the elections or not, but I am kinda sad, since I realize that the cooperation we launched will not take place. So many controversial things were said in relation to what happened to Paruyr, that I came to understand that this is not where I belong." February 11

This is how P. Hayrikyan put an end to this distance debate that each of them led on their own Facebook pages: "I revealed a new Hrant Bagratyan to myself and I felt sad, I was willing to be helpful to him. He is a traitor, since he did not even consult Levon Ter-Petrosyan's advice when he nominated himself for Presidency." (February 13)

## Mass Media in the Campaign

Two of the five monitored media outlets had technical problems in the course of the campaign. During the first week of the campaign (January 21 - 27), the activities of Zham.am website were disrupted because of a hacker attack.

In the last two days of the campaign (February 15 – 16) the 1in.am Facebook page was blocked. As we were informed from the editorial office of 1in.am, it was because of technical and not political reasons.

These media outlets joined the campaign with audiences (those who liked the page) of different sizes and with varied levels of interactivity (reactions to the content on the page – Comments) (See Appendix 2, Table 16).

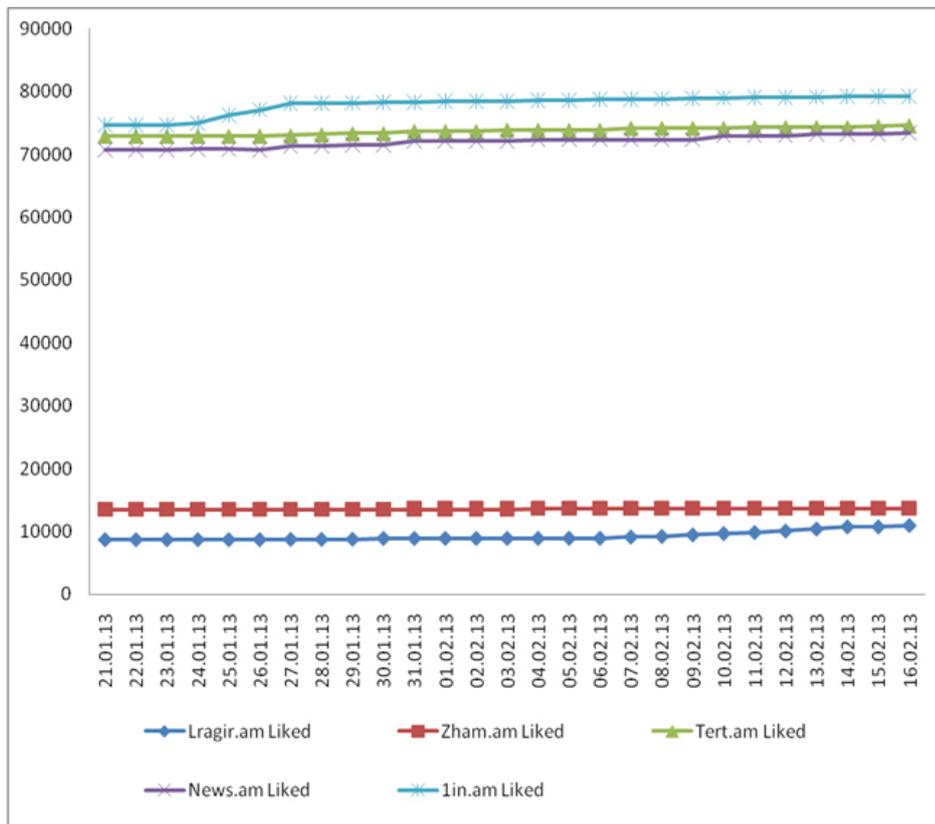
These audiences constantly grew. The picture was different with regard to the number of reactions given to the content shared on the pages and displayed in any form (Likes, shares or comments). In the course of the campaign the number of users who reacted to the content of Lragir.am page grew unevenly, by almost 6 times.

Declines have been recorded in the indicators of the first and last days of the campaign in the number of reactions to the content on the Facebook pages of Tert.am and News.am. By the way, in the course of the campaign Tert.am shared considerably fewer materials on its Facebook page than the others. The editor explained to us that this could be accounted for by the fact that unlike other media outlets already before the elections they started to implement a different policy. They share not every piece or maximum number of materials on the main website, but those they assumed might be of interest to their Facebook audience. However, on the Election Day Tert.am presented content pieces on Facebook that would in no way be fewer in number than those, shared by other outlets.

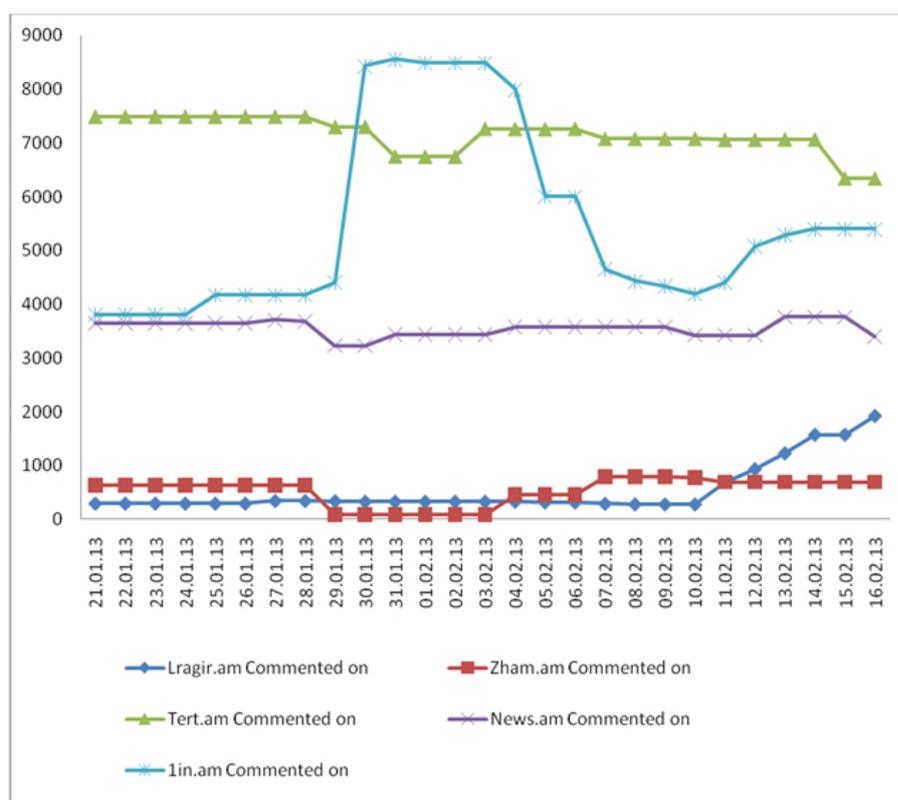
General Audiences of Monitored Media

(January 21-February 1-16)

Number of users who reacted to the content of monitored media outlets  
(January 21-February 16)



**Number of users who reacted to the content of monitored media outlets  
(January 21-February 16)**



In the course of the campaign, the vast majority of the materials shared onto the Facebook pages of these media outlets referred to the elections. All the media outlets recorded a high degree of interest in the materials on elections. In other words, the vast majority of the materials on elections were somehow reacted to by the audience (See Appendix 2, Table 17).

In the course of the campaign the media outlets referred mainly to the topic of electoral processes, highlighting the specific features of the candidates' campaigns, their evaluation of their own and others' campaigns and the estimates of probable victory. Among the materials, relating to the candidates' meetings with the electorate, the lion's share were the ones on the general course of the meetings, with fewer materials covering topics, specifically addressed by the candidates (See Appendix 2, Graphic 2).

Exclusive content, authored by the candidates or their supporters and shared on the relevant Facebook pages, continuously made its way to the media outlets.

In the course of the campaign the comments on and evaluations of the electoral processes related mainly to the candidates involved in the race, however there were quite numerous evaluations of Parliamentary political forces (PAP, ANC, ARF, fewer of the Free Democrats) acting as passive observers.

It was easy to notice the tendency of trying to present negative and discrediting evaluations (Black PR), addressed at this or that candidate, by the candidates themselves. At the press conferences the candidates would refer to other candidates' already made evaluations of them at mass media's request. A typical example could be:

The response given by Vardan Sedrakyan to the question on his activities, voiced at one of Hrant Bagratyan's press conferences: "It is not clear whose game he (V. Sedrakyan – L.B.) is playing. Is he playing for the authorities?" At another press conference V. Sedrakyan answered as follows: "I have not referred to his (H. Bagratyan's – L.B.) miserable and piteous person in all my press conferences" (News.am).

## Black PR, Political Humor and Political Sarcasm in the Course of the Campaign

During the campaign the degree of Facebook users' activity arose even more. They had become members of the campaign, sharing the content that appeared in different media outlets and evaluating them.

A number of unprecedented happenings occurred in the course of the campaign, resonated among Facebook users in the form of political humor and sarcasm.

Formally the RPA candidate S. Sargsyan was not present on Facebook, because he did not have a page of his own. However, he had become the main hero of quite rapidly shared demotivators and political sarcasm pieces on the network throughout the campaign. Those were occasionally responded to either directly or in the form of Black PR counteractions, taken by S. Sargsyan's supporters. A number of stand-alone expressions, made by him or voters participating in the meetings, became major political memes in this time period ("Why on earth did you come here?" "Cucumbers grow topsy-turvy," "Cheburashka," "We'll hit it").

Those memes have various etymologies. Here is the story behind the origin of the most popular one: it was the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the creation of the RA Army (January 28th) when the top administration of the RA, headed by S. Sargsyan, visited Yerablur. Here a woman approached Serzh Sargsyan, crying and telling him that she lived in dire straits. In response, Serzh Sargsyan said: "Why on earth did you come here to spoil our celebration?"

As a sign of protest to such a response, given by the candidate, an initiative immediately appeared on Facebook, called "Why on earth did you come here?"

(<https://www.facebook.com/pages/%D4%B5%D5%AF%D5%A5%D5%AC-%D5%A5%D5%BD-%D5%BD%D5%BF%D5%A5%D5%B2-%D5%B8%D6%80-%D5%AB%D5%B6%D5%B9-%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%A5%D5%BD/542152982476178?fref=ts>), which in its turn would add up examples of this phrase as suggested by other users on various occasions.

The quantitative indicators of the interactivity on the page testify to the volumes of the turnover of this expression made by S. Sargsyan. These figures show that the ones who shared various demotivators and caricatures from this page and commented on them outnumbered those who liked it (7.810).

By the way, probably coming from the turnover of this expression on Facebook, S. Sargsyan smiled at a reporter asking him a question on the Election Day and replied: "Why on earth are you asking me that question?"

In reply to the question asked in Gyumri on the chances of his victory, S. Sargsyan answered with an expression "We will hit as much as you wish." A member of his headquarters and RPA, an active Facebook user and Minister of Education and Science A. Ashotyan made a subsequent attempt to mitigate the effect of this phrase. Here is what he wrote on his page: "Being the obvious favorite candidate in the RA Presidential elections, Serzh Sargsyan and his team do not need to make extensive and additional efforts, endeavors, or to apply new political technologies. This is the very context in which we should

consider Serzh Sargsyan’s statement, made in Shirak yesterday and the hint that his team and he have made a conscious choice in following this option in the electoral race, since they have appropriate rating, a reserve of anticipated growth in the number of voters and certainly much larger organizational and innovative supplies. He and his team ARE NOT APPLYING the FULL potential of their technological and innovative arsenal” (See Appendix 1, Table 15).

We could provide examples of political humor and sarcasm also with regard to the campaign led by Andrias Ghukasyan, R. Hovannisian and P. Hayrikyan. In the first two cases they normally come in the form of political humor. For example, when Radio Liberty reported in its “A Day with Andrias” broadcast that the latter had gone home for a short while to wash, the users reacted to this broadcast with jokes on the topic of “Enjoy Your Bath, Andrias.”

Or, Raffi Hovannisian’s habit to hug and to shake hands with everyone he came across in the campaign generated a series of jokes on the topic “Have you kissed all, Raffi?”

In P. Hayrikyan’s case there was mainly political sarcasm, since he changed his mind several times whether to submit his application on postponing the elections to the Constitutional Court or not. And P. Hayrikyan’s intensive explanatory writing on his Facebook page for days on end did not make the sarcasm any milder.

Examples of this kind occupy a special place on the candidates’ pages in the Black PR mass on Facebook. It is typical that by its quantitative indicators the Black PR examples sometimes outnumbered cases of self-promotion (See Appendix 1, Tables 12, 13, 14).

## SILENCE DAY (FEBRUARY 17)

On the eve of February 17 the final Facebook topic discussed in the last hours of the last day of campaign was the Silence Day. The users in Armenia, who actively discussed the electoral processes, began to remind one another of the start of the Silence Day and the “obligation” not to say anything on elections any more.

“Do you know what Facebook looks like now? It looks like everybody calling to each other to be silent in the classroom, but in reality no one keeps silent,” a user wrote, describing the situation (<http://www.facebook.com/ani.smbatyan?ref=ts&fref=ts>).

Part of the users began to share music videos and other non-political content. The others announced of their “civil disobedience” and continued to bring forth election topics.

In the first hour of the Silence Day there were also media outlet editors who shared materials on election topics, published in their outlets in the course of the campaign.

On Silence Day the advertisement section on Facebook continued to promote the pages of Presidential candidates Vardan Sedrakyan and Paruyr Hayrikyan.

On Silence Day the statement made by Paruyr Hayrikyan’s supporters and already posted a few days before was re-shared onto his page.

Two materials were posted on another candidate's, Andrias Ghukasyan's page: one being his photo with Hrant Bagratyan who visited the former at the site of his hunger strike and the other being his interview for a news website on the previous day (<http://iravaban.net/2013/02/16> Answer: What is the RA Presidential Candidate's Notion of an Anti-Corruption Armenia?)

On Silence Day the RPA made an announcement that S. Sargsyan yielded his right to have his own proxies located between two commission members on Election Day to H. Bagratyan and R. Hovhannisyanyan. This was taken up by Tert.am and was posted on its website and the outlet's Facebook page (<http://tert.am/am/news/2013/02/17/serzh-sargsyan/>, <http://www.facebook.com/TERTam.arm?fref=ts>).

These were the violations we revealed on Facebook on Silence Day.

## ELECTION DAY (FEBRUARY 18)

All the three major players, both the candidates, and the mass media and the Facebook users actively covered the election process on Facebook on Election Day. The Facebook users reported after the formula of "I voted and I shared on Facebook all I saw at the polling station." As a result of the extensive citizen journalism, the Armenian segment of Facebook turned into a multi-content platform where it was possible to get information on the events of the day, occurring not only in the capital, but in other settlements, too.

The photos of various ballots, shared on Facebook by the so-called "Army for Invalid Ballots" (the ballots, deliberately made invalid by the voters) drew special attention. They were presumably taken by cell-phones in the booths. The photos shared on Facebook contained various boycotting messages: "Don't falsify impertinently," "I am not sold." There were ballots bearing the word "Cheburashka," already turned into a meme and so on. There was even a case when the voter ate up his ballot in front of the members of the commission right at the polling station.

At the end of the day along with a number of media outlets and candidates the users shared preliminary information on the results of the elections from different regions, thus providing the summary of the events of the day on Facebook.

At the very first minutes of voting (just past midnight of February 17) the first material of the day appeared on Raffi Hovannisian's Facebook page, which called Hovannisian's proxies to be alert during the vote, since there was information that in order to forge the elections the authorities intended to bring in groups of citizens from marzes to the capital and to hold the forged voting by means of the so-called "additional electoral registers." This was the first comment, related to the Election Day shared on the Facebook pages of any of the 7 Presidential candidates.

Some of the Presidential candidates covered the Election Day on their Facebook pages, too. This was an attempt to spread information speedily and extensively. Obviously the most active of all was Raffi Hovannisian's page where the largest number of materials, relating to the Election Day, was posted. There were references to the Day of Elections also on the pages of Andrias Ghukasyan, Arman Melikyan, Hrant Bagratyan and Paruyr Hayrikyan (See Appendix 3, Table 18).

There was absolutely no material on the Election Day on Vardan Sedrakyan's and Aram Harutyunyan's pages, candidate, who voluntarily withdrew from the elections. The latter, as it became known from his

own page, was having his birthday party on the Election Day and answered no to the question “Are you going to elections tomorrow?” asked the day before.

Arman Melikyan was the second candidate who continued to boycott, not going to the polling station on the Election Day either.

Andrias Ghukasyan, too, announced of his inability to go to the polling station because of the weakness caused by the prolonged hunger strike. His representatives were the ones who continued to post materials onto his page on the Election Day.

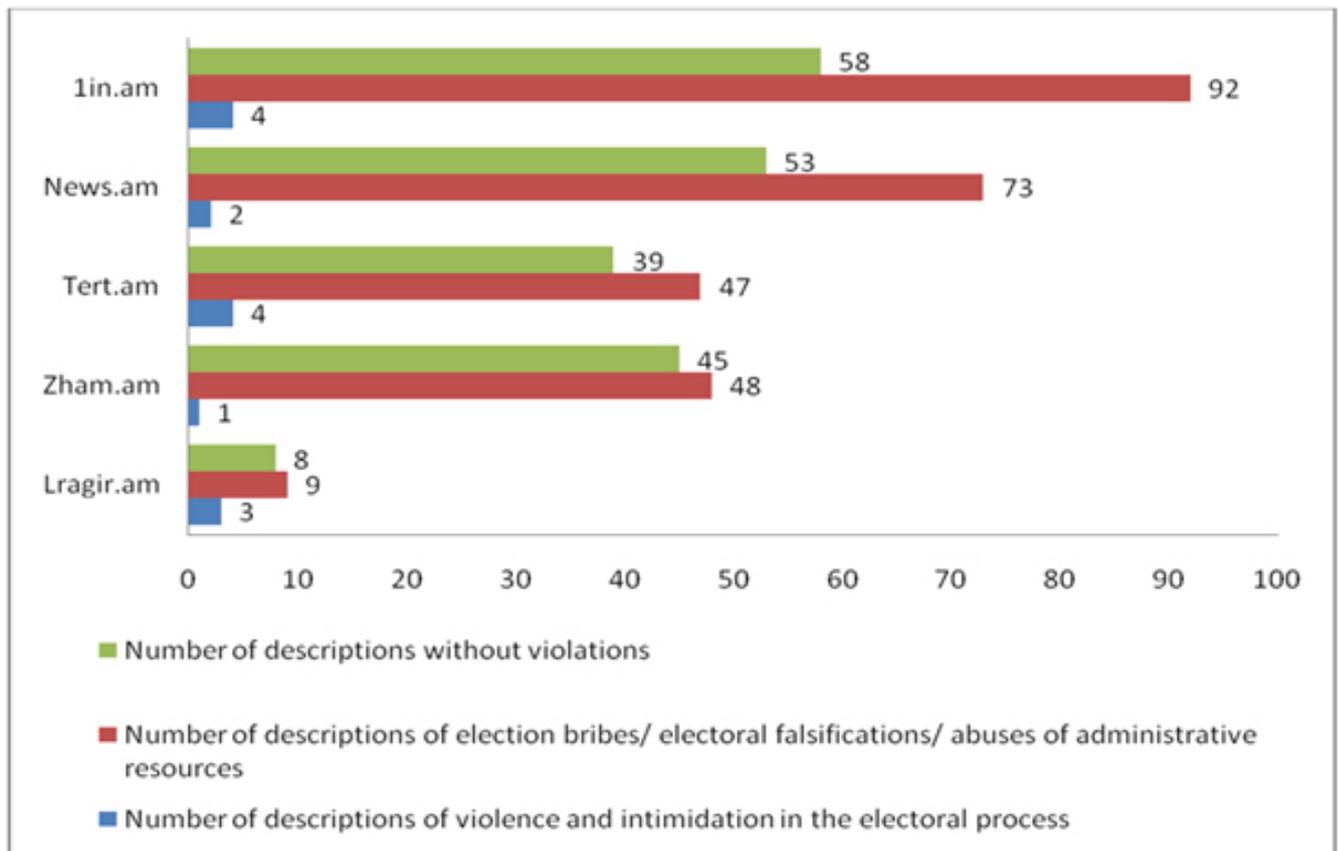
Back in the course of the campaign Facebook users mostly shared videos to show the abuse of administrative resources by the candidate of the ruling party. For example, videos were shared with two school headmasters who propagated to vote for S. Sargsyan among the parents of the school children. Or the video with high-schoolers, recruited for a meeting with S. Sargsyan at the time of regular classes. The response of the RA Minister of Education and Science, an RPA member Armen Ashotyan was immediate. An administrative penalty was taken against the headmasters, and he qualified these endeavors of politicizing the education system for the sake of S. Sargsyan as disservice to their candidate.

Not only the so-called traditional media, but also the Facebook comments became sources of fact collection on electoral bribes and other electoral violations by the law-enforcing bodies. Thus, on February 17 the head of the Asparez Journalists’ Club L. Barseghyan made a statement where he informed that the Police tried to get additional information from the representatives of their club in relation to the comments they made on Facebook on the electoral bribes, given out in Gyumri (<https://www.facebook.com/levon.barseghyan/posts/10200568311919662>).

However, the topic of election bribes, electoral violations and the abuse of administrative resources became noticeably spread on Facebook on the Day of Election, this time due to the materials shared not only on the mass media, but also Presidential candidates’ pages (See Appendix 3, Table 19).

The vast majority of materials shared on the pages of the media outlets and the candidates on the day of the elections referred to various electoral violations and their locations (specifying the names of the polling stations).

To compare, for example, we should state that only in Zham.am, from among the monitored media outlets, there was a discussion on the developments at a polling station without any description of an election violation (See Appendix 3, Tables 20, 21, 22, 23).



R. Hovannisian's page stood out by its number of descriptions of various election violation manifestations.

From among the Facebook pages of all Presidential candidates, Raffi Hovannisian's page was the one that bore the largest number of polling stations where election violations had been recorded.

A total of 65 different names of polling stations where violations had taken place were presented on the pages of all the candidates.

In the media outlets we found 139 names of polling stations where election violations took place (See Appendix 3, Tables 20 and 23).

## THUS,

- We revealed a varied use of diverse possibilities Facebook has by different candidates, completely different examples of varied behavior by the candidates, messages addressed to the public and one another, with examples ranging from the simple dissemination of diverse information about themselves via Facebook and sharing the materials published by mass media to personally sharing their own perspectives, interacting with the electorate and inviting one another via Facebook to debates.
- It was impossible to get an idea on the number of real supporters or the voters who voted for the given candidate on the Election Day, judging from the number of the so-called Facebook audiences of these Presidential candidates. But, on the other hand, the number of Raffi Hovannisian's fans abruptly arose starting in the last few days of the campaign (15090 likes on the last day of the campaign and about 20000 likes in the two days following the Election Day). This

growth in the number of likes proves the fact that Hovannisian enjoyed those people's support.

- We recorded that on Facebook social network all the three players were active on Facebook at all the stages of the electoral processes: both those who were to be elected – the candidates, and those who were obliged to cover the developments due to their status – the mass media, and those who were to make a choice and vote – the voters.
- The latter participated in the making of Facebook campaigns, too, by their comments and statuses, disseminating various opinions and evaluations during the course of the campaign that was in some aspects unprecedented in the history of Presidential elections in Armenia.
- In that regard, the Armenian segment of Facebook social network was unprecedentedly active, too, reflecting an incomparably wider versatility than the traditional mass media.
- What was the Silence Day on Facebook like and who are obliged to follow compliance with the requirements of the day? There is no answer to this question in the legislation. Besides, it is not clear whether it should be considered a violation if the head of a media outlet or the reporter continues to post campaign materials on their personal pages. Or should it be considered a violation of the election code provision if such conduct is practiced by the so-called ordinary user? Aren't the Facebook pages formally personal space? But in fact they are also public propaganda tools.

## APPENDIX 1

## OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN - CANDIDATES

**Table 1. Facebook Audiences of Candidates and Possibilities of Interactivity on their Pages  
(January 21 – February 16, 2013)**

Candidates	Likes		Friends		Followers		Data on the page
	21.01.13	16.02.13	21.01.13	16.02.13	21.01.13	16.02.13	
Vardan Sedrakyan	4702	5324					
Andrias Ghukasyan	2055	2101					
Paruyr Hayrikyan	1903	4035					
Aram Harutyunyan			506	1311			
Arman Melikyan			520	681			
Raffi Hovannisian	8134	15090					
Hrant Bagratyan	1613	3228					

The page is closed for other users' materials
The page is open for other users' materials

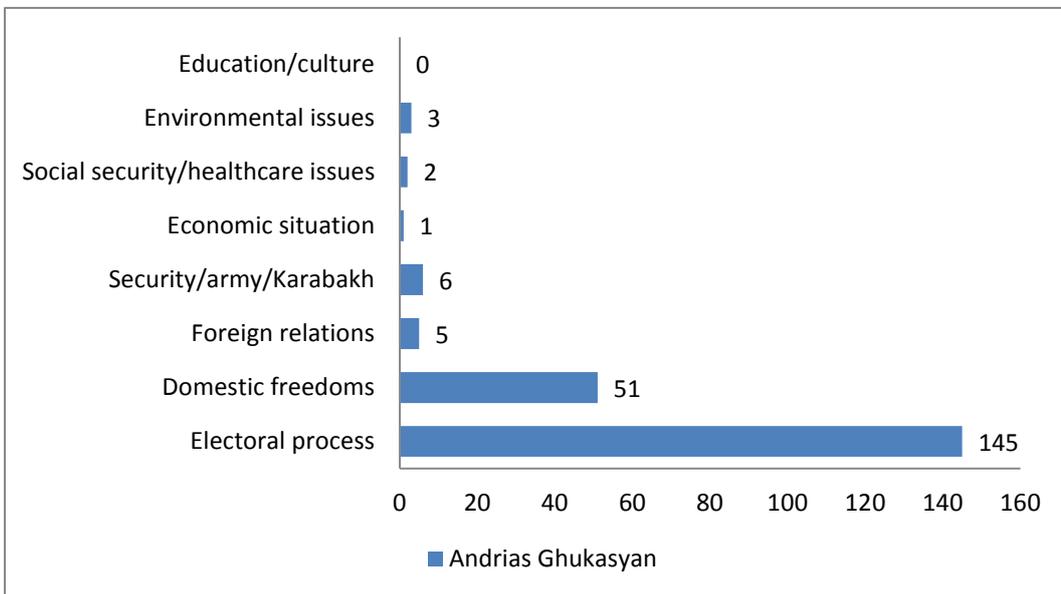
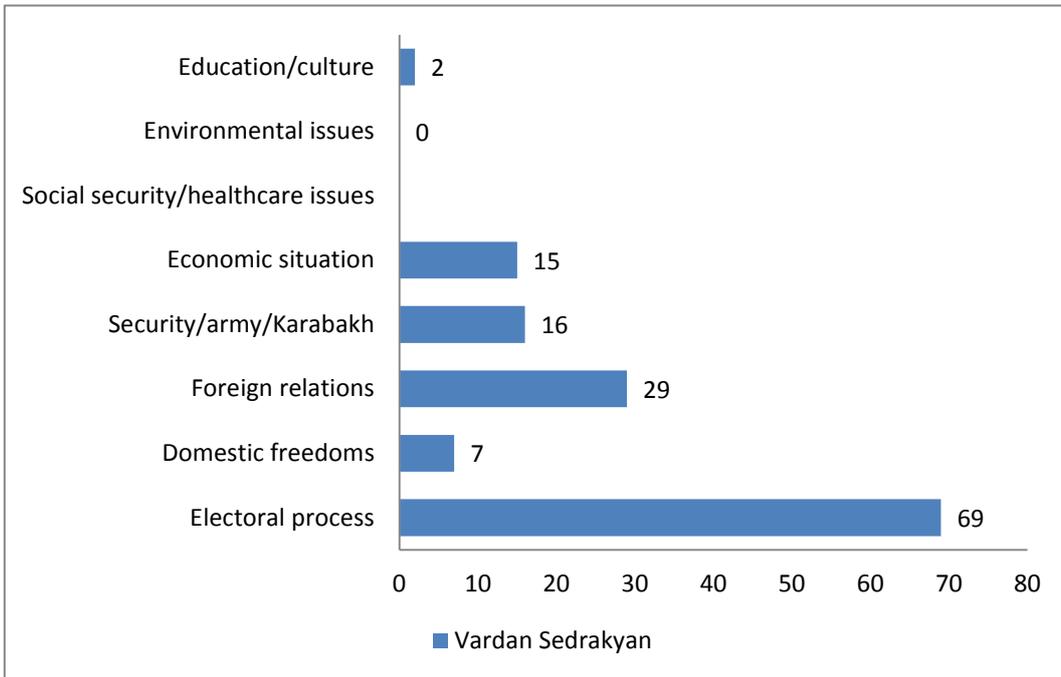
**Table 2. Indices for Interactivity on Candidates' Pages****(January 21 – February 16, 2013)**

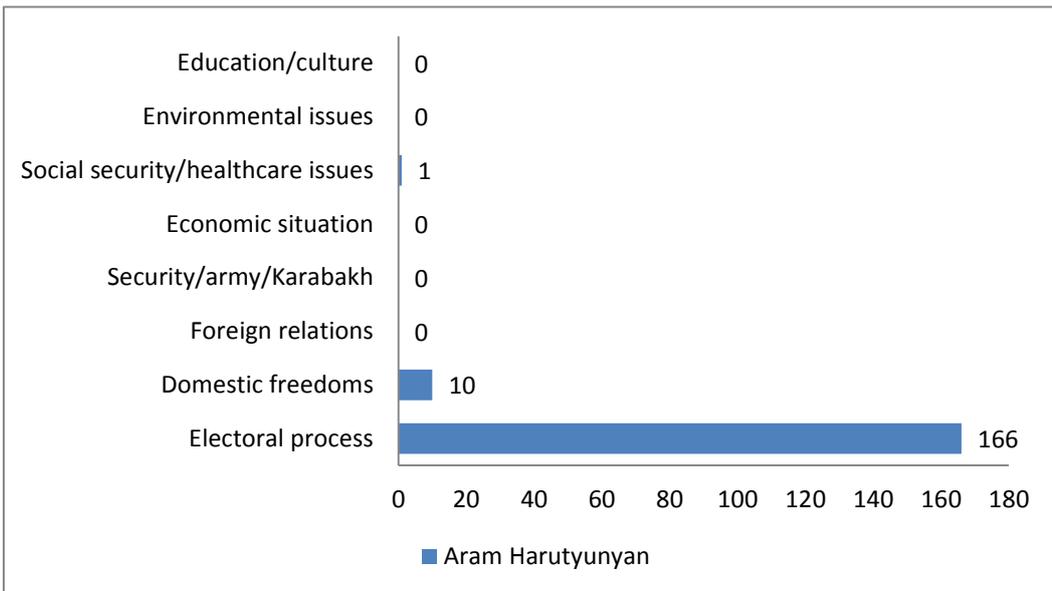
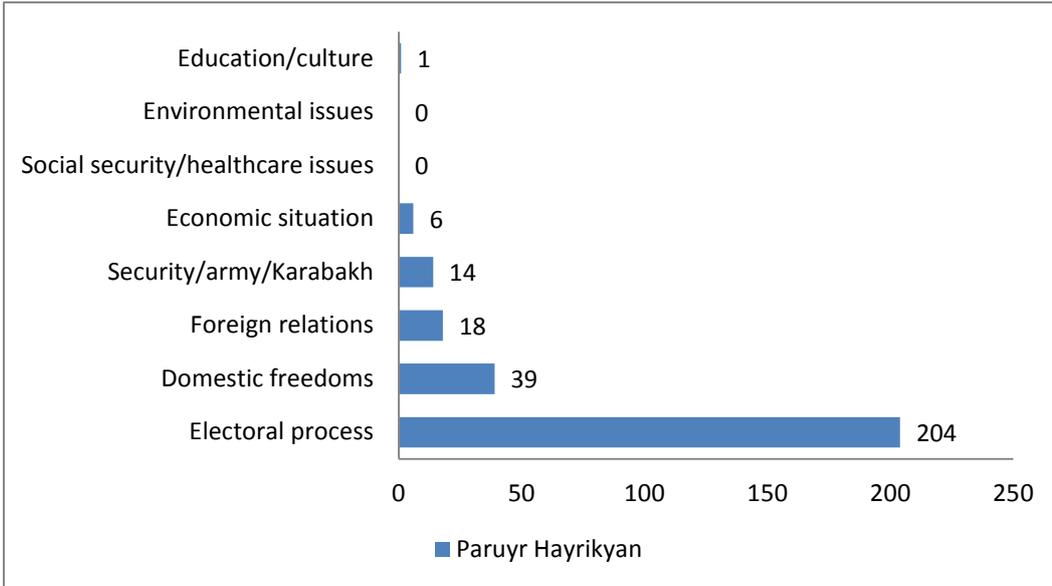
<b>Candidates</b>	<b>Number of materials</b>	<b>Number of commented materials without the candidate's comments</b>	<b>Number of commented materials with the candidate's comments</b>	<b>Total number of commented materials</b>	<b>%</b>
Vardan Sedrakyan	68	38	1	39	57%
Andrias Ghukasyan	113	45	1	46	41%
Paruyr Hayrikyan	110	54	3	57	52%
Aram Harutyunyan	74	17	0	17	23%
Arman Melikyan	201	9	12	21	10%
Raffi Hovannisian	265	239	0	239	90%
Hrant Bagratyan	198	44	1	45	23%

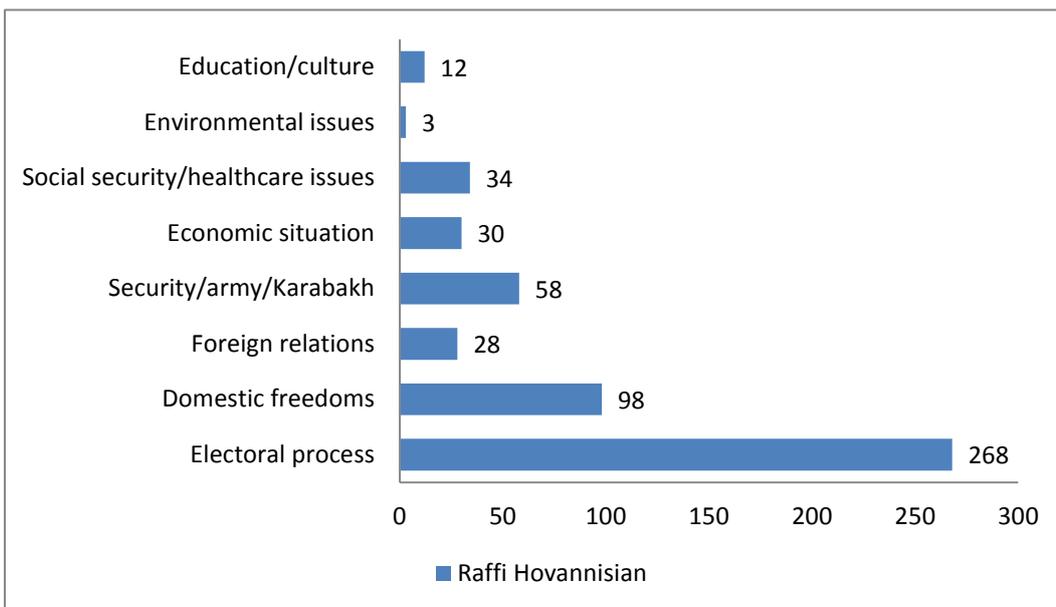
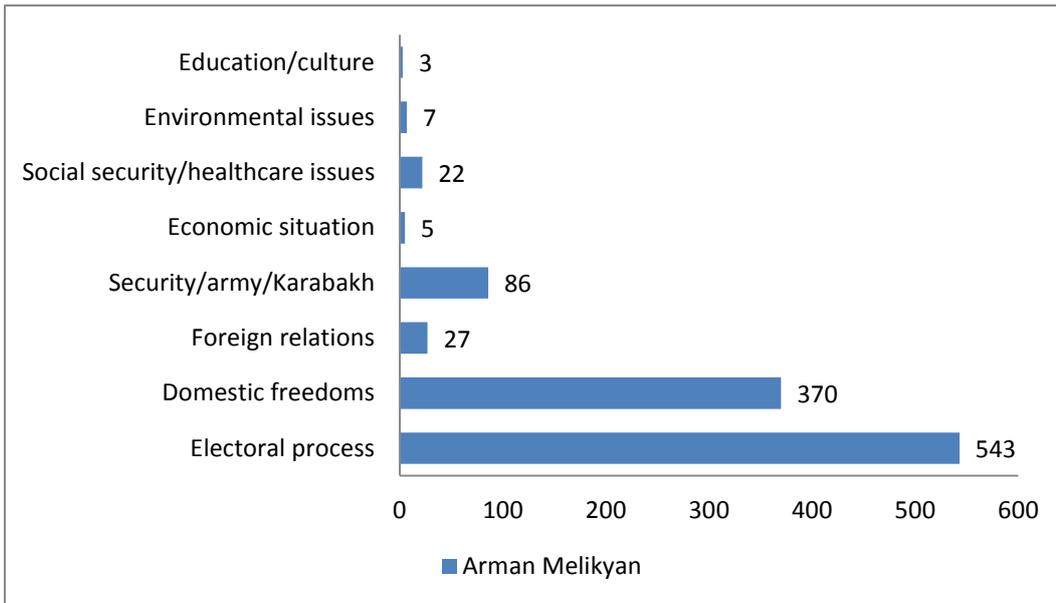
**Table 3. Activities in Candidates' Facebook Groups**

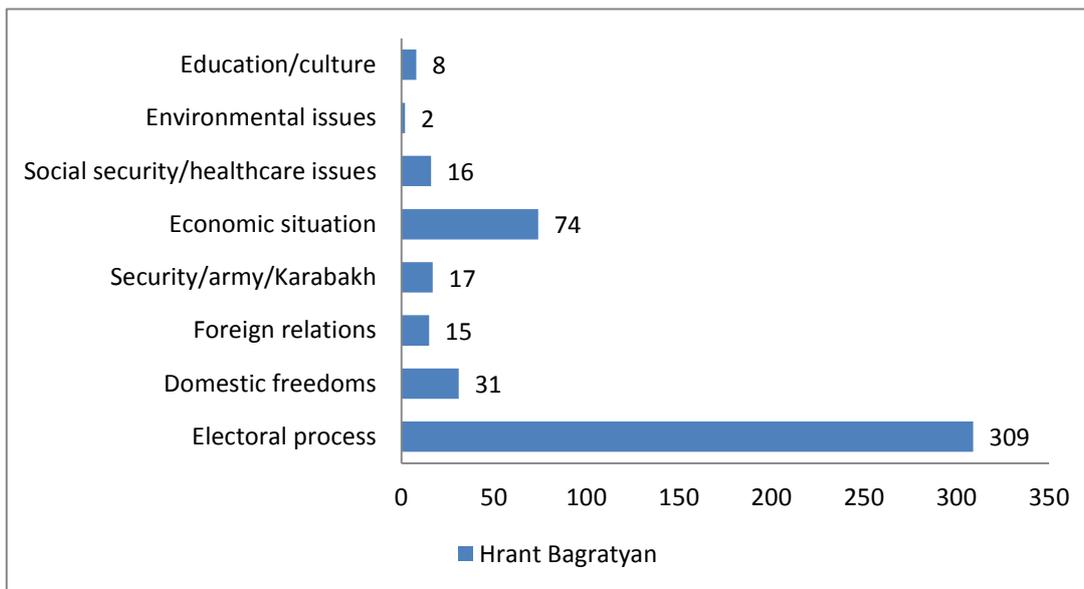
<b>Facebook groups</b>	<b>Number of members</b>		<b>Number of materials</b>	<b>Commented materials</b>
	21.01.13	16.02.13		
Arman Melikyan	495	478	413	16
Vardan Sedrakyan	1697	1737	128	0

**Graphic 1. Issues Raised on Candidates' Pages  
(January 21 – February 16, 2013)**









**Table 4. Issues Covered in Materials on Electoral Processes and Number of References to Them**

Issue	Number of references
1. Nomination of candidates	39
2. Participation format	21
3. Course of campaign	421
4. Forms of campaign	13
5. Electoral register	120
6. Parliamentary Government	2
7. Proportional or majoritarian system	2
8. Evaluations given by other countries and international organizations (observing missions)	22
9. Support for this or that candidate by external forces	9
10. Surveys	30
11. Candidates' ratings	6
12. Electoral violations	75
13. Forged elections	85
14. CEC	68
15. Election bribe	33

16. Abuse of administrative resources	41
17. Appealing election results	11
18. Boycotting elections	128
19. Campaign struggle	1
20. Electoral Platform	79
21. Electoral forgeries	22
22. Violence and oppression in the electoral process	107

**Table 5. Issues Covered in Materials on Domestic Freedoms and Number of References to Them**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number of references</b>
1. State	8
2. Constitution	39
3. Legitimacy	97
4. Democratic developments	13
5. Rights	47
6. Civil society	19
7. Independence of the judicial system	21
8. Corruption	28
9. Freedom of speech	19
10. Mass media	33
11. Change of Regime through elections	16
12. Justice	44
13. Impunity	13
14. Crime	11
15. Coalescence of power and business	21
16. Power	85
17. Opposition	20
18. Society	38
19. Description/evaluation of political situation	34

**Table 6 . Issues Covered in Materials on Foreign Relations and Number of References to Them**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number of references</b>
1. Foreign policy orientations	27
2. Relations with different countries and international organizations	85
3. The Diaspora	10

**Table 7. Issues Covered in Materials on Security/Army/Karabakh and Number of References to Them**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number of references</b>
1. Force or figure, ensuring security	27
2. Different security issues	10
3. Demographic situation	2
4. Migration	61
5. Challenges	3
6. Army	30
7. Conscription	1
8. Situation in the army	12
9. Karabakh conflict	51

**Table 8. Issues Covered in Materials on the Economic Situation and Number of References to Them**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number of references</b>
1. Fake indices of economic development	2
2. Taxes	28
3. Tax legislation	5
4. Budget	35
5. Branches of economy	32
6. Monopolies	7
7. Small and medium sized business	22

**Table 9 . Issues Covered in Materials on Social Security/Healthcare and Number of References to Them**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number of references</b>
1. Basket of goods and poverty	9
2. Stratification of the society	3
3. Minimum wages	6
4. Bonuses	1
5. Pensions	12
6. Healthcare issues	7
7. Corruption in healthcare system	2
8. Price rise	2
9. Poverty	28
10. Unemployment	8

**Table 10. Issues Covered in Materials on Environmental Protection and Number of References to Them**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number of references</b>
1. Environmental activity	3
2. Mines	3
3. Use of natural resources	1
4. Sevan	2
5. Protection of reservoirs	2
6. Environmental situation	4

**Table 11. Issues Covered in Materials on Education/Culture and Number of References to Them**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number of references</b>
1. Ministry and Minister of Culture	1
2. Preservation of different cultural values	2
3. Ministry of Education	1
4. Higher educational institutions	2
5. Schools	2
6. Scholarships	2
7. Level of education	6
8. Education competitiveness	1
9. Science	7
10. Politicization of education	2

**Table 12. Self-Promotion on Candidates' Pages and PR Ensured by Others**

<b>Candidates</b>	<b>Self-Promotion</b>	<b>PR ensured by others</b>	<b>Total</b>
Vardan Sedrakyan	11	2	<b>13</b>
Andrias Ghukasyan	3	9	<b>12</b>
Paruyr Hayrikyan	12	7	<b>19</b>
Aram Harutyunyan	9	1	<b>10</b>
Arman Melikyan	4	1	<b>5</b>
Raffi Hovannisian	6	0	<b>6</b>
Hrant Bagratyan	15	25	<b>40</b>

**Table 13. Black PR on Candidates' Pages**

<b>Candidates</b>	<b>Black PR from the candidate</b>	<b>Black PR from other users</b>	<b>Total</b>
Vardan Sedrakyan	21	0	<b>21</b>
Andrias Ghukasyan	22	0	<b>22</b>
Paruyr Hayrikyan	3	3	<b>6</b>
Aram Harutyunyan	83	0	<b>83</b>
Arman Melikyan	62	0	<b>62</b>
Raffi Hovannisian	5	1	<b>6</b>
Hrant Bagratyan	29	14	<b>43</b>

**Table 14. Self-Promotion and Black PR on Candidates' Pages**

<b>Candidates</b>	<b>Black PR</b>	<b>Self-Promotion</b>
Raffi Hovannisian	6	6
Hrant Bagratyan	43	15
Paruyr Hayrikyan	6	12
Andrias Ghukasyan	22	3
Arman Melikyan	62	4
Vardan Sedrakyan	21	11
Aram Harutyunyan	83	9

**Table 15. Indices of active Facebook users, supporting S. Sargsyan or affiliating with the RPA, during the campaign**

**Daily average of materials and statuses (26 days)**  
**(Only materials with independent content posted in the appropriate column on the timeline are considered statuses.)**

<b>Political figure</b>	<b>Number of materials on electoral process</b>	<b>Including own statuses</b>	<b>Daily average of statuses (26)</b>	<b>%</b>
Karen Avagyan	90	39	1.5	43%
Armen Ashotyan	86	47	1.8	55%

## APPENDIX 2

### OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN – MEDIA OUTLETS

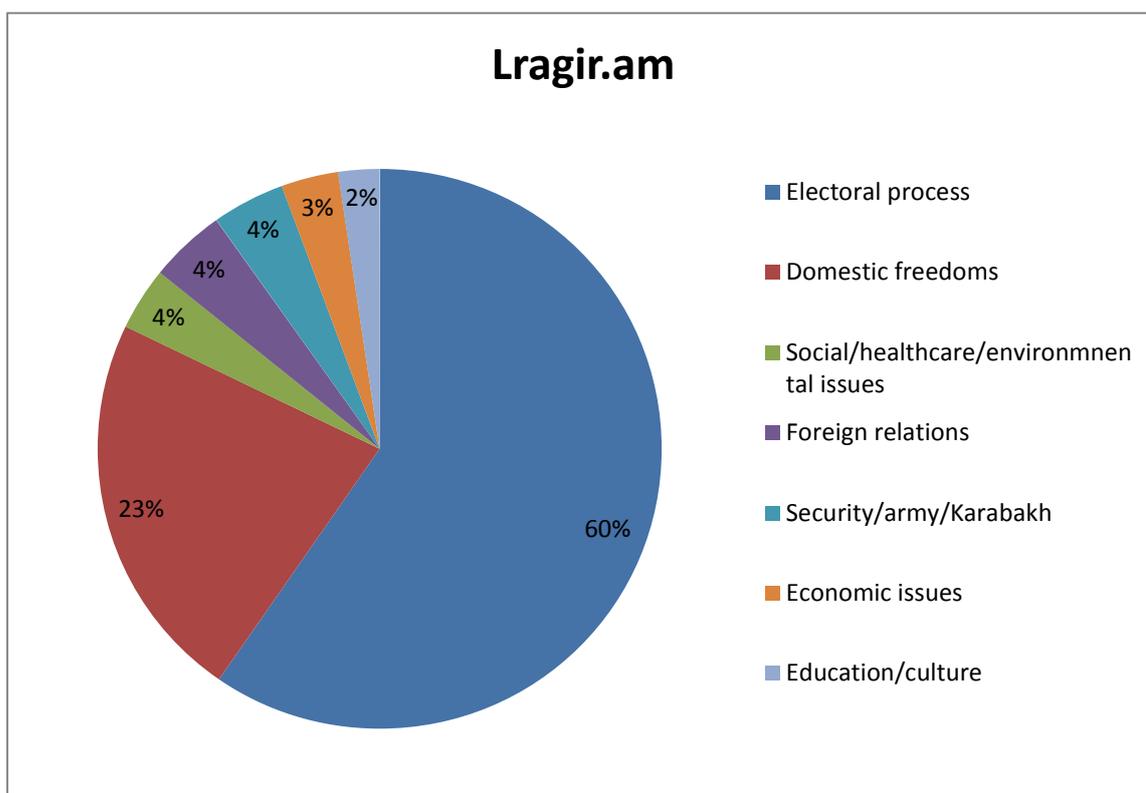
**Table 16. Audiences of Media Outlets During the Official Campaign**

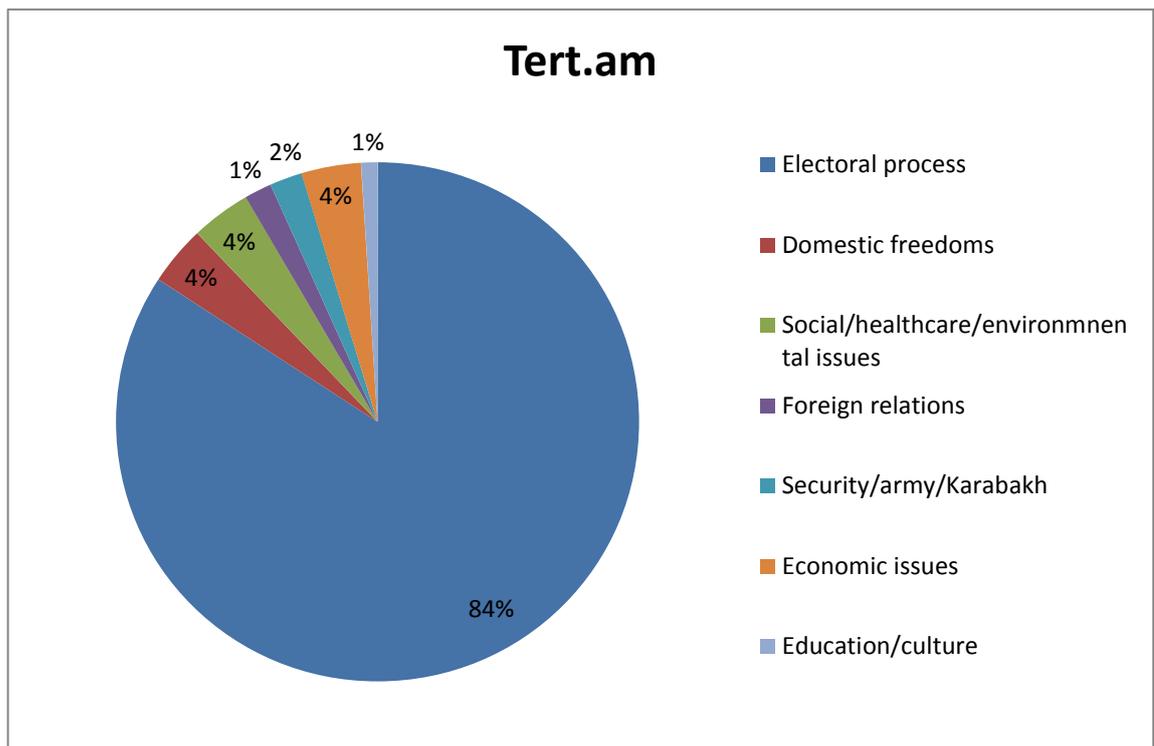
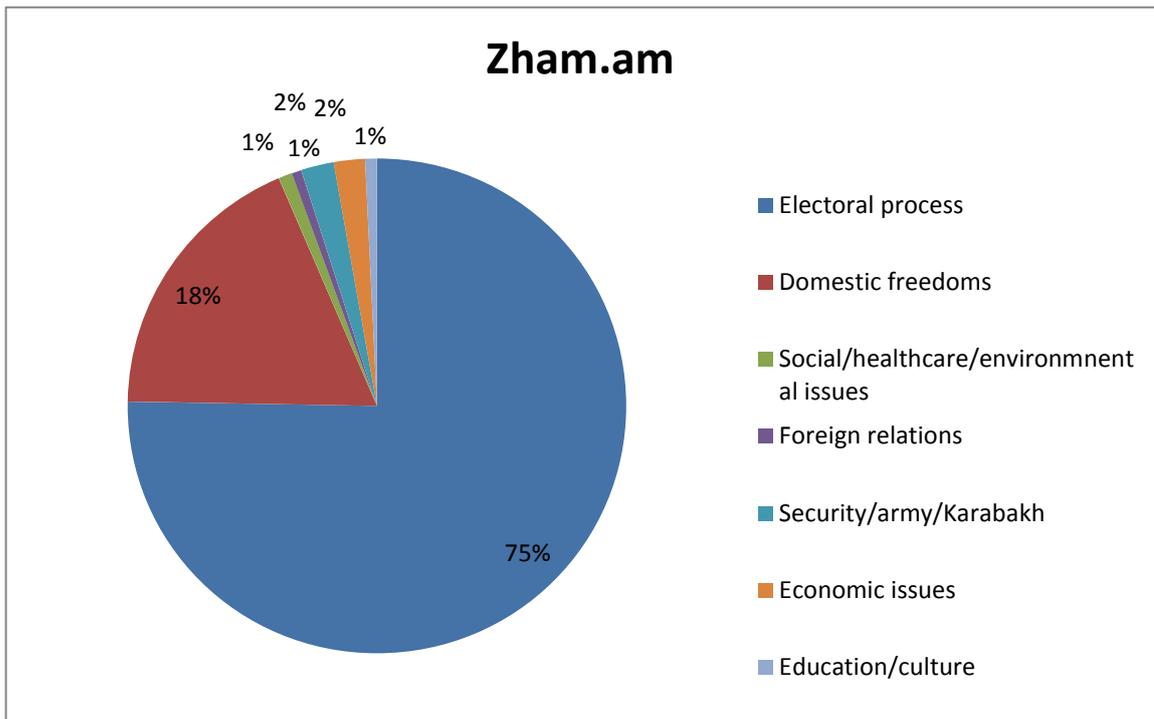
Media outlet	Lragir.am		Zham.am		Tert.am		News.am		lin.am	
	Like	Talking about								
21.01.13	<b>8721</b>	293	<b>13509</b>	641	<b>72925</b>	7482	<b>70693</b>	3648	<b>74659</b>	3798
16.02.13	<b>10951</b>	1917	<b>13612</b>	701	<b>74576</b>	6334	<b>73405</b>	3398	<b>79212</b>	5394

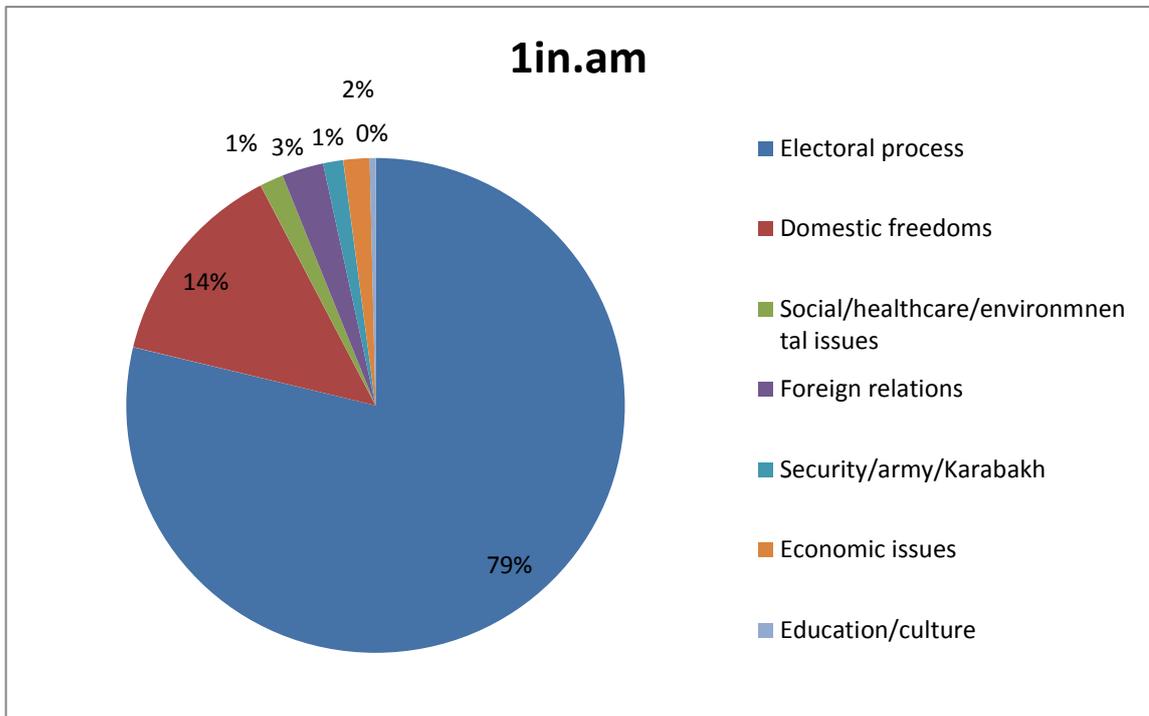
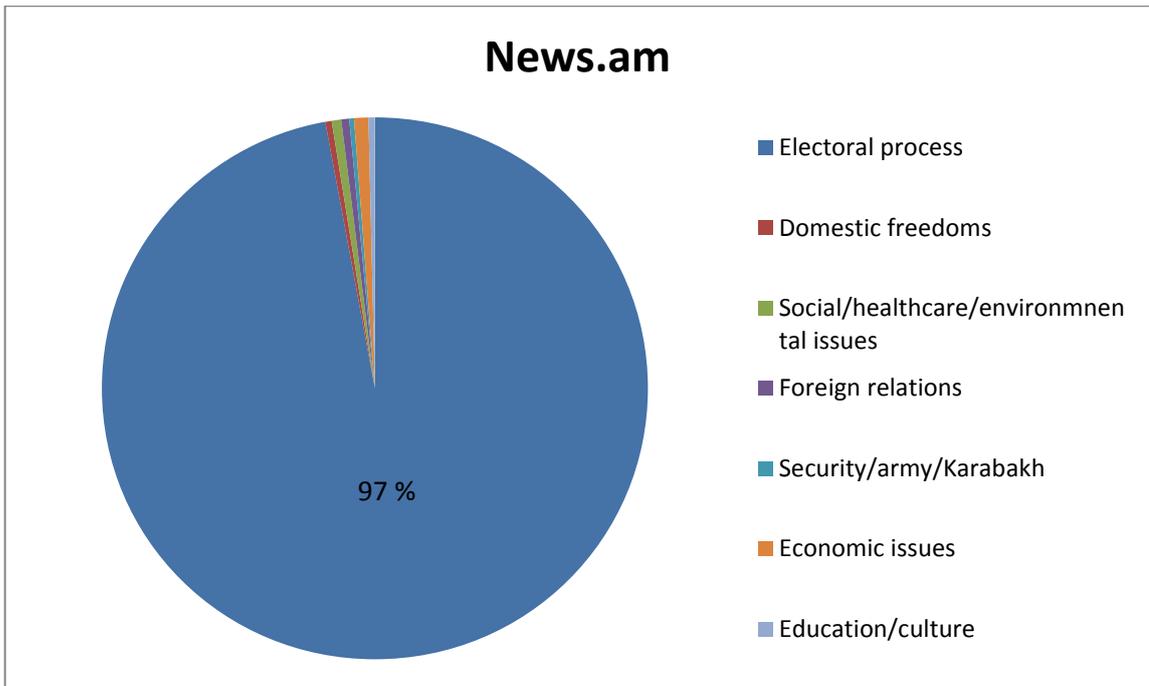
Table 17. Audiences' Interest on Materials on Elections

Media outlet	Number of materials on elections	Number of materials with likes, shares and comments	%
<b>Lragir.am</b>	155	117	75%
<b>Zham.am</b>	398	258	65%
<b>Tert.am</b>	167	139	83%
<b>News.am</b>	425	367	86%
<b>1in.am</b>	645	624	97%

Graphic 2. Issues Raised on Media Outlets' Facebook Pages During the Official Campaign







## APPENDIX 3

### ELECTION DAY

**Table 18. Number of Materials on Candidates' Pages on Election Day**

Candidates	Number of materials
<b>Andrias Ghukasyan</b>	12
<b>Arman Melikyan</b>	4
<b>Raffi Hovannisian</b>	45
<b>Hrant Bagratyan</b>	5
<b>Paruyr Hayrikyan</b>	1
<b>Vardan Sedrakyan</b>	0
<b>Aram Harutyunyan</b>	0

**Table 19. Topics of the Materials on the Candidates' Pages on Election Day (February 18)**

Candidates	Violence and oppression in the electoral process	Election bribe, electoral falsifications, abuse of administrative resources	Materials without descriptions of violations
<b>Andrias Ghukasyan</b>	1	12	0
<b>Arman Melikyan</b>	3	3	0
<b>Raffi Hovannisian</b>	6	93	15
<b>Hrant Bagratyan</b>	0	3	2
<b>Paruyr Hayrikyan</b>	0	0	1

Table 20. Number and Types of Violations on Candidates' Pages on Election Day

Candidates	Number of descriptions of election bribes/ electoral falsifications / abuses of administrative resources	Number of descriptions of violence and intimidation in the electoral process
Andrias Ghukasyan	2	0
Paruyr Hayrikyan	0	0
Arman Melikyan	0	0
Raffi Hovannisian	75	2
Hrant Bagratyan	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>2</b>

**Polling stations where cases of election bribes/election falsifications/abuses of administrative resources were registered, as reported in the materials shared on the candidates' pages (63 polling stations)**

03/03	03/19	03/33	04/07	04/13
04/22	05/10	06/21	07/13	07/27
08/09	08/11	08/16	08/22	08/23
09/01	09/03	09/18	09/20	09/27
09/28	10/08	11/03	12/23	12/35
13/04	13/37	13/4	16/41	17/05
17/15	19/08	19/10	19/18	19/41
20/35	24/07	24/7	29/04	29/24
29/4	29/45	3/19	3/33	32/39
32/5	32/50	34/27	34/36	38/12
4/13	4/22	4/7	42/46	5/10
6/21	7/13	8/11	8/16	8/9
9/1	9/18	9/20		

**Polling station were cases of violence/intimidation were registered, as reported in the materials, shared on the candidates' pages (2 polling stations - 04/15, 17/05)**

## The Election Day on Media Outlets' Pages

Table 21. Number of Materials on Elections on Media Outlets' Pages on Election Day

Media outlets	Number of materials
Lragir.am	17
Zham.am	79
Tert.am	88
News.am	88
1in.am	90

Table 22. Topics of Materials on Election Day (February 18) Published on Media Outlets' Facebook Pages

Media outlets	Violence and oppression in the Electoral process	election bribes/ electoral falsifications/ abuse of administrative resources	Materials without descriptions of violations
Lragir.am	3	9	8
Zham.am	1	48	45
Tert.am	4	47	39
News.am	2	73	53
1in.am	4	92	58

**Table 23. Number and Types of Violations on Media Outlets' Pages on Election Day**

<b>Media outlets</b>	<b>Election bribe/electoral falsifications/abuse of administrative resources</b>	<b>Violence/intimidation in the electoral process</b>	<b>Descriptions of electoral process without violations</b>
<b>Lragir.am</b>	4	0	0
<b>Zham.am</b>	37	1	2
<b>Tert.am</b>	21	0	0
<b>News.am</b>	55	0	0
<b>1in.am</b>	89	2	0

**Polling stations where, according to the materials published by the monitored media outlets, cases of election bribe/electoral falsifications/abuse of administrative resources took place**

**(the polling stations are quoted here as mentioned in the materials)**

Polling stations, located in School 1, Chambarak town, Gegharkunik Marz	Polling stations, located in School 2, Chambarak town, Gegharkunik Marz	Polling stations, located in School 3, Chambarak town, Gegharkunik Marz	A polling station in Araratyan District	Kanaker – Zeytun District
01/06	01/16	01/35	02/08	03/02
03/03	03/30	03/33	04/10	04/11
04/17	04/23	05/01	05/02	05/03
05/08	05/21	05/23	05/24	06/16
06/17	06/23	06/34	06/35	07/14
07/21	07/27	07/28	08/08	08/16
08/22	08/23	09/02	09/03	09/04
09/09	09/15	09/27	09/28	10/08
10/22	11/06	11/29	12/01	12/04
13/03	13/05	13/06	13/12	13/13

14/21	14/23	16/41	17/01	17/02
17/03	17/05	17/07	17/10	18/08
20/02	22/15	22/23	25/26	28/12
28/23	29/07	29/08	29/17	29/18
29/21	29/25	29/27	29/29	30/01
30/02	30/06	30/11	30/12	30/26
30/31	30/34	31/02	31/05	31/25
32/05	32/14	32/34	32/56	33/63
33/74	34/04	34/06	34/08	34/09
34/10	34/15	34/16	34/19	34/21
34/22	34/30	34/36	34/39	35/05
35/10	35/19	35/22	35/23	35/33
35/34	35/35	35/36	35/38	35/39
35/40	36/45	37/07	38/12	38/19
40/33	40/43	40/46	41/09	41/11
41/13	41/21	41/23	41/26	87/07

**Polling stations where cases of violence and intimidation took place, according to the materials published in the monitored media outlets (the polling stations are quoted here as mentioned in the materials)**

Metaqs  
Headquarters 17/05 34/36

**Polling stations where electoral violations did not take place on Election day, as reported in the materials, published in the monitored media outlets**

02/08 04/31