

# ONTARIO ELECTIONS AND REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

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**By Dikran Abrahamian MD, Ontario, 2 June 2022**

Parliamentary elections took place today in Ontario, the most populous province in Canada with a population of fifteen million people. Probably our compatriots in the Republic of Armenia (RoA) may learn a thing or two from this election regarding how to conduct themselves in a democracy. Of course, that all depends on dropping their "we know better" attitude and not searching for excuses to avoid practising what they are expected to whenever they dislike the outcome.

Eligible voters in Ontario were 10,760,433 (71.6% of the population) and the turnout was 43.50%. Of the total votes the incumbent Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario (PCP) received 41% of the votes (rounded), whereas the opposition parties obtained 59%, almost two-third of the popular vote. Not a single incident of voter fraud, vote stuffing and bribery was reported, and the day went by peacefully. Unlike RoA where proportional representation is the rule, in Canada first-past-the-post voting system is used, i.e., the candidate who wins the most votes in each constituency is elected. Due to this process PCP garnered eighty-three seats (67% of the total 124), whereas the combined opposition seats were 36 (33% of total). Opposition parties that were able to win seats, despite major differences in ideology and programs *vis-a-vis* the winning party, gracefully accepted the results. The leaders of the opposition congratulated the winning party and its leader Doug Ford who will be the premier of Ontario for a second term. They promised to work with the government in opposition and praised the democratic process.

In contrast, a year ago in RoA, at the snap elections turnout of 2,595,334 voters was 49.37% (1,281,375) -- roughly 6% more than Ontario's current election. The winning party received 53.95% (71 seats) of the votes and the opposition (combined) 26.33% (36 seats). Unlike in Canada, incidents of voting fraud and bribery were recorded, not to mention brawls and disturbances here and there. There were no congratulatory remarks by opposition leaders. On the contrary, right from day one derogatory remarks were hurled at the winning party and its leader. The opposition made it clear it would do everything in its power to obstruct the government's efforts to conduct business; furthermore, they vowed to bring down the government and its leader. They did not shy away from assaulting elected officials and turning the parliament into a circus and into violent scenes. The conduct of the opposition was anything but democratic and it continues to this day.

The subject of this writing is not about the "causes" and goals of this conduct but about the process which leads us, on the side, to make a couple of remarks about opposition pundits' views. They draw parallels between ongoing unruly protests and the popular uprising of 2018. They point out that through "mass" agitation the government was brought down, and a similar "mass" action will chase the present authorities out the door. That is too much of a stretch in imagination considering the vast differences between the two occurrences.

*For one, in 2018 the people in RoA were galvanized. They were in hundreds of thousands, whereas the present protests can recruit only a small portion of that number. In 2018 people expressed their*

*grievances accumulated over decades against a corrupt oligarchic-kleptocracy that had plundered the country and its citizens. The protests now are led by the same gang of thieves and their ally the bureau of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF). In 2018 it was a grass roots movement. Independent citizens, various social formations, intellectuals, political parties, student bodies, working peoples' groups ... did not wait for a command from top; they independently joined the protests en masse. What we notice today is a guided command structure, a pyramid on top of which is the disgraced oligarchy.*

All comparisons, including this *exposé*, should be taken with a grain of salt. Acts that occurred at various times and thousands of miles apart hardly match item to item. However, they serve as an intellectual framework of illustration for how to behave in a democracy. Ontario is a multi-ethnic society, whereas the RoA is homogeneous. Bread and butter issues are the concerns of Ontarians. In contrast, Armenians are facing existential issues: they are threatened by war which leads to anxiety and agitation, and thus to otherwise unacceptable behaviour, including violence.

Following the 44-day Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) war RoA's existence became vulnerable to both internal and external threats. Pronouncements and decisions of the authorities became incoherent. They gave rise to all sorts of allegations which are being exploited by street protesters. I am not able to establish the veracity of these allegations, but they are serious enough that they generate criticism against the authorities from almost all corners.

It took nearly three decades to establish a semblance of democracy in the country. If we cherish it, then it is incumbent upon us to act accordingly. Mass actions are part of democratic norms, provided they are supported by a critical mass of citizenry. In its absence, the movement must give up its agitation. Otherwise, it will be shunned by the people and considered a fringe movement causing an unhealthy socio-political environment with disastrous outcomes.

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