

TRUST DEFICIT IN TRADITIONAL POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

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✘ Team Keghart Editorial, 22 February 2010

✘ Our Diaspora political organizations, namely the traditional three parties, have had dramatic highs and lows during their long history. Currently, especially with the advent of the Internet, they face new challenges to their operations, if not existence. In the past few years non-affiliated societies and diverse groups have mushroomed on an unprecedented scale, asserting the Diaspora needs new solutions and new leadership. Already leadership and strategic guidance of Diaspora communities has begun to slip away from the parties. This undeniable fact is naturally a cause for concern to people who have thus far enjoyed near-hegemony in dictating the affairs of Armenian communities spread around the globe.

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To our knowledge, no scientific study has been carried out to explore the phenomenon and provide clues as to why this evolution has developed and gained momentum. Some observers blame it on the self-defeating rivalry of the three parties. The fratricide, especially of the late '50s in Lebanon, is fresh on many minds. Others blame the political challenges on the well-documented social sciences conclusions which maintain that positions and power eventually lead to isolation and degeneration with all their attendant manifestations of greed, arrogance, intolerance, character assassination, absence of transparency and accountability. Still others claim that the traditional organizations have not kept pace with changes in economic, political and social spheres. At least one political party has not updated its platform and bylaws for more than two decades.

Whether these serious challenges to the domination of the traditional parties bode well for the Diaspora is a question that cannot be addressed in a conclusive manner. However, it is assumed that party leaders view the evolution differently from those who do not participate in activities initiated on their behalf. There is an absence of two-way communication between leaders and followers at large, and totally non-existent between parties and non-affiliated people. The parties themselves have to carry the blame for this. As well, the political parties have shown neither tolerance nor patience for "others", except when there has been an opportunity to co-opt them. To this day there are some, though minority, who believe that if you do not belong to a certain party you should not have a say ... perhaps you are not even Armenian. In some quarters to be Armenian is defined by

party membership.

Is it any wonder then that there is a huge trust deficit towards the established parties? Is it not natural for concerned but non-affiliated Armenians to look for ways to have their voice heard? Is it surprising to witness such a quest--especially in Western countries where give and take, the expression of opinion and freedom of speech are formally respected?

A recent [poll](#) conducted by Keghart.com, albeit non-scientific, provides a sample of the prevailing mood at least in a specific sector. To this date 874 visitors looked at the poll and 238 cast votes. The overwhelming majority-- over 80%-- said that "a new entity is required to speak on behalf of the Diaspora." The poll is still active and accessible at: www.keghart.com/4diaspora.



Meanwhile, a recent study titled "[A Tale of Two Charts](#)" conducted by Richard K. Ohanian and published independently in Keghart.com and in Boston's The Armenian Weekly provided some interesting observations. Ohanian stated, "more than 90% of the Armenians living in the U.S. who are interested in politics and have the means to go online and visit a 'grassroots' political organization's website choose not to do so on a regular basis." The reference was to the Armenian National Committee of America – ANCA.

Another interesting Ohanian observation was that "about 7,000 to 8,000 Armenians visit the ANCA's website on a monthly basis."



Keghart.com has no means to verify the information submitted by Ohanian, and treats it at face value. However, we can provide our own data as shown below. In the past six months, between August 2009 and January 2010 Keghart.com attracted more than 6,000 "unique visitors" month after month. It is relevant to emphasize that the site does not carry any advertisements, is only two-and-a-half years old, compared to ANCA's "decades of existence", and has no organizational support.



Our intention at Keghart.com is not self-promotional, nor are these data provided to generate advertising revenues. Our sole purpose is to back the assertion that there is among Diaspora Armenians a trust deficit in traditional organizations. People are in search of new modalities of expression, and over time they are drifting away from the political parties. Thus far the mainstream political trio has made no attempt to stay relevant. Rather than address the ever-changing challenges the Diaspora faces, the Hnchak and the Ramgavar have witnessed serious fissures among their ranks, while the biggest political party—the Tashnag—has continued its "we know best" policy.

