

Contrasts between Political Appeal and Good Governance Trajectories



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ABSTRACT: This is a longitudinal case study that applies pattern-matching analytical techniques to explain the highly contextualized phenomena of the ‘Velvet Revolution’ and to establish dominant themes and comparative patterns that have influenced the policy and governance agenda of Armenia since May 2018. The research sets out with questions on the message embedded within the ‘Velvet Revolution’ and the extent to which it corresponds to the policy objectives and expressed outcomes that the government aims to accomplish. It then investigates the policy priorities and governance agenda that Pashinyan proposed to achieve during his tenure as prime minister of Armenia, weighed against the message he transmitted as activist, politician and protest leader, and the consequent department he assumed in order to build and sustain public appeal and trust. This article presents findings from the analysis of collected data pertaining to the period May 2018 through August 2019.

KEY WORDS: political communication; anti-intellectualism; tolerance; populism; agenda-setting; evidence-based policymaking; governance; public administration; responsibility; responsiveness

INTRODUCTION

In April-May 2018, the headlines of former-Soviet countries and Europe devoted significant attention to the street protests in Armenia. On May 8, 2018 “*Pashinyan, a fiery political orator who has spent the past decade in street politics, was himself elected as prime minister in a 59-42 vote in parliament, capping weeks of peaceful mass protests*” (The Guardian, May 8, 2018). Upon his election, as the ‘*My Step*’ leader approached the podium to address the crowd, cheers and applause were roaring. Notwithstanding the differences in public opinion and the particular labels that people used to characterize the ‘Velvet Revolution’ and succeeding expectations, a few features stood out: disapproval of the concentration of wealth in the hands of a handful of people and rise of inequalities at the expense of citizens; government’s shortfall in evaluating public priorities; and lack of uniformity in the implementation of policies across all segments of society.

Using the shared expectations of assembled masses, the foremost question one would raise is what the ‘Velvet Revolution’ produced in terms of policy reforms and transformation of governance. Central to this research is the policy and governance agenda that Pashinyan aims to achieve during his tenure as prime minister, weighed against the message he transmitted as opposition politician and protest leader, his pathos-powered communication to sustain public appeal and trust, and his subsequent department as prime minister. Alongside the notion that emotion plays a role in supplementing rationality, we argue that politicians often maneuver in that domain using persuasive, even unintellectual discourse to assemble and shape enthusiasm, thereby maintaining political stance and eliciting political credit. Nonetheless, good governance requires rational choices and transformative solutions to public issues that would deliver optimal outcomes through multi-level consultations and apolitical evidence-based policy decisions and reforms.

POLITICAL APPEAL V. GOVERNANCE

Emotion is an undeniable and unavoidable part of human nature, though critics argue that it should be constrained when making choices or judgments on political matters. But evidence suggests that public opinion is more often shaped by the moods, feelings, or emotions of citizens. Marcus et al. (2000) argue that two fundamental systems work in parallel to produce emotional appraisal, which shape the choices and actions of citizens. These are sensations of enthusiasm versus frustration originating from signals people get in their surroundings, including the news media, friends, political actors, and community leaders.

Thus, political appeal relies mostly on influencing emotions for shaping affinities, whereas governance demands logical reasoning and thoughtful deliberation that consider alternative judgments and beliefs. As several scholars tackling issues of governance have explained, emotions are deliberate means used to distinguish among different opinions and beliefs to create necessary conditions (Bickford, 2011; Van Dijk, 2009; Valentino et al., 2007). Though emotion is inevitable in discursive political practice, when coupled with anti-intellectualism and intolerance, it could have socially and politically damaging consequences.

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Theorists especially emphasize the importance of using rationality when assessing public needs, governing, and shaping policy, arguing that “*emotion should be constrained and excluded from final judgments on public matters*” (Marcus, 2002: 5).

A glance at contemporary mass political rallies, such as the ‘Velvet Revolution’, reveals that there is a growing trend of anti-intellectualism associated with intense endeavors for political appeal. As Motta (2017) argues, anti-intellectualism is often used to craft support for different political movements and politicians build public support simply by rejection of ‘the other’—rejection of existing unpopular policies or denunciation of those that have crafted such policies—without necessarily delving into the underlying tenets, assumptions, or conditions. Conversely, intellectualism entails basing political action on information acquired through reasoning and analytical thought rather than by instinct, moral sensibility, and emotion (Van Dijk, 2009; Sides, 2006).

A person who displays anti-intellectual qualities often disparages the rational examination associated with intellectual pursuits. However, anti-intellectuals are not necessarily unintelligent or dismissive of smart people, rather, they wrangle the other. Anti-intellectuals also exhibit distaste for the alleged arrogance or undue advantage they believe accompanies intellectualism (Kuhneman, 2003). For them, intellectuals tend to generate suspicion and cynicism, hence the notion that intelligence, albeit valuable and useful, also creates harm. This might be the reason why anti-intellectuals may often snub at or simply ignore expert opinion or evidence-based scholarly analysis. Cases of anti-intellectualism are abundant in populist politics.

Moreover, anti-intellectualism breeds exacerbated intolerance. “*Political tolerance in a democracy requires that all political ideas (and the groups holding them) get the same access to the marketplace of ideas as the access legally extended to the ideas dominating the system*” (Gibson, 2013: 3). In situations of intolerance, those in power contend that their performance is consistent with their values, views, and aspirations, therefore the populace is expected to support them without raising questions or doubting their integrity. Hence the reason why many populists claim speaking in the name of or representing ‘the people’. In such manifestations, those expressing different or opposite views from what the ruling elite holds are regarded negatively, ridiculed, criticized, and even oppressed (Sullivan et al., 1982).

In this context, tolerance is viewed as a traditional comportment that compels the belief that there is such a thing as a ‘better’ or ‘more optimal’ solution or action that can be found, and the best way to achieve that is through debate, reflection, and investigation. Such pursuits, however, require cooperation, serious consideration of opposing beliefs, compromise, and persuasion through reasoning and not judgment by emotion. Coercion, exclusion, slander, bias, blame, together with authoritarian and often repressive action have no place in the search for optimal political solutions.

In well-established democracies, public policy results from rational consideration using a process where all stakeholders have the opportunity to deliberate their positions beyond just articulating preferences. Habermas (1984) asserts that emotion cannot enter rational deliberation without unduly undermining logical reasoning because it incites action without thought. Instead, it is reason that provides the foundation for appraisal of alternatives to reach optimal decisions (Marcus, 2000).

Agenda Setting & Governance

In this article, governance is conceptualized as “*the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority to manage a nation’s affairs*” (UNDP 1997: 7). Integral to this, democratic governance includes citizen participation in decision-making, transparency of government institutions, responsiveness to public needs, equity in the treatment of citizens, efficacy in the use of public resources, accountability to the people, and the “*exercise of strategic vision in planning for development*” (UN 2006: 7). This requires the search for alternative solutions and evidence intended to deliver optimal solutions and reforms (Cohen, 1977).

A fundamental feature of democratic governance is to ensure that society moves forward through increased education and awareness of the populace for active and intelligent participation. In that regard, Lipset (1959) posits that creating a democratic environment would lead to having a strong private sector capable of partnering with the state in the pursuit of shared goals. In such a partnered governance system, public policy discussions would be participatory, at the least, and would consider public needs and policy alternatives that place shared development priorities at the top of the state policy agenda.

Moreover, governance would involve the examination of evidence and re-examination of the role of institutions, citizens, civil society, parallel to reviewing and/or revising existing norms and processes that affect public priority setting and service delivery (UN 2006). Thus, evidence-based governance suggests awareness and evaluation of the impact of existing policies and consideration of the potential effects of new policy decisions—through formative evaluations that would weigh in the ‘public value’ those policies would create against the potential negative consequences or spillovers—as well as their micro and macro institutional effects (Parkhurst, 2017).

Thus, one of the key challenges of governance is agenda-setting (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 1995) to reflect the aspirations and configurations of what government proposes to accomplish. Kingdon (1984) argues that the convergence of various agenda-setting approaches—problem stream, policy stream, and political stream—sets the momentum for placing an issue on the agenda. His model lays out the process of articulating priority issues, discussing them among policy makers and key public actors regardless of party affiliation or position in the political landscape, and reaching consensus on an agenda based on informed accord.

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RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The principal research question in this segment of our longitudinal case study involves identifying the characteristics of policymaking and governance agenda pre- and post- Armenia 2018 elections, including the message embedded within the ‘Velvet Revolution’ and emanating patterns of policymaking and governance. The propositions investigated are whether or not or the extent to which (1) the government plan reflected *what, when, and how* to achieve systemic change and results; (2) the public administration capacity demonstrates the strength necessary for advancing prosperity; and (3) the government demonstrates evidence and/or expertise in responsible and responsive governance.

Data was collected in May 2018-August 2019 and included online media articles published ($n = 204$); interview-discussions aired on Armenian TV ($n = 20$); milestone speeches by Pashinyan ($n = 5$); in-depth interviews with politicians and scholars ($n = 12$); and a snowball public survey ($n = 126$) conducted last only to validate the patterns established in the earlier phases.

Stratified random sampling was used to draw media articles from a population of 15 online outlets.¹ The selection of TV interviews was purposive and aimed at affording maximum variation of content relevant to the study.² The Pashinyan speeches analyzed comprised those delivered at significant milestones since the ‘Velvet Revolution’.³ The selection of interviewees for the in-depth interviews conducted for the study also followed maximum variation principles. The survey, conducted last, aimed at confirming the patterns and findings from the qualitative phase of the case study.⁴

Analysis of Media Articles, TV Interviews, and Pashinyan Speeches

Content analysis of data collected—media articles, TV interviews, and speeches included in this phase of the study—showed that in the months following his election as Prime Minister on May 8, 2018, appeals increasingly aimed at evoking, assembling, growing, and influencing popular support through emotion-charged words—such as *happiness, love, support, hope, belief, loyalty, trust, justice, equality, dignity, victory*, etc. Pashinyan labeled the ‘Velvet Revolution’ as a revolution of *love and solidarity* and an end to *desolation and misery*—rather consistent with the use of pathos in populist communication. His appeal underscored *victory, solidarity, pride, unity, cooperation, tolerance, mutual understanding*,⁵ but also pointing to the necessity of embracing modern administrative practices in government. The strategic priorities set forth were geared to advancing the high-tech industry and agriculture at an unconventional speed, along with other internal and international priorities. Persistent criticism of the former regime was aimed at holding snap elections to totally dismantle the Republican stronghold in the parliament. Similar rhetoric prevailed in the government plan presented a month later and agenda priorities focused on corruption and poverty eradication.⁶

The government made a concerted effort to overtly expose and prosecute corruption cases. Though there were expressed criticisms of selective bias and concerns with the absence of direction for tackling issues and getting them to fruition or conclusive decision. A visible difference was that “*the citizenry truly felt empowered to make changes in the country and that is one of the biggest achievements of [building] a democratic state.*”⁷ Duly recapped by the prime minister on the 100th day rally on August 17: “*In the Republic of Armenia (RA) there is no coalition. In RA there is no majority legislature. In RA there is the people, the highest authority rests directly with the people. ... This is where lies the real meaning of the revolution.*”⁸

But, unlike the practice in established democracies where free expression is cherished, even in the early months following the ‘Velvet Revolution’ there was little tolerance for criticisms of the Prime Minister. Idolizing the leader of the movement had reached extremes leaving no room for questioning any claim or taking an opposing stance.⁹ But, when the new government was formed with relatively young cabinet appointments, opinion pages in the media applauded the bold decision of selecting young professionals to assume key roles in the administration. Though there were reservations that “*the new government stands before varied problems with respect to attracting new, capable and expert cadres for sketching the economic direction and shaping the right course appropriate to the new public stance.*”¹⁰

In the months before the December 2018 elections, the government asserted concerted focus on two urgent issues: fighting against corruption and amending the electoral code (or finding some avenue) for calling snap elections (though the elections were

¹ Online outlets were stratified by circulation size, from which the first, fourth, seventh, and tenth outlets were selected to populate the sample, with articles published every seventh day starting on May 8, 2018-April 30, 2019.

² *Herankar* aired on Shant TV was selected by a group of nine scholars as the most non-partisan in the selection of interviewees from different political factions, as indicated in a quick poll conducted in January 2018.

³ The sample included the May 8, 2018 public address before his election; June 7, 2018 address in parliament on his policy agenda; 100th day speech in Republic Square on August 17, 2018; presentation of the pre-election platform on November 25, 2018; the speech on government’s five-year plan on February 12, 2019; and the August 5, 2019 speech in Stepanakert.

⁴ The survey used exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling that relied on referrals from an initial list of addressees and subsequent recipients via chain messaging.

⁵ Translated from Pashinyan’s May 8, 2018 speech.

⁶ Though issues of national security, human rights, environmental protection, repatriation, freedom of the press, and foreign affairs were included in the plan.

⁷ Translated from Arman Tatoyan’s interview for *Herankar TV* on April 4, 1029.

⁸ Translated from Pashinyan’s Speech on August 17, 2018.

⁹ Paraphrased from article published in Aravot.am on July 3, 2018.

¹⁰ Excerpt from article published in Lragir.am on June 5, 2018.

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held regardless of the constitutional requirement for dissolution of the parliament¹¹ and the changes in the electoral code vowed by Pashinyan). After all, “*by public perception or by general observation, Pashinyan was not as much or not at all prime minister as he was leader of the revolution, regardless of where that revolution or its power axis lies, whether within the administration or in the streets.*”¹²

The Yerevan municipal elections were announced first, and that campaign served as a watershed event for swelling a ‘*black and white*’ division in the local population.¹³ When campaigning for his nominee, Pashinyan made a public appeal “*not to give a single vote to opposition candidates and to vote instead in favor of the ‘whites’ so we may have unconditional and total victory with an unquestionable majority, [and] downright defeat of anti-revolutionists.*”¹⁴ Such populist orations fashioned ‘for’ or ‘against’ divisions breaking apart the political alliances that had buttressed the movement that brought Pashinyan to power. The non-violent ‘Velvet Revolution’ started losing its peaceful demeanor. Contradictions with his earlier assertions and declared manifesto began to flourish.

The landslide victory by the Civil Contract party in local elections increased the impetus for calling national elections. Much of the pre-election campaign rhetoric fostered the populist argument that “*the citizenry is expecting practical actions that would address the challenges our country and the people are facing.*”¹⁵ The campaign was divisive and mostly driven by ‘pathos’ rather than political competition. At a campaign rally on November 25, 2018, Pashinyan touted the slogan ‘*happy individual, caring society, strong state*’ and appealed to the public to break away from despair and shake off pessimism by believing in themselves. His closing campaign pitch was that “*all those who vote for the My Step alliance will be voting in favor of optimism, in favor of civic confidence, in favor of Armenia, Artsakh, and our people.*”¹⁶

The parliamentary elections of December 9, 2018, bolstered Pashinyan’s authority winning 70.4% of the valid votes cast as he proclaimed that “*Armenian citizens have created a revolutionary majority in the parliament.*”¹⁷ The other two parties to secure the required threshold were Prosperous Armenia with 8.2% and Bright Armenia with 6.3% of votes. “*The election process was rather different from before from the sense that voters were true participants [in elections] and not citizens who were making deals with the ruling faction or other groups.*”¹⁸ These elections were declared democratic despite the blatant notion that the votes cast in favor of the victorious alliance were not so much in support of individual candidates on the ballot than they were against ‘the other’ and for the populist Pashinyan himself—typical of populist movements that rally votes around a leader. Did that infer that the primary responsibility for legislative reforms and transformation¹⁹ also rested on him alone? Would the absolute dominance by My Step discount checks and balances and undermine the separation of powers between executive and legislative branches of government placing undue burden on Pashinyan to deliver on the campaign promises he made?

Nearly two months later, the government presented its five-year plan that covered a multitude of issue—including the creation of an anti-corruption commission, infrastructure development, environmental protection, export-driven production in high-tech, agriculture, tourism, light industries, and other sectors. As in prior years, the government plan was ambitious and touched upon all aspects of development, short of delineating priorities, strategies, and goals to monitor performance and track progress. “*It is regrettable that [the plan] lacks the implementation mechanisms and, most importantly, this is the plan of a government that came to power having criticized ... that the previous government’s plan had not included monitoring mechanisms for measuring results.*”²⁰ In defense of the government, the majority leader of the parliament justified that “*the plan contains the overall vision and guidelines, with which we want to reach results within five years.*”²¹

¹¹ Translated from excerpt published in Aravot.am on August 28, 2018 (as explained by Edmon Marukyan).

¹² Excerpt from article published in Aravot.am on October 9, 2018.

¹³ Analogous to *good* and *evil* in Manicheism.

¹⁴ Excerpt from article published in Lragir.am on September 11, 2018.

¹⁵ Excerpt from article published in Panorama.am on September 25, 2018.

¹⁶ Translated from Pashinyan’s Speech on November 25, 2018.

¹⁷ With 48.63% voter turnout.

¹⁸ Excerpt from article published in Lragir.am on December 11, 2018.

¹⁹ As Pashinyan later declared at the United Nations General Assembly.

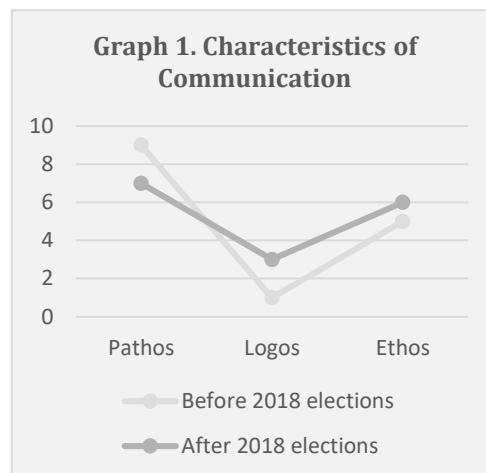
²⁰ Synopsized from Babken Pipoyan’s interview for Herankar TV on February 9, 2019.

²¹ Translated from Lilit Makunts’ interview for Herankar TV on February 7, 2019.

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Criticisms then moved to the executive branch ‘optimization’ proposal that reduced the number of ministries absent supporting analysis of the roles and responsibilities of ministries. Such an examination would have surely revealed the unnecessary layers and redundant or duplicative functions that warranted elimination (but is that what ensued?).

The Pashinyan speeches analyzed in this segment, depicted in [Graph 1](#), show the relative frequencies of the use of pathos, logos, and ethos. The dominance of pathos and also ethos to a great extent is evident. The significantly sparse use of logos (especially before the 2018 elections) is obvious and has been characterized by some as open and ingenuous communication, while others have found it ostentatious and, at times, otiose, biased, and misleading. Regardless, not much change is observed in the characteristics of Pashinyan speeches before and after 2018 elections.



In-Depth Interviews

Whereas the in-depth interviews conducted in June-July 2019 touch upon several factors, in this article we only present those related to the propositions examined, mainly agenda-setting/policymaking, and governance.

At the helm with an absolute majority, government attention focused on salient issues to maintain public approval and realize promises to the extent possible. Not much was different than in the past in the process of pulling together the government’s five-year plan, except for being even less participatory.²² What resulted was “*a very generic plan: fight against corruption, economic growth, freedom. There is nothing problematic in the plan, but at the same time there are no mechanisms as to how the government is proposing to advance an agenda of progress and how it proposes to measure that.*”²³

My Steppers interviewed defended the plan asserting that “*This first five-year plan shouldn’t have had indicators, priorities or targets ... because we are in an unprecedented situation that we must grapple with, we must study and understand how it is evolving, because ... we do not know [yet] where we are headed to. ... The government has now begun to set a vision for 2050 and there will be five-year as well as annual plans derived from that.*”²⁴ ²⁵ There might be a confusion between publicizing a popular manifesto or declaration of what a party stands for and a vision of where the country will be in five years, from which are derived the strategies and policy priorities and related mechanisms and anticipated results.

In stark contrast to the 2050 manifesto, [Table 1](#) depicts several agenda items included in the five-year plan that stood out in the public sphere, as duly articulated by the interviewees. Despite being a sample of issues that have high currency, there is noticeable change in the momentum of issues dominating the policy discourse before and after the 2018 parliamentary elections.

Table 1. A Comparison of Agenda Priorities Before and After 2018 Elections²⁶

Agenda Priorities Before 2018 Elections	Agenda Priorities After 2018 Elections
— Organize large-scale pan-Armenian repatriation and curtail emigration	— Still on the agenda, but without commensurate program or budget
— Refrain from interfering in the judiciary [as the practice has been in the former regime]	— Visibly no direct interference but conjectures to the contrary
— Reform the tax code to reduce income taxes	— New code instituted flat income tax
— Advocate employment stimulation policies that reduce reliance on state assistance	— No apparent policies related to employment stimulation. Emphasis on individual effort.
— Adopt policies that would attract local and foreign direct investments	— No new policies beyond some anti-corruption measures and legal actions
— Realize economic revolution	— Still on the agenda but open-ended

Aside from minimal actions to fight corruption and relentless accusations of the former regime, there were no innovative policy decisions to fuel competition. “*Though competition has not always been considered an essential defining condition of*

²² Paraphrased from interviewee #6.

²³ Statement by interviewee #6.

²⁴ Translated from statement by interviewee #3.

²⁵ “*By 2050 we need to be able to solve the following issues: increase the population of Armenia to at least 5 million; create 1.5 million jobs; eradicate poverty; transform Armenia into an industrial country; increase Armenia’s gross domestic product fifteenfold; have at least five Armenian technological companies whose worth exceeds \$10 billion and 10 thousand functioning startups; increase average salary sevenfold; and rank at least in the top 20 of the most combat-ready armies and have intelligence service ranking in the top ten worldwide, ensure 100% access to healthcare services and increase healthcare funding twentyfold*” (Pashinyan, August 5, 2019 in Stepanakert).

²⁶ A more thorough analysis of the policy agenda and priorities is discussed in a separate article by the authors.

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democracy, when speaking of 'economic revolution' there are expectations that the planning or decision making are based on direct input from experts, other political factions and interest groups."²⁷ Fueling competition as an antidote to corruption could provide the motivation necessary for growing the economy. One My Step delegate opined that theirs "*is a non-textbook approach to economic revolution. The call itself [for economic revolution] will lead to action.*"²⁸ As to targets and planned outcomes, "... *let historians talk about numbers later; one cannot formulate policy based on numbers.*"²⁹

Counter arguments were abundant. One argued in favor of "*participatory debates on alternatives and evidence-based agenda-setting and policymaking to ensure use of the best available research and information on options to guide decisions at all stages of the policy process.*"³⁰ This would help identify what works, highlight existing gaps where there is no evidence of effectiveness, enable policymakers to monitor implementation, and measure outcomes to improve performance. Summing up public expectations, one interviewee added: "*For me the transformation that should have taken place from Pashinyan as revolutionary leader to administrator has not happened.*"³¹

Beyond the official strategic plan, the government structure was analyzed in view of the fact that restructuring generally involves consideration of the relative weights of the strategic goals and factors that improve productivity and are aimed at achieving planned targets. As one interviewee asserted, the government structure must reflect the strategic priorities and how the government proposes to achieve desired outcomes. The overwhelming criticisms of the new structure related to the unjustifiable merger of the Ministry of Agriculture with the Ministry of Economic Development and Investments. Conversely, the rationalization was that "*Export is very important for a small country like Armenia. The Ministry of Economy, which is also responsible for the development of international [trade] relations, is a very appropriate place for realizing this function.*"³²

Beyond the structure itself, the capacity of the public administration was deemed as a key factor for the successful implementation of stated goals. "*This requires not only good stewardship of public assets but also results-driven and visionary leadership. This comes through in actual performance, how the leader deals with issues, ... and how savvy the administrator is in negotiating with different sides.*"³³ The aptitude of using expert knowledge and evidence effectively is crucial to achieving optimal solutions to complex social problems. "*Whether government becomes a hindrance or facilitator of economic development depends largely on how Pashinyan will lead the institutions to influence the wellbeing of the people. The challenge is to reshape and build the capacity of public institutions to play beneficial roles in helping citizens to cope with existing uncertainties and to benefit from opportunities he creates.*"³⁴ Becoming a changemaker demands cooperation with all stakeholders through democratic, transparent, and participative processes that integrate different ideas and approaches. "*Key political actors must make decisions collectively. They must demonstrate the capacity to work with parties, associations, and movements to identify solutions, articulate preferences, and influence policies.*"³⁵

In the current study period, the most striking policy challenge for Pashinyan's administration related to the Amulsar mining project³⁶ that flared up in August 2019, soon after he came to power. This gave Pashinyan the best window to demonstrate his role as administrator in contrast to his previous position as a member of the opposition in the parliament (when he had adamantly opposed the Amulsar mining). Would his position be different now? In a live Facebook broadcast on September 7, 2019, Pashinyan declared that, based on information received by government, he has no reason to believe that exploitation of the mine would harm the environment and Lydian would be permitted to proceed with the project adhering to the recommendations of the environmental audit completed by an independent international firm. The decision was not welcomed by the public and took to the streets hundreds demanding the permanent closure of the Amulsar project. (To the date of this writing, the project remains closed in spite of Pashinyan's public announcement, and no revised policy decision to the contrary appears to be conceivable in the near future.)

The Amulsar issue was briefly illustrated above not only for the importance the topic itself represents, but also because of the challenge it typically represents in balancing between a policy decision that may have significantly helped Pashinyan realize the sharp economic boost he had pledged, and a contrary decision that demonstrates (at least in the view of a large segment of his voters) responsiveness to public needs. "*When dealing with serious policy issues, government is expected to weigh in the priorities of citizens against projected gains in economic development without necessarily considering the likely adverse effects of decisions on the ratings of the ruling elite.*"³⁷ Under any administration of any political penchant or party allegiance, there will be government

²⁷ Statement by interviewee #11.

²⁸ Translated from statement by interviewee #5.

²⁹ Translated from statement by interviewee #3.

³⁰ Statement by interviewee #12.

³¹ Translated from statement by interviewee #8.

³² Translated from statement by interviewee #4.

³³ Statement by interviewee #8.

³⁴ Statement by interviewee #11.

³⁵ Statement by interviewee #12.

³⁶ Amulsar is a gold mine in southern Armenia operated by Lydian Armenia CJSC, fully owned by Lydian International Limited, that began drilling in 2007 under exploration licenses granted by the Armenian government. In 2018, local residents and activists blocked the access roads to the mine contesting that it posed a threat to the environment.

³⁷ Statement by interviewee #10.

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decisions that will not be agreeable or popular by one segment of the population or another. What should be upheld above all is the best interest of the state. Responsiveness and responsibility could conflict when public demands are incompatible with performance commitments associated with intended economic growth trajectories.

Using systems thinking to appraise the technical capacity and expertise of government, all interviewees were unanimous that Armenia needs stronger institutions, a skilled cadre of professionals, enhanced technical capacity, better experience, and knowledge in civil service. Opposition appraisals of appointments were negative, though Pashinyan supporters attested to the competitiveness of the process. *“I can state for sure that the qualifications of those people [appointees] are taken into consideration, as well as their political commitment to the revolution and its values—and that is very important.”*³⁸ Others believed that *“Pashinyan has serious flaws in recruitment matters.”*³⁹ His supporters also raised concerns. *“As prime minister he still has a great deal to develop to enhance his ability to govern. ... For instance, the professionalism of specialists, the degree to which they are shouldering responsibility and moving forth.”*⁴⁰ The incapacity of government has raised questions of unpredictability that extend beyond the resolution of internal issues.

The capacity of the executive branch is integral to advancing the profile and standing of Armenia in the outside world. *“Particularly in developing countries where there are negative forces that hold the economy back from moving ahead in steady progress, new solutions are needed to realize sustained economic growth or eliminate unpromising patterns of growth such that the population will feel the difference.”*⁴¹ Here, the capacity of government plays a significant role in planning and implementing innovative solutions that would ensure the upsurge of economic development.

Triangulation of Findings & Conclusion

The patterns established in the analysis of qualitative data and subsequent survey were triangulated to reveal the most dominant patterns and the different aspects of the phenomena examined enabling fair and unbiased interpretation (Given, 2008). This approach facilitated the categorization of concepts through coding and classification of observed or articulated ideas methodically, increased impartial assessment, and helped interpret views and attitudes within the framework of relevant theories (Saldaña, 2015).

Looking at the pre-election rhetoric, the analysis in this segment of our longitudinal case study has shown that the language, conduct, behavior, and actions of the leader are populist, pleasing to the masses, and not necessarily positioned to the ‘right’ or ‘left’. The ‘Velvet Revolution’ rhetoric was built on denouncing the ruling elite, it was Manichean, and focused on representing the will of the people (but more on this topic in a separate article by the authors). Appraisal of the five-year plan by survey respondents, depicted in [Table 2](#), as well as assessment of the new government structure, [Table 3](#), are visibly aligned with the patterns established in the earlier qualitative analysis.

Table 2. Appraisal of Five-Year Plan by Respondents’ Voting Record

	<i>Voted for My Step</i>	<i>Voted Others</i>	<i>for Total</i>	<i>%</i>
No delineated targets and strategies	13	44	57	45
No priorities for achieving high economic performance	10	25	35	28
Not much different than the previous plan	6	20	26	21

The most evident and dominant pattern vis-à-vis the government plan sketches the paucity of priority objectives, strategies, and targets, whether these relate to process and behavioral changes, or outcomes that would create public value. These are the measurable results that the plan and government programs and initiatives ensuing from the plan would achieve. Aside from providing clarity of destination and direction to the implementers in both legislative and executive branches, such a plan must serve as a strategic management blueprint and instrument to augment the efficacy of government, as well as to measure success and to evaluate the level of impact of the ruling elite and the public administration. The plan is expected to sketch the pattern of subsequent policy decisions and directives that stem from the five-year plan strategies and lead to the end targets. In turn, the substantive elements included in the plan serve as the policy agenda for the formulation of tactical approaches, planned action and use of resources (both financial and technical) accordingly. That is the fundamental reason why the government plan and structure cannot be viewed separately. Revising the structure or reorganizing the executive branch is essentially performed to increase productivity, efficacy, create new synergies, eliminate, or create units driven by the urgencies and policy priorities articulated in the government plan. Though it may seem less obvious, strategy and structure are closely interlinked and dependent on each other in a way that the manifestation of emphases and relative weights within the structure must mirror the priorities and targeted results established in the plan.

³⁸ Translated from statement by interviewee #4.

³⁹ Translated from statement by interviewee #2.

⁴⁰ Translated from statement by interviewee #3.

⁴¹ Statement by interviewee #12.

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In that context, the structure of government as implementer of the plan must reflect the plan requirements. In contrast, the pattern established here reveals that the new structure of government brought to parliament stems from positions that are predominantly partisan. Aside from dealing with the challenges imposed by complexities of the political environment in which the declared “*new Armenia*” would evolve, the analysis has shown that it is important to link human resource requirements with planned goals. But, in the absence of such measurable goals, restructuring becomes a tenuous exercise of political whim.

As shown in [Table 3](#), the evolving dominant theme is the necessity to take an integrated approach to restructuring such that real gains in productivity are achieved. Absent such analysis, a reorganization or restructuring of government may fall short of attaining success. In practice, government restructuring must be preceded by a thorough examination of existing arrangements and their respective performance outcomes (including potential outcomes). Thus, such a process must take into consideration planned long-range goals, prevalent social, political, and economic conditions, together with competences, strengths and expertise needed for achieving the results depicted in the government plan.

	<i>Voted for My Step</i>	<i>Voted for Others</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Restructuring should start by eliminating superfluous units within ministries	24	40	64	51
The new government structure is not reflective of the vision of 'economic revolution'	7	31	38	31
The restructuring should have been reflective of the five-year plan	7	24	31	25

For appraisal of the capacity of the executive branch, the theoretical underpinnings used for the analysis showed that there are challenges related to appointments by the Pashinyan government. In this matter of significance to the productivity of the executive branch, all interviewees recognize the existing capacity gaps in the administration, the same as how survey respondents posit. All data sources considered, governance or public administration considers the quality of directives and decisions with respect to procedures and laws, combined with management expertise and technical capacity to tackle issues most critical for the state, while being responsive to the needs of the people.⁴²

More importantly, the specific issues related to the capacity of political appointees and cadre of professionals responsible for realizing what is intended requires ensuring that government maximizes productivity and value creation, while managing the state apparatus in order to achieve the aims set forth in its policy agenda. This suggests that government also must strive to be nimble and flexible to be able to adjust to potentially changing assumptions and circumstances, but still meet expectations and achieve results.

	<i>Voted for My Step</i>	<i>Voted for Others</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
The cabinet comprises highly qualified and experienced appointees	13	2	15	12
<i>Contrary appraisal</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>37</i>
Top tier appointments in the executive branch are expert technocrats	18	2	20	16
<i>Contrary appraisal</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>26</i>
All appointments to the executive branch have followed meritocratic principles	12	0	12	1
<i>Contrary appraisal</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>32</i>

[Table 4](#) depicts the appraisals of executive branch appointees by voting record of survey respondents. In all of the elements, there is a pattern of judgment by partisan penchant or voting record. Much like the findings from the qualitative analysis, not all My Step voters responding to the survey have endorsed the qualifications and executive experience of the current leadership. These responses confirm the pattern drawn earlier that the public administration capacity falls short of the strength necessary for realizing results that would significantly enhance government performance.

Moreover, despite claims or pledges to the opposite, this government (much like those in the past) has not followed meritocratic principles in making appointments to key management positions (or even at lower levels of the civil service). That would have established a model whereby political power and decision making are vested in individuals based on qualifications,

⁴² These are issues included by various scholars in discussions on topics of administrative sciences, such as by Villela, 2001.

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talent, experience, and past achievements, as opposed to party affiliation and loyalty, personal relationships, or kinships. The end results accrued in a meritocratic system would lead to performance, evidence-driven influence, and institutional growth and evolution.

There are, however, several achievements that most My Steppers as well as the opposition inside and outside of the parliament do not hesitate to praise: empowerment of the population; improving health benefits for children 18 and under; making government somewhat more accountable and transparent; and combatting corruption.⁴³ However, here too there are abundant criticisms that even the early corruption convictions have not reached conclusive finality; that the feeling of empowerment has often translated to futile demonstrations against a policy or government decision, small and large; and that transparency of government is also selective.

The qualitative analysis and survey have shown that there are more important policy issues to address, shown in [Table 5](#),⁴⁴ and that there is an urgency for constitutional amendments to decrease the power vested in the prime minister (selected as #1, #2 or #3 by 90% of respondents). The findings from the analyses have shown that the government has demonstrated insufficient evidence of responsible and responsive governance.

	<i>Voted for My Step</i>	<i>Voted Others</i>	<i>for Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Adopting poverty reduction programs	37	42	79	63
Creating new jobs	37	42	79	63
Adopting policy incentives to promote manufacturing	30	42	72	57
Institutionalizing meritocratic civil service	31	29	60	48

In short, the findings on the propositions investigated in this segment have produced consistent patterns that the government plan falls short of providing answers to *what*, *when*, and *how* to achieve systemic change and results post Velvet Revolution; that the capacity of the public administration in this period of investigation does not possess the strength necessary for advancing prosperity; and that the government has not yet demonstrated evidence and/or expertise in responsible and responsive governance.

Concluding Remarks

Though there are a few positive changes, the government that came to power following the 'Velvet Revolution' has not met voter expectations showing a rising trajectory of dissatisfaction primarily vis-à-vis the capacity of the administration, policy agenda-setting and consideration of urgent public issues, and the overall unpredictability and instinctive behavior of the prime minister. Formerly opposition and protest leader, Pashinyan was loudly applauded by a large segment of society but is not praised as a statesman expected to manage the affairs of the state and improve the welfare of all segments of society.

The "*democratic transformation*" that Pashinyan claims to be delivering⁴⁵ should have widened the scope of participation by all segments of society affording them the freedom and opportunity to influence political outcomes without fear of public confrontation, hatred, bias, or reprisal. Since state leadership plays a vital role in democratic transformation, understanding the nature of statesmanship and balancing among conflicting priorities are critical to success (Young, 2000; Waldo, 2001). Policymaking in a democracy is typically concerned with taking a clear direction that reflects adoption of state priorities that are equitable, evidence-based, and far-reaching and, therefore, allocation of scarce resources to initiatives and projects that contribute to stability and influence long-term economic advancement. In this process, policy decisions typically involve making choices among options that contain competing sets of social values against considerations of upholding political and personal power.

Thus, engaging citizens in adopting a shared policy agenda and involving them in decision-making rather than simply counting on their moral support is mutually beneficial and would augment governance effectiveness, efficiency and equity, including responsiveness to critical priorities that consider both the state and the people (Holmes, 2012). Therefore, though intended to meet economic priorities and development objectives, policy discussions should consider the potential positive and negative socio-economic impacts of government action (USAID 2007). In other words, a true democracy "*offers a variety of competitive processes*

⁴³ Some interviewees have noted that combatting corruption was not yet realized at the institutional level and rather pursued at the individual level.

⁴⁴ The top #2 priority issues requiring government action, ranked by My Step voters as well as others, were (a) the need to amend the electoral code to decrease the threshold for inclusion of a party in the National Assembly (42% of total survey respondents); (b) to increase the number of opposition seats in the National Assembly (39%); and constitutional amendment to decrease the power vested in the prime minister (37%). The absolute majority hailed by Pashinyan has become a true encumbrance in moving the country forward.

⁴⁵ Pronounced at the United Nations on September 25, 2019.

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and channels for the expression of interests and values—associational as well as partisan, functional as well as territorial, collective as well as individual—that are integral to its practice” (Schmitter & Karl, 1991).

Moreover, the challenges of democratic governance are for the political and administrative leaders to redefine the functions of government and to build the capacity of public and private institutions to play more productive and value-added roles that enable the citizens to better cope with uncertainties and benefit from opportunities (Rondinelli & Cheema, 2003). Here, empowerment is applied on the individual and the collective such that citizens grow and achieve outcomes important to them, which also benefit the whole. This is how empowerment becomes a potent force in democratic governance where mutual accountability strengthens the state enabling greater sustainability of change initiatives in the longer term.

But, in order to deliver meaningful results, accountability should not be simply viewed as a process of sharing stand-alone bullets, numbers and soundbites with the public in tweets or through other such means of communication. Particularly, in the current political environment of absolute majority (as labeled by Pashinyan himself), numbers and results must be supported by appropriate documentation and dissemination of performance data (even educational explanations) derived from verifiable sources and not at the expense of eliminating plurality of opinions. Such institutional mechanisms and procedures of checks and balances are akin to strong and well-functioning democracies. Also, the participation in these processes by different political factions or interest groups outside the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government is equally crucial for the equitable and enhanced practice of democratic governance.

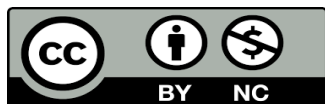
The case study has shown that a statesman must set back from the hurdles imposed by super partisanship and political imitations. Building bridges and integrating multiple ways of dissecting issues and situations have better potential to deliver tangible outcomes for advancing the state. Finding those innovative solutions to urgent policy issues while maintaining a balance between responsibility and responsiveness would not compromise personal authority or integrity. As stated earlier, good governance requires reason-driven choices and transformative solutions to public issues that deliver optimal outcomes through multi-level consultations and apolitical evidence-based policy decisions and reforms.

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