

Armenia

**Period of democratic transition: 1989–1991**

**Pro-democracy civic movement: not present**

After a brief period of independence from 1918 to 1920, a part of the predominantly Christian Republic of Armenia became a Soviet republic in 1922, while the western portion was ceded to Turkey. Problems owing to rapid industrialization, disgust at Communist elites, rampant corruption, and concern over the fate of Armenians living in Azerbaijan fed growing nationalism that developed in the late 1980s.

A bid for autonomy in 1988 by the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh (and ensuing interethnic violence) in the neighboring Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic gave impetus to the emergence of a movement in Armenia that organized mass marches, demonstrations, and occasional work stoppages in support of greater national sovereignty and political autonomy within the USSR. Initial calls for the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia became the catalyst for the emergence of the Armenian National Movement (ANM), which served as an umbrella civic and political organization and united a broad spectrum of pro-independence groups, anti-Communists, and Communists-turned-nationalists. While democratic slogans were occasionally advanced, the major themes of protest were focused instead on national reunification with Nagorno-Karabakh, the creation of an independent state, and the supplanting of Communist rule.

Interethnic violence served as a backdrop during the period of Armenia's march toward statehood, but with several exceptions, the civic movement relied largely on nonviolent means. The pro-independence positions of the opposition civic and political forces grouped around the ANM contributed to the establishment of the independent Armenian state in September 1991. Presidential elections in October 1991 saw the victory of the ex-Communist-turned-nationalist Levon Ter-Petrossian.

Contested parliamentary elections after independence were not held until July 1995. The 1995 and 1999 parliamentary and 1996 presidential elections were marred by serious irregularities. The most recent presidential and parliamentary polls, in 2003, were strongly criticized by international monitors, who cited widespread fraud, particularly in the presidential vote. Corruption, nepotism, and bribery continue to inhibit the state of democracy.