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# The Politics of Armenia

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## Introduction

Armenia, a small yet historically significant country at the crossroads of Western Asia and Eastern Europe, boasts a rich tapestry of cultural and political heritage. Nestled in the South Caucasus region, Armenia has been shaped by millennia of migration, conquest, and transformation, occupying a unique place in the geopolitical landscape. The emergence of the modern Armenian state at the dawn of the 1990s marked a profound shift, ushering in new challenges and opportunities as the country navigated the uncharted waters of post-Soviet independence.

The politics of Armenia remain deeply informed by its complex past. Over centuries, Armenians endured cycles of independence and foreign domination, from ancient kingdoms to medieval empires and the tumultuous experiences under Ottoman, Persian, Russian, and Soviet rule. Each epoch left indelible marks on the nation's identity, institutions, and political culture. The declaration of independence in 1991 was a pivotal moment that set in motion the establishment of Armenia's current political system—an evolving experiment in parliamentary democracy.

This book, *The Politics of Armenia: A Guide to Politics and the Political System in Armenia*, seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of Armenia's political architecture, the forces that have shaped it, and the challenges that continue to define its trajectory. Moving beyond surface-level accounts, the guide delves into the structure and functions of government, the design of its constitution, and the configuration of its executive, legislative, and judicial branches. It examines the significance of geography, demography, and the enduring influence of history on contemporary governance.

At the heart of the Armenian political system is a vibrant, if often tumultuous, multiparty landscape. Since independence, the country has witnessed shifting alliances, popular uprisings, and dramatic realignments—including the transformative “Velvet Revolution” of 2018. Political participation, from routine elections to outspoken civil society movements, attests to the active engagement of Armenia's citizenry, even as persistent challenges remain concerning electoral fairness, representation, and accountability.

Armenia's external relations present a further layer of complexity, shaped by unresolved regional conflicts, especially over Nagorno-Karabakh, and the constant balancing act between larger powers such as Russia, the European Union, and the United States. The nation's foreign policy, therefore, reflects both historical realities and contemporary aspirations—a striving for security, development, and recognition in an often volatile neighborhood.

In exploring the multiple dimensions of Armenian politics, this book aims not only to inform but also to encourage nuanced understanding, critical analysis, and informed engagement. Whether you are a student, a policymaker, an observer of regional affairs, or simply curious about Armenia, this guide endeavors to illuminate the intricate workings of a dynamic polity that stands at a crossroads of tradition and change.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: The Lay of the Land and the People Within**

To truly grasp the politics of Armenia, one must first understand the stage upon which this intricate drama unfolds: its geography and the people who inhabit it. Armenia is a landlocked country, tucked away in the South Caucasus region, a place where continents seem to jostle for space and influence. It's situated at the juncture of Western Asia and Eastern Europe, giving it a fascinating dual identity that is often reflected in its political leanings and cultural ties.

Imagine a place defined by mountains. That's Armenia. The terrain is predominantly mountainous, with an average elevation of 1,800 meters (5,900 feet) above sea level. There are no lowlands to speak of; even the "lower" areas are still quite high by global standards. These lofty ranges, deep river valleys, and volcanic plateaus create a dramatic and often challenging landscape. The northwestern part is home to Mount Aragats, the country's highest peak, reaching a staggering 4,090 meters (13,418 feet). While Mount Ararat, that iconic symbol of Armenia, is now just across the border in Turkey, it remains a powerful visual and emotional presence, even featured on the national emblem.

The mountains aren't just scenery; they significantly impact the climate. Due to Armenia's position and the surrounding ranges blocking moderating air masses, the climate is dry and continental with considerable regional variation. Summers can be long and hot, particularly in the lower plains, while winters are generally cold with plenty of snow, especially in the higher elevations. Precipitation varies greatly depending on altitude, with mountain slopes receiving significantly more rainfall than sheltered inland areas. Despite the sometimes harsh conditions, the volcanic soil in the plateau regions is surprisingly fertile, supporting agriculture that dates back millennia.

Armenia is a relatively small country, covering an area of roughly 29,743 square kilometers (11,484 sq mi). To put that in perspective, it's comparable in size to Belgium or the state of Maryland in the United States. Its borders are shared with Georgia to the north, Azerbaijan to the east, Iran and the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan to the south, and Turkey to the west. This neighborhood is, to put it mildly, complex, and these borders have been the subject of historical and ongoing disputes, profoundly shaping Armenia's foreign policy and domestic stability.

Now, let's talk about the people. Armenia is often described as one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries in the region, a characteristic that became even

more pronounced following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and subsequent conflicts. The vast majority of the population, around 98%, are ethnic Armenians. This strong ethnic majority contributes to a unified cultural identity, reinforced by the widespread use of the Armenian language and the enduring influence of the Armenian Apostolic Church, one of the oldest national churches in the world.

While Armenians constitute the overwhelming majority, there are small but notable minority groups. The largest of these are the Yazidis, an ethnic and religious group who primarily reside in the western part of the country and account for around 1.2% of the population. Other minority groups include Russians, Assyrians, Kurds, Ukrainians, and Greeks, among others. These groups have often arrived in Armenia through various historical migrations, sometimes seeking refuge.

The population of Armenia is estimated to be just under three million people as of 2025. However, it's important to note that there is a very large Armenian diaspora around the world, with estimates suggesting that at least five million Armenians live abroad, and some estimates go as high as eight million. This global Armenian community plays a significant role, both culturally and politically, maintaining ties with their homeland and often advocating on its behalf on the international stage.

Population density in Armenia is about 104 people per square kilometer. However, this figure doesn't tell the whole story, as the population distribution is far from uniform. The highest density is found in the Ararat Plain, a crucial agricultural and economic center. River valleys in the southeast and northeast are also relatively densely populated. In contrast, the high mountain ranges are sparsely populated, with virtually no permanent residents above certain elevations. Urbanization has significantly altered settlement patterns over time, with about two-thirds of the population now residing in urban areas. Yerevan, the capital and largest city, is home to over a million people and serves as the country's political, economic, and cultural hub.

Armenia's natural resources are primarily mineral-based. The country is rich in deposits of various metals, including copper, molybdenum, gold, lead, zinc, and iron, among others. Molybdenum and copper are particularly significant, with Armenia being a notable global producer of molybdenum. These mineral resources contribute substantially to Armenia's exports and economy, although the responsible management of this sector is an ongoing area of focus. Beyond metals, Armenia also possesses a wealth of non-metallic minerals and construction materials like tuff, basalt, granite, and marble.

In essence, Armenia's geography presents both opportunities and constraints. The mountainous terrain offers stunning natural beauty and some hydroelectric potential from its rivers, but it also poses challenges for infrastructure development and connectivity. Its landlocked nature necessitates reliance on its neighbors for trade routes, a reality complicated by regional political tensions. The demographic makeup,

while largely homogeneous, is characterized by a large and influential diaspora. Understanding these fundamental geographical and demographic realities provides the essential backdrop for exploring the political system and dynamics that govern this fascinating South Caucasian nation.

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