



Regional Studies Center (RSC)
Yerevan, Armenia

AN ANALYTICAL MODEL TO ASSESS NATIONAL STABILITY

Applying Qualitative Research: The RSC Analytical Model

As an independent “think tank” in Armenia, the Regional Studies Center (RSC) is developing our own analytical model of regime stability, first developed in 2009-2011, and used to assess national stability.

Our analytical model served as the basis of our past research and assessment of regime stability in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), which was also developed during our research collaboration with the Brussels-based Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). Our work with CEPS included an analysis of stability in Armenia entitled, “Armenia’s Crisis for the Non-Democrats,” that was published by CEPS in book form in 2009 (*Democracy’s Plight in the European Neighbourhood: Struggling Transitions and Proliferating Dynasties*), and edited by Michael Emerson and Richard Youngs.¹ Our analysis and findings from that publication then served as part of a larger research cited by the Brookings Institution in Washington.²

As the result of our collaboration with the CEPS project, that publication addressed the evolution of political regimes in former Soviet states to countries in the Arab Mediterranean worlds. More significantly, the book also assessed the outlook for democratization in those regions since the “color revolutions” of 2004-2005 (a wave of mostly nonviolent, democracy-advocating protests against authoritarian governments), and analyzed the major causes of both progress and regress.

Some of the key research questions addressed included such pressing issues as whether international democracy promotion in the European neighborhood was “running out of steam,” and an examination of the changing impact of factors such as corruption and state capture, energy resources and rent-seeking behavior, the relationship of both political and radical Islam on democratization in those regions, as well as what became known as a “democracy backlash,” focusing on:

- former Soviet states, which were found to be engaged in “struggling transitions,” with some aspiring to the European model of democracy, but hindered by shortcomings in reform;
- three Arab states of the Southern Mediterranean, marked by a weak tendency toward democracy and a contrary trend of “proliferating dynasties.”³

¹ “Armenia’s Crisis for the Non-Democrats,” in Emerson, Michael and Richard Youngs, Ed.s, *Democracy’s Plight in the European Neighbourhood: Struggling Transitions and Proliferating Dynasties* (Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels), October 2009. www.ceps.be/ceps/download/2315

² See www.brookings.edu/research/books/2010/democratisationsplightintheeuropeanneighbourhood.

³ A more complete description is available at: www.efsp.eu/docs/771Democratisation-in-the-Neighbourhood-2.pdf.

With the eruption of the “Arab Spring” in late 2010, however, we then refined our analytical model of assessing regime stability, and incorporated a set of “triggers, trends, and tools” in our methodology, which we then developed in a series of “focus groups” and seminars. The subsequent regime stability assessment model included the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, and expanded an analytical modeling of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary movements at the time, serving as the basis for further collaboration with other think tanks and research institutes.⁴

Assessing Armenia

We are now working to apply this analytical model to assess the situation in the Republic of Armenia, with a focus on the trends and triggers related to the medium- to long-term outlook for stability. Given fundamental shortcomings in reform, the outlook for stability in Armenia remains far from certain. More recently, a wave of assertive activism driven by a degree of deepening discontent now poses new challenges to the Armenian government, raising fresh questions over the medium- to long-term outlook for stability. This was most apparent during the months of June and July 2015, when Armenia was beset by a series of escalating public protests that became known as “*Electric Yerevan*,” triggered by the government’s move to increase electricity prices, and again in July 2016, as the country was gripped by a two-week hostage standoff. Our model will also incorporate several related trends, including the pronounced economic fragility and vulnerability that has driven a new degree of discontent and disenfranchisement, as well the more recent crisis in Armenian-Russian relations and the impact of the April 2016 fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh.



⁴ For more on our collaborative analysis, see: www.ceps.eu/content/southern-neighbourhood-islam-and-europe.