

POST-REVOLUTIONARY DISCOURSE AND THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION: NIKOL PASHINYAN'S ARMENIA

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Abstract: *This paper investigates the transformation of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's political discourse from the period following the 2018 Velvet Revolution to the political and religious confrontations of 2020–2025. Using the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and drawing on the work of Wodak, Van Dijk, Fairclough, Van Leeuwen, and Reyes, it examines how Pashinyan has positioned himself as the moral embodiment of the revolution while portraying opponents, ranging from former political elites to war critics, civil society actors, and religious leaders as threats to the state. Through strategies such as referential reduction, predication, moral evaluation, securitization, and fear-based legitimization, his rhetoric has progressively narrowed the range of acceptable political participation. The study traces the shift from inclusive, reformist messaging toward a crisis-driven style that frames loyalty as virtue and dissent as disloyalty, with the boundaries of the political "enemy" expanding over time. Drawing on speeches, press conferences, and symbolic performances, the analysis demonstrates how this discursive trajectory has contributed to the erosion of pluralism, the redefinition of political legitimacy, and the securitization of opposition in post-revolutionary Armenia. This analysis is based on a qualitative corpus of public speeches, parliamentary addresses, press conferences, and digital communications produced by Nikol Pashinyan between 2018 and 2025.*

Keywords: *Pashinyan; Armenia; Velvet Revolution; political discourse; framing; fear appeals; discursive boundaries.*

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Introduction

Since coming to power in 2018 through Armenia's Velvet Revolution, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has built and sustained his political authority through both institutional mechanisms and a distinctive, often polarizing rhetorical style. Armenia, emerging from the shadows of Soviet influence and enduring decades of oligarchic governance, found itself at a crossroads in 2018. The Velvet Revolution, spearheaded by Nikol Pashinyan, marked a decisive break from entrenched political structures, promising to reshape the country's democratic trajectory.

Initially positioned as a reformist and democratizing figure, Pashinyan presented his leadership as a decisive break with the corrupt, oligarchic past and as a restoration of popular sovereignty. Over the subsequent years, particularly following the military defeat in Nagorno-Karabakh, the emergence of large-scale protests, and heightened tensions with the Armenian Apostolic Church, his discourse has shifted in tone, focus, and target.

The rhetoric surrounding revolutionary leadership, especially in post-Soviet contexts, is as much about redefining moral boundaries as it is about institutional change.

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Pashinyan's rise was framed as a moral revival, positioning his leadership as a direct repudiation of a corrupt past. Revolutionary rhetoric, in this sense, is not merely about achieving political power; it involves reshaping the moral and symbolic boundaries of political participation, defining who belongs within the political community and who does not. By framing his leadership in opposition to the former political elites and their corrupt practices, Pashinyan set the stage for a new understanding of political legitimacy in Armenia - one based not only on institutional reforms but also on moral and symbolic purity.

While Pashinyan's leadership was framed as a moral rebirth for the Armenian nation, opposition forces, such as the Armenian Apostolic Church and various protest movements also began to construct counter-narratives. The Church, for example, emphasized its role as a moral compass for the nation, positioning itself as a counterweight to Pashinyan's portrayal of political legitimacy. The Armenian Apostolic Church, with its long-standing influence in Armenian society, viewed Pashinyan's populist rhetoric and government as an overreach that threatened religious authority and national identity. In contrast, the Church emphasized its stewardship over moral values, portraying itself as a guardian of Armenia's traditions and cultural integrity, which it believed were at risk in the wake of the revolution (Terzyan, 2025a).

This paper examines how Pashinyan has used language to reinforce his own legitimacy while challenging the credibility of critics, constructing a contrast between a legitimized "Self" (associated with the revolution, the people, and his leadership) and a delegitimized "Other" (linked to the previous political order, war critics, segments of the political opposition, and parts of the clergy). It traces the evolution of his political discourse from post-revolution optimism to crisis-oriented narratives, and from relatively open-ended appeals to increasingly explicit criticism of institutions.

The analysis draws on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the work of Wodak (2001), Van Dijk (2005), Fairclough (2003), Van Leeuwen (2007), and Reyes (2011). These scholars conceptualize discourse as a mechanism of social power, one that shapes legitimacy, sets boundaries for inclusion, and influences perceptions of authority. For the purposes of this study, key concepts are defined as follows. Moral exclusivity refers to the construction of political legitimacy as belonging solely to a particular actor or movement, excluding alternative viewpoints from the realm of acceptable discourse. Discursive enclosure denotes the narrowing of the political field through rhetorical practices that delegitimize dissent and reduce pluralism. Authoritarian populism is understood as a form of political discourse that combines appeals to popular sovereignty with the concentration of moral authority in a single leader or movement. Securitization refers to the framing of political actors or positions as existential threats, thereby justifying exceptional measures and limiting the space for democratic contestation.

Strategies such as referential reduction, evaluative labeling, fear appeals, temporal framing, and crisis narration help explain how political authority can be reframed as a matter of national necessity. By examining Pashinyan's speeches, press conferences, and symbolic performances from 2018 to 2025, this paper argues that his discourse has increasingly

narrowed the range of political positions deemed legitimate, often framing alternatives as steps backward or as risks to stability.

The empirical corpus consists of a purposive selection of public speeches, parliamentary interventions, press conferences, Facebook livestreams, and official statements produced between 2018 and 2025. The materials were selected based on their relevance to key political turning points and their visibility in shaping public discourse. The corpus is structured across three analytical phases: post-revolution consolidation 2018–2019, post-war crisis 2020–2022, and confrontation with institutional actors 2023–2025. This periodization enables a systematic comparison of discursive strategies across changing political contexts.

Beyond the Armenian case, this study contributes to broader debates on populism and post-revolutionary governance by illustrating how discursive strategies of legitimation evolve in response to crisis. It shows that rhetorical transformation is not only reactive but also constitutive of political authority, offering insights applicable to other post-Soviet and post-revolutionary contexts.

Post-Revolution Optimism and the Seeds of Moral Division (2018–2019)

When Nikol Pashinyan ascended to power in May 2018 after leading Armenia's Velvet Revolution - a peaceful civic uprising against entrenched oligarchic rule his public rhetoric immediately emphasized a radical moral rupture from the past. The revolution, according to Pashinyan, was not merely a political transition but a profound ethical rebirth for the Armenian nation (Terzyan, 2020, pp. 148-150). This discursive framing positioned the new leadership not as a replacement government but as the purified expression of the people's will and dignity.

In the early months of his premiership, Pashinyan frequently used referential and predicative strategies to distinguish the new revolutionary government from what he portrayed as a discredited *ancien régime*. Rather than naming past leaders, he often referred to "former corrupt elites," "forces who plundered the state," and "criminal oligarchic clans," framing the previous political order in morally and economically negative terms (Azatutyun, 2019; The Armenian Mirror-Spectator, 2018). Such language reflects a technique common in crisis rhetoric, where political actors invoke broadly defined threats to maintain a sense of ongoing mobilization (Chilton, 2004, pp. 111–116). He accused them of obstructing reform and resisting his anti-corruption agenda (Azatutyun, 2019). These broad referential categories served a dual purpose: they invoked shared public resentment without naming individuals directly, and they reinforced a moral dichotomy between the virtuous revolutionary "we" and the corrupt, faceless "they." This strategy aligns with what van Dijk, in his *Ideological Square*, terms negative other-presentation the systematic emphasis of out-group negative attributes alongside the downplaying of in-group shortcomings (Van Dijk, 1995, pp. 143–145).

In speeches such as the one delivered at the 100-day post-revolution rally in Yerevan's Republic Square in August 2018, Pashinyan declared: "There is no monopoly in Armenia today, there is no petrol monopoly, no monopoly of anything, there is only the monopoly of power, and you are the owner of that power..." (Pashinyan, 2018). This statement exemplifies moral evaluation as a strategy of legitimation (Reyes, 2011, p. 785). By proclaiming that power had returned to the people, Pashinyan simultaneously reinforced the illegitimacy of the previous regime and framed the revolution as a process of moral purification.

At the United Nations General Assembly in September 2018, Pashinyan stated, "Our democratic transformation and zero-tolerance policy against corruption are not without resistance from former corrupted elites" (Pashinyan, 2019a). Here, again, he invoked the ambiguous category of "former elites" rather than naming political parties or individuals, mobilizing strategic ambiguity to reinforce a sense of continued moral struggle. Such temporal binarization- the past as decay and the present as redemption is a hallmark of populist discourse (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 89-91).

Pashinyan's speeches were also marked by populist monopolization of authority, a rhetorical structure in which the speaker claims an exclusive and unmediated relationship with "the people." His repeated declarations that "you are the owners of power" and that the government must serve "only the people" framed any disagreement with his leadership as an assault on popular sovereignty itself (Pashinyan 2019b).

By the end of 2019, Pashinyan had succeeded in constructing a political discourse in which his administration was framed as the sole representative of moral authority and democratic legitimacy. This was not merely a matter of policy divergence, but of moral polarization. Through referential generalization, moral dichotomization, and strategic ambiguity, Pashinyan constructed a public narrative in which dissent was indistinguishable from disloyalty. The discursive field was not only restructured, it was morally enclosed.

Beyond verbal statements, Pashinyan's early premiership also relied on a repertoire of symbolic and embodied actions that reinforced his image as the antithesis of the old order. Walking to work through city streets without security escorts, wearing informal clothing to public events, and personally engaging with citizens in unplanned encounters all functioned as visual cues of accessibility and humility. From a discourse-analytic perspective, these non-verbal performances complemented his moral-political framing by making the rupture from oligarchic privilege tangible in everyday life. The lack of ceremonial distance between leader and public projected an egalitarian ethos, strengthening the association of the "Self" with authenticity and moral renewal. Over time, however, this imagery of openness and proximity stood in sharp contrast to the more guarded and securitized posture that emerged during later crises, when public appearances became less spontaneous, rhetorical tone hardened, and physical access to the leader was more tightly controlled. This shift not only marked a transformation in the style of leadership but also visually reinforced the broader discursive movement from inclusive revolutionary optimism to exclusionary, crisis-driven governance.

Crisis And Escalation: The 2020 War and the Broadening of the “Enemy” (2020–2022)

The 44-day war over Nagorno-Karabakh in the fall of 2020 constituted a critical rupture in Nikol Pashinyan’s political discourse. Previously regarded by many as the moral voice of a revolutionary movement, Pashinyan found himself suddenly vilified by large segments of the public, especially after signing a Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement that included significant territorial concessions to Azerbaijan. The resulting backlash was immediate and intense: on November 10, 2020, crowds stormed the Armenian parliament, vandalized government buildings, and chanted slogans such as “Nikol is a traitor” (Al Jazeera, 2020).

Following the Nagorno-Karabakh war, opposition voices began to frame their dissent as rooted in the defense of Armenia’s national integrity and sovereignty. Critics positioned their opposition to Pashinyan not just as a policy disagreement but as a stand against what they perceived as a betrayal of national values. Similarly, protest movements increasingly emphasized their moral duty to protect Armenia from what they viewed as Pashinyan’s concessions to Azerbaijan. Their discourse began to shift from a critique of policy to a defense of national survival, making it clear that their opposition was not just political but existential (Terzyan, 2025b).

The language of betrayal quickly became central to both public discourse and the government’s counter-narrative. Protesters accused Pashinyan of abandoning Shushi - one of the most symbolically important cities in Nagorno-Karabakh and thus of humiliating the Armenian nation on the world stage. In response, Pashinyan’s allies in parliament, as well as state-aligned media, began portraying critics as “agents of panic,” “tools of Azerbaijan,” or internal saboteurs (Asekose.am, 2021). Veterans, opposition figures, and journalists who questioned the government’s decisions were portrayed as acting in concert to undermine official policy (Sputnik Armenia, 2021a). This marked more than a defensive reaction, indicating a shift from treating such actors as legitimate participants in democratic debate to framing them as organized challenges to the state’s authority.

Within formal political institutions, similar framings emerged in parliamentary debates and legislative sessions during the post-war period. The language of “emergency unity” and “wartime discipline” was repeatedly invoked in procedural contexts, signaling that the atmosphere of crisis extended beyond rallies and public speeches into the deliberative spaces of governance. Even in the restrained register of parliamentary discourse, opponents were implicitly cast as obstructive to national recovery if they challenged the government’s policy trajectory. The procedural formality lent this framing an air of institutional legitimacy, embedding the Self/Other divide within the record of state deliberations. By infusing legislative discourse with the same moral and security-oriented binaries found in public rhetoric, the government ensured that the logic of loyalty versus disloyalty permeated both symbolic and operational domains of political life.

As protests persisted into 2021, the government's rhetoric hardened, entering what Fairclough (2003) and Chilton (2004) define as a securitization phase the transformation of opposition into a security threat. This process of securitization, whereby political opponents are redefined as existential threats, is not only a strategy for consolidating power but also a fundamental reshaping of democratic norms. The erosion of pluralism in the wake of the Nagorno-Karabakh war illustrates how security narratives can be leveraged to justify authoritarian practices in the name of national survival.

When General Onik Gasparyan and over 40 senior military officers issued a public call for Pashinyan's resignation in February 2021, the Prime Minister framed the appeal not as constitutional dissent but as an attempted coup d'état. He warned the public that Armenia was facing a "dangerous internal destabilization campaign," allegedly orchestrated by those who could not tolerate the new democratic order (Sputnik Armenia, 2021b). Protesters and critical media outlets were no longer treated as voices of civic unrest but were accused of engaging in criminal conspiracies against the constitutional order (Guardian, 2021).

During this period, Pashinyan increasingly framed disinformation and digital dissent as threats to national security. In March 2019, he warned that "millions of dollars" were being spent to mislead the public and destabilize the new government through fake news, while affirming his commitment to freedom of speech (EVN Report, 2019). A month later, he instructed the National Security Service (NSS) to act against individuals using social media to "manipulate public opinion" or incite unrest, effectively linking online opposition to state vulnerability (EVN Report, 2019). This strategic ambiguity what Reyes (2011, pp. 791-793) identifies as *fear-based legitimization through projected hypothetical futures* blurred the line between critique and sabotage. While no specific actors were named, the implication was clear: civic voices and online platforms critical of the government could be construed as foreign-aligned or subversive. In practice, this discursive move contributed to the erosion of trust in civil society institutions, which had once been integral to the revolution itself.

From 2020 to 2022, the Armenian government's rhetorical framework thus shifted from revolutionary idealism to authoritarian populism. Opposition was no longer constructed as a legitimate alternative but as a threat to national survival. This three-pronged strategy moral labeling, securitization, and conspiratorial ambiguity effectively erased the boundaries of legitimate dissent. Critics were depicted not merely as adversaries but as traitors and destabilizers. This kind of political discourse uses predictive and emotionally charged narratives to justify the concentration of power (Reyes, 2011, pp. 793-796). By portraying dissent as the beginning of future catastrophe, governments can frame their repressive measures as protective rather than authoritarian.

The democratic field was not simply narrowed it was discursively reconstructed to exclude any position outside of the ruling party's framework. What mattered was not what one said, but whether one affirmed or opposed the government's moral narrative of post-war survival.

Clergy as Political Threat and Discursive Suppression (2024–2025)

In the spring of 2024, the Armenian political crisis reached a new pitch with the rise of the *Tavush for the Homeland* movement. Sparked by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's decision to cede four border villages in Tavush Province to Azerbaijan as part of a broader peace process, the movement began as a localized expression of resistance. It quickly transformed into a nationwide protest after Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan - head of the Diocese of Tavush began a symbolic march from the region to Yerevan. Drawing on religious authority and moral rhetoric, Archbishop Bagrat galvanized tens of thousands of citizens. By the time the march reached Republic Square, the movement had become one of the largest popular mobilizations since the 2018 Velvet Revolution (Le Monde, 2024; AP News, 2024).

The Church's involvement in politics raised deeper questions about Armenia's sovereignty and national identity. The Church's resistance symbolized a deeper contest over the soul of the nation and the moral authority intertwined with religious institutions. For many Armenians, the Church was a central pillar of national self-definition, and its opposition raised a broader ideological contest over Armenia's identity and what it means to be Armenian after the revolution.

The entry of the Armenian Apostolic Church into open political dissent posed a unique challenge to Pashinyan. Archbishop Bagrat, widely respected and regarded by many as incorruptible, was now leading a movement that merged moral and political critique. Pashinyan's discursive response was swift and aggressive. Rather than addressing Archbishop Bagrat by name, he and his allies began referring to movement leaders in deliberately opaque and derogatory terms consistent with referential/nomination strategies (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 44) that construct social actors via collective labels and depersonalizing descriptors, and with van Dijk's account of negative other-presentation/polarization (van Dijk, 2006, pp. 734–736).

Publicly, Pashinyan accused the Church's leadership of forming an “anti-Christian, immoral, antinational and antistate group” and referred to its members as “coup organizers” and part of a “criminal-oligarchic clergy” (Mirovalev, 2025). This predication, understood here as the attribution of morally and politically charged characteristics (van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 95–98), served to reframe religious dissenters not as legitimate moral critics but as political actors portrayed as seeking to undermine the state.

Simultaneously, Pashinyan alleged that the Church hierarchy maintained long-standing ties to the former “criminal regime” and sought to reclaim the political influence and privileges enjoyed under previous administrations, particularly during the Republican Party era (Vardanyan, 2025; Cornell, 2024). This line of attack functioned as *moral evaluation* (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 96–97), attributing to the Church motives and qualities that placed it outside the bounds of legitimate political participation.

The confrontation with the Church was not confined to elite exchanges between political and religious leaders; it unfolded in full public view, where its symbolic stakes

could be continuously reinforced. The staging of speeches, choice of venues, and sequencing of events all contributed to a controlled narrative arc in which the government appeared as the guardian of national integrity and the clergy as a destabilizing force. Processions, counter-rallies, and the timing of public statements were orchestrated to maximize the contrast between a disciplined, forward-looking state and an alleged faction seeking to reverse the revolution's gains. By managing the performative dimensions of the conflict in this way, the government extended its discursive advantage into the realm of political theatre, where visual spectacle and ritualized confrontation could amplify the perception of an existential divide.

On May 29, 2025, Pashinyan likened churches to “storerooms” filled with clutter - an image widely interpreted as criticism of institutional stagnation and as a veiled indictment of clerical decline (Armenian Weekly, 2025a). In CDA terms, such metaphors serve to *delegitimize entire institutions* by reducing them to symbols of decay, aligning with Fairclough's (2003, pp. 89–91) description of discursive framing in which actors and institutions are positioned as incompatible with modern, “progressive” governance.

The Prime Minister's most personal and pointed attacks were directed at the head of the Church, Catholicos Garegin II. As Church support for the *Tavush* movement became more public, Pashinyan accused the Catholicos of violating his celibacy vows, acting under “anti-Christian and anti-state influences,” and functioning not as a spiritual leader but as a political operative aligned with counter-revolutionary forces (Eurasianet, 2024). He even floated the idea of a formal state oversight mechanism for future Catholicos elections, hinting at legislation that would permit the government to effectively replace the Church's top official (Civilnet, 2025). Such a measure would mark a dramatic break with the traditional autonomy of the Armenian Apostolic Church and was widely interpreted as an attempt to bring the institution under executive control.

The confrontation escalated sharply in June 2025 when Armenian authorities arrested Archbishop Bagrat on charges of orchestrating a coup d'état. According to the official indictment, Archbishop Bagrat had organized over 1,000 former soldiers and police officers into strike groups tasked with blocking roads, inciting unrest, and disrupting infrastructure. Authorities framed the effort as a coordinated attempt to overthrow the government rather than as a protest. Pashinyan described it as a “large and sinister plan by the criminal-oligarchic clergy” to seize power (Al Jazeera, 2025; Reuters, 2025). This marked the first time a senior cleric in post-Soviet Armenia had been arrested under national security provisions.

The government's portrayal of the case reflected a securitizing move in discourse (cf. Fairclough, 2003, pp. 89–91; Chilton, 2004, pp. 111–116), in which opposition is redefined as a threat to the survival of the state. In such discourse, actors are not debated with; they are neutralized. This logic was reinforced by what Reyes (2011, pp. 792–793) terms *fear-based legitimization through hypothetical futures*, where officials warned that failure to act against the clergy would lead to national destabilization.

The state's actions did not end with Bagrat. A second cleric, Archbishop Mikael Adjapahyan of the Shirak Diocese, was also targeted for arrest. When police attempted to

detain him at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, dozens of clergy and laypeople formed a human barrier to protect him. The resulting scuffles created a moment of profound national symbolism: the physical confrontation of Church and State at the holiest site of Armenian Christianity (Armenian Weekly, 2025b).

Moral evaluation further framed the Church's actions as inherently regressive, while *securitization* cast its dissent as an existential threat to the republic. The strategic ambiguity of accusations, referring to "forces working against the state" without concrete identification amplified public suspicion while insulating the government from direct accountability.

By collapsing the boundaries between religion, civil society, and insurgency, Pashinyan's rhetoric and actions reframed the Armenian Apostolic Church from a respected national institution into a partisan actor disloyal to the republic. In this new discursive regime, moral authority belonged solely to the revolutionary government; any competing claim, even from the pulpit, was treated as subversive.

Ultimately, the clergy were not simply discredited but removed from the sphere of accepted political participation. Through carefully crafted language, symbolic actions, and highly visible measures such as the arrests at Etchmiadzin, the government acted not only to silence dissent but to reshape the very definition of what constitutes legitimate political engagement. The *Tavush for the Homeland* confrontation marked the peak of a political trajectory in which authority was presented as resting with a single, unquestionable source, and all competing voices, including those from the Church were cast as illegitimate and potentially subversive.

Table 1. Delegitimizing the "Other" in Pashinyan's Discourse

Discursive ("Other")	Target	Discursive Strategy	Examples	Intended Effect
Former regime, elites		Referential reduction; moral labeling	"Criminal oligarchic clans", "forces who plundered the state"	Delegitimize ancien régime, moralize revolution
Protesters, critics	military	Securitization; fear-based legitimization	"Agents of panic", "coup attempt", "traitors"	Reframe dissent as existential threat
Clergy, institutions	Church	Predicative demonization; symbolic exclusion	"False prophets", "those in robes and knives"	Collapse religious dissent into sabotage
Pashinyan ('Self')		Altruistic legitimization; symbolic capital	"I took responsibility for peace"; walking with people	Sanctify rule, monopolize moral authority

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Across these phases, the analysis reveals a consistent shift in the function of discourse. Early rhetoric constructs legitimacy through inclusion and moral renewal, while later stages rely increasingly on exclusion, threat construction, and the redefinition of dissent as disloyalty. This progression reflects a transition from mobilizing discourse to stabilizing discourse, where language is used not only to describe political reality but to delimit the boundaries of legitimate participation.

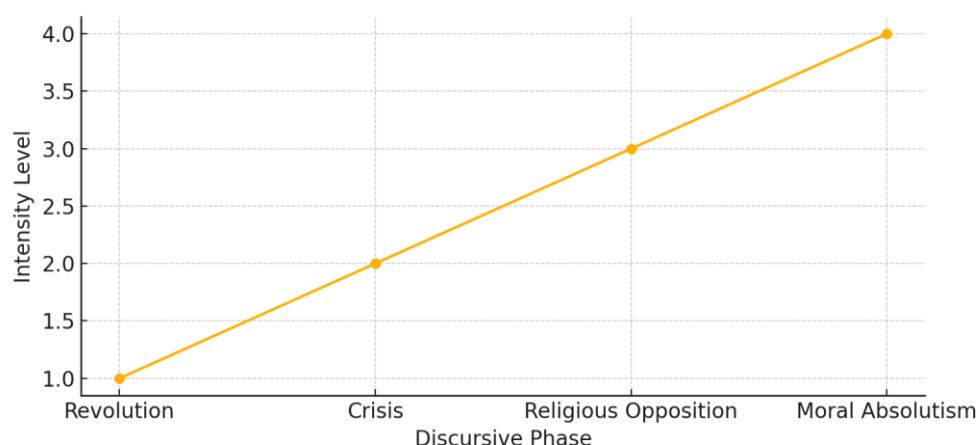


Figure 1. Discursive Strategy Intensification in Pashinyan's Rhetoric

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Implications for Political Legitimacy and Community

The progression of Pashinyan's political rhetoric indicates not only a constriction of Armenia's public sphere but also a transformation in the basis of political legitimacy. This transformation is shaped by a combination of structural and situational factors. The post-war crisis created conditions of political vulnerability that incentivized the consolidation of authority, while ongoing institutional challenges encouraged the framing of dissent as destabilizing. At the same time, the persistence of hybrid political structures provided a foundation for the strategic use of moral and security narratives.

By advancing a governing style grounded in moral certainty and narratives of existential danger, his approach departs from the democratic pluralism envisioned in 2018 and moves toward a framework where allegiance is celebrated as a civic virtue, while dissent is portrayed as a moral transgression.

One direct consequence of this morally charged political order is the weakening of the shared foundation needed for genuine democratic engagement. When definitions of acceptable speech and participation are shaped through invocations of existential threat and moral virtue, political disagreement is recast as unacceptable -something to be dismissed or condemned rather than debated. In such an environment, the political arena shifts from a space of negotiation and collective agency to one defined by exclusion and mistrust, with the onus placed on critics to justify themselves to those in power.

The impact of this shift extends beyond formal political institutions, influencing how national identity and collective memory are constructed. By intertwining narratives of historical trauma, communal grievance, and a redemptive national story, Pashinyan's discourse encourages citizens to root their belonging not in common institutions, but in alignment with a sanctified "Self" that stands in opposition to an ever-changing array of "Others." This process fosters cycles of polarization, wherein each successive crisis demands the identification of new adversaries, thereby rationalizing the continued consolidation of political authority.

Armenia's experience also demonstrates how populist rhetoric can evolve when confronted with opposition from non-state actors such as religious institutions or civil society groups. As perceived threats shift from entrenched elites to disaffected military figures to the Church the category of the political "enemy" becomes increasingly elastic. This adaptability suggests that authoritarian populism functions less as a static political arrangement and more as a continuous discursive project, one that reshapes the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in response to changing political circumstances.

From a scholarly perspective, these trends challenge optimistic expectations about democratization in the post-revolutionary period. The Armenian case illustrates broader patterns observable in post-revolutionary and post-Soviet settings, where initial democratic mobilization is followed by discursive consolidation of authority. The expansion of the category of the political "enemy" and the increasing reliance on securitizing rhetoric are not unique to Armenia but reflect a wider trajectory in contexts where institutional constraints remain weak and political legitimacy is continuously contested. These dynamics underscore the need to examine not only institutional structures of democracy, but also the symbolic and linguistic mechanisms through which legitimacy is constructed, contested, and transformed.

Looking ahead, the persistence of these rhetorical tendencies raises critical questions about the handling of future crises. Should similar situations arise whether over territorial disputes, economic upheaval, or institutional confrontation the entrenched habit of defining dissent as a threat to survival could make it easier to revert to securitized narratives and exclusionary framing. Over time, this normalization risks erasing the boundary between emergency measures and routine politics, allowing a discourse of crisis to dominate even in times of stability. Such a pattern would further constrain the space for legitimate political expression, fostering a governance model in which consensus is equated with adherence to a single, elevated vision of the national interest.

Ultimately, the Armenian case underscores the fragility of political community during periods of accelerated change. As stories of redemption and betrayal increasingly shape the parameters of public life, the conditions for pluralism, institutional resilience, and civic trust are significantly altered. Meeting this challenge will require not only the restoration of checks and balances, but also a revitalization of the language and practices that sustain inclusive forms of political belonging.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that the transformation of political rhetoric is closely linked to the construction of legitimacy in post-revolutionary contexts. As discourse shifts from inclusive mobilization to exclusionary stabilization, the criteria of legitimate political participation are redefined, narrowing the space for dissent. This confirms that rhetorical strategies are not secondary to political processes but are central to the consolidation and maintenance of authority.

The evidence suggests that the resilience of democratic change is not secured solely through constitutional structures or electoral competition; it also relies on preserving discursive

norms that uphold the legitimacy of diverse political actors. Armenia's case illustrates how rhetorical adaptability allows leaders to respond to evolving challenges whether from entrenched elites, protest movements, or religious institutions, while maintaining a cohesive narrative of self-legitimation. This adaptability can be politically effective, yet it risks eroding the safeguards that prevent the concentration of authority in a single figure or movement.

Comparatively, the Armenian trajectory mirrors patterns seen in other post-revolutionary or post-crisis states, where the moral capital of a transformative moment is gradually reframed as a mandate for centralized control. In these contexts, political loyalty becomes bound to the person of the leader, and dissent is reframed not simply as policy disagreement but as a challenge to the nation's cohesion or survival. Such dynamics complicate the distinction between leadership as a unifying force and leadership as a gatekeeper of acceptable political expression.

Looking ahead, sustaining Armenia's democratic institutions will require more than procedural safeguards; it will demand a recalibration of political communication to accommodate dissent without framing it as disloyalty. Civil society, independent media, and institutional actors will play a crucial role in expanding the discursive space, resisting the normalization of crisis language, and promoting narratives that make room for genuine contestation. The goal should be to create an environment where disagreement is interpreted as an indicator of democratic vitality rather than a threat to stability.

Ultimately, Armenia's experience offers a cautionary lesson for states navigating the aftermath of rapid political change: the rhetorical tools that energize a revolution can, over time, be reconfigured to defend the status quo. Recognizing and addressing this shift early is essential if the original promise of political transformation is to be preserved and translated into a lasting, inclusive democratic order.

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