

Armenian President Promises Security

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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YEREVAN, Armenia — Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan promised Tuesday to make the country secure and stable after cruising to victory in an election that international vote monitors said lacked real competition.

But Sargsyan, 58, faces a challenge in his second five-year term to prevent tensions increasing with Azerbaijan over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh that could lead to a new war in the South Caucasus, where pipelines carry Caspian oil and gas to Europe.

Preliminary results showed Sargsyan won 58.6 percent of the votes cast in Monday's election, enough to avoid a second-round run-off. His closest rival, U.S.-born former Foreign Minister Raffi Hovannisian, trailed on nearly 37 percent.

International observers said the election was an improvement on last year's, in which 10 people were killed. But "the limited field of candidates meant that the election was not genuinely competitive," representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said in a statement.

"The candidates who did run were able to campaign in a free atmosphere and to present their views to voters, but the campaign overall failed to engage the public's interest."

Several of Sargsyan's potential rivals, most notably former President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, decided not to run because they feared the election would be skewed in the president's favor.

A minor candidate was shot and wounded during campaigning, and police received 70 complaints of voting violations. But the result was in line with opinion polls.

Sargsyan's promises of economic recovery went down well with voters in the country of 3.2 million, where more than 30 percent live below the poverty line. The average monthly wage is about \$300, and unemployment was 16 percent last year.

But Sargsyan has outlined no big policy changes, and investors and foreign governments are worried by Armenia's fraught relations with Azerbaijan.

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