

# Armenian Opposition Seeks Early Election

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YEREVAN, Armenia &mdash; More than 10,000 people rallied in the Armenian capital to demand early elections if jailed opposition members are not released, highlighting growing resistance to President Serzh Sargsyan's rule.

The protest — the third Armenia's opposition have organized in two weeks — also commemorated victims of deadly clashes between the opposition and police in 2008 following the last presidential election, which put Sargsyan in power.

Holding portraits of the victims — 10 people were killed including two police officers — the crowds chanted "Unity!" and "Fight until the end!" as they took to the streets of downtown Yerevan on Tuesday.

"If they fulfill our demands, we are ready to start dialogue with the government on early presidential and parliamentary elections in the country in the coming months," said opposition leader Levon Ter-Petrosyan.

The opposition says the 2008 presidential election was rigged and Sargsyan has ushered in unpopular legislation such as the recent ban on street trade in the capital. Western monitoring bodies deemed the vote fair.

While most of the 52 people who were arrested in the 2008 violence have since been pardoned, the opposition wants all of them now released. It is not clear how many remain behind bars.

The arrests drew concern from human rights groups over the strength of government crackdowns in Armenia.

Parliamentary elections are due in 2012, and the presidential vote is in 2013, where Sargsyan is eyeing a second term.

The opposition — who said police estimates of 10,000 at the rally were one-fifth of the real number — said they would gather again on March 17 if their demands are not met.

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