THE ELECTION PROPAGANDA IN ARMENIA UNDER THE RULE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF ARMENIA

(ERMENİSTAN KOMÜNİST PARTİSİ'NİN İKTİDARINDA ERMENİSTAN'DA SEÇİM PROPAGANDASI)

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Abstract: *In the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), the citizenship rights of the Armenian people were determined within the framework of the Soviet constitutions. The use of the right to vote by the Armenian people on the basis of the constitution in force in the Soviet Union was also realized in the shadow of the Communist Party. Elections were held in the ASSR under the leadership of the Communist Party of Armenia (CPA), a branch of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and the Armenian people were encouraged to participate in the elections through propaganda posters prepared during this period. This study aimed to reveal the messages given in the election propaganda under the power of the CPA by examining the election-themed propaganda posters in the ASSR. For this purpose, within the scope of the study, the posters used in election propaganda under the power of the CPA were analyzed through the semiotic*

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concepts of the US semiotician Charles William Morris. In the findings obtained in the study, it was revealed that the Armenians, who adopted the communist ideology and voted in line with the ideas of Vladimir Lenin, were presented as idealized Armenian citizens in the election posters. On the basis of the posters, it was determined that the Armenian people participated in the elections within the framework of the limited authority given by the Soviet constitutions. On the other hand, it was concluded that the communist ideology and regime were tried to be glorified in the Armenian public opinion through the election-themed propaganda posters. As a result, it was revealed in the study that the election propaganda under the CPA government tried to legitimize the communist regime in the Armenian public opinion by ensuring that the Armenian people supported the candidates approved by the regime.

Keywords: *Armenia, Propaganda, Communist Party, Election, Communism*

Öz: *Ermenistan Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyeti'nde (ESSC) Ermeni halkının vatandaşlık hakları Sovyet anayasaları çerçevesinde belirlenmiştir. Sovyetler Birliği'nde yürürlükte olan anayasa temelinde Ermeni halkının seçim hakkını kullanması da Komünist Parti'nin gölgesinde gerçekleşmiştir. ESSC'de Sovyetler Birliği Komünist Partisi'nin (SBKP) bir kolu olan Ermenistan Komünist Partisi'nin (EKP) öncülüğünde seçimlere gidilmiş ve bu dönemde hazırlanan propaganda posterleri üzerinden Ermeni halkının seçimlere katılması teşvik edilmiştir. Çalışma; ESSC'de seçim konulu propaganda posterlerini inceleyerek, EKP'nin iktidarı altında seçim propagandasında verilen mesajların ortaya koymayı amaçlamıştır. Bu amaçla çalışma kapsamında EKP'nin iktidarı altında seçim propagandasında kullanılan posterler, ABD'li göstergebilimci Charles William Morris'in göstergebilim kavramları üzerinden analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmada elde edilen bulgularda, seçim posterlerinde Komünizm ideolojisini benimseyen ve Vladimir Lenin düşünceleri doğrultusunda oy kullanan Ermenilerin, idealize edilen Ermeni vatandaşları olarak sunulduğu ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Posterler üzerinden Sovyet anayasasının verdiği sınırlı yetki çerçevesinde Ermeni halkının seçimlere katıldığı belirlenmiştir. Diğer yandan seçim konulu propaganda posterleri üzerinden Ermeni kamuoyunda komünist ideolojinin ve rejimin yüceltilmeye çalışıldığı sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Sonuç olarak çalışmada EKP iktidarındaki seçim propagandasının Ermeni halkının seçimlerde komünist rejim tarafından onaylanan adayları desteklemesi sağlanarak, Ermeni kamuoyunda rejimin meşrulaştırılmasına çalışıldığı ortaya çıkarılmıştır.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Ermenistan, Propaganda, Komünist Parti, Seçim, Komünizm*

Introduction

The 20th century was a period when many parts of the world began to experience democratic rule. Free elections were held in democratic countries with the participation of various political parties holding different views and ideologies. Election campaigns were prepared in which different discourses and promises came to the fore, especially in the elections held in Western democracies. Many academic studies have been conducted on the election campaigns in Western democracies.

On the other hand, the election propaganda in the Soviet Union, which played a leading role in the spread of the communist ideology in the world in the 20th century and also led the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War, has been dealt to a limited extent. Perhaps the underlying reason for this is that the elections in the Soviet Union were held under the one-party rule of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the election process focused directly on political propaganda, apart from the concept of political advertising or political public relations.

The dominance of only one ideology in the Soviet Union eliminated the possibility of voters turning to different ideologies during the election process. This process prevented different ideologies other than Communism from being effective in the politics of the Soviet Union.

Election propaganda was also carried out in the socialist republics that formed the Soviet Union. One of the Soviet socialist republics where these campaigns realised was the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). In particular, the communist regime carried out election-oriented propaganda activities to the Armenian people through the posters prepared during the election periods in the ASSR under the rule of the Communist Party of Armenia (CPA). In this respect, the examination of the propaganda posters used for the Armenian people on the subject is important in terms of shedding light on the election propaganda of the Soviet Union through the ASSR[1].

In the literature research carried out within the scope of the study, it was revealed that there was an important gap in the field of election propaganda in the Soviet Union. At this stage, it was aimed to reveal both the election propaganda of the ASSR and the election propaganda of the Soviet Union through the ASSR by examining the posters used in the election propaganda of the ASSR. For this purpose, ASSR's election posters were examined in the

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1   Tuğba Baytimur, Caner Çakı, and Ferit Arda Arıca, "The Propaganda in Armenia of The Five-Year Development Plans Implemented in The Soviet Union," *Review of Armenian Studies,* no. 42 (2020): 81-102.

propaganda dimension using the semiotics method. In the light of the findings obtained in the study, the following questions were tried to be answered:

- What messages were given to the Armenian people in the election-themed posters of the ASSR?

- How was the ideology of Communism and the communist regime presented in the election posters of the ASSR?

- For what purpose were the election posters of the ESSC used in Soviet propaganda?

The study is important in terms of giving information about the election periods of the Soviet Union through the ASSR. In this respect, it is aimed that the study will be a resource that researchers in the fields of communication, politics, and history can benefit from studying on the ASSR in specific and the Soviet Union in general.

The propaganda posters examined in the study were prepared during the period when the 1936 or 1978 constitution was in force. 1936 and 1977 constitutions eliminated indirect election of deputies[2]. On the other hand a right not specifically granted to a citizen by law may not be presumed to be inherent in man. In this context, "right" is simply defined as lawful entitlement or entitlement under the laws in force[3]. In this whole process, it can be stated that the Communist Party was influential in the political scene in the Soviet Union and the concept of the Soviet Union state was prioritized.

1. Literature Review

Various academic studies regarding communist party propaganda have so far been made. The following topics have been discussed in these studies: Mickiewicz examined the modernization of party propaganda in the Soviet Union. In this study, an area of Soviet political communication activity was examined through development theory.[4] Terrell examined propaganda organ of the Communist Party of China (CPC). This study tried to present a selective description of the first 25 years of the *Beijing Review*.[5] Chen examined CPC

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2   I.I. Kavass & G.I. Christian, "The 1977 Soviet Constitution: Historical Comparison," *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 12, no. 3 (1979): 580.

3   Christopher Osakwe, "Soviet Human Rights Law under the USSR Constitution of 1977: Theories, Realities and Trends," *Tulane Law Review* 56, no. 1 (1981-1982).

4   Ellen Mickiewicz, "The Modernization of Party Propaganda in the USSR," *Slavic Review* 30, no. 2 (1971): 257-276.

5   Robert L. Terrell, "The First 25 Years of the Beijing Review, An Official: Propaganda Organ of the Communist Party of the People's Republic of China," *Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands)* 37, no. 3 (1986): 191-219.

and propaganda films. This study explored the shifts in the meaning of cinema that occurred under the CPC as post-1949 propaganda emphasized the novelty of film technology and its connection to socialist modernity.[6] Pretorius et al. discussed printed propaganda of the Communist Party of South Africa during Second World War. This propaganda was examined by briefly describing the impact that the War had on the party and its propaganda production.[7] Brady examined CPC Central Propaganda Department. This study utilised previously unexplored classified sources, particularly the journal *Neibu tongxun* (*Internal Report*), to present a brief overview of the propaganda system in the 1990s and 2000s.[8] Tsai discussed operations of the CPC's external propaganda system. In this article, the concepts, principles, and practices employed by the CPC to carry out external propaganda were examined[9].

Various academic studies on the elections in the Soviet Union were also made apart from the studies on communist party propaganda in general. The following topics have been discussed in these studies: Swearer examined functions of Soviet local elections. This study into the role of elections in the Soviet political process subsumed several more specific questions about the nature of Soviet elections[10]. Hill discussed continuity and change in the Soviet Union Supreme Soviet elections. This article examined the results of the USSR Supreme Soviet elections held in June 1970. On the other hand, it presented an analysis of the patterns of drop-out and re-election among deputies to the previous Supreme Soviet, elected in June 1966[11]. Hill also examined the CPSU in the Soviet election campaign[12]. Zaslavsky and Brym discussed functions of elections in the Soviet Union. The purpose of this article was to outline Soviet elections[13]. Saratovskikh examined new features in the legislation on elections to the Soviet Union Supreme Soviet[14]. White discussed 1984 Soviet Union

6   Tina Mai Chen, "Propagating the Propaganda Film: The Meaning of Film in Chinese Communist Party Writings, 1949-1965," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 15, no. 2 (2003): 154-193.

7   Deirdre Pretorius, Grietjie Verhoef, and Marian Sauthoff, "The Printed Propaganda of the Communist Party of South Africa during World War II," *Image & Text: a Journal for Design* 20, no. 1 (2012): 30-48.

8   Anne-Marie Brady, "Guiding Hand: The Role of the CCP Central Propaganda Department in the Current Era," in *Critical Readings on the Communist Party of China (4 Vols. Set)*, ed. Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard (Holland: Brill, 2017), 752-772.

9   Wen-Hsuan Tsai, "Enabling China's Voice to be Heard by the World: Ideas and Operations of the Chinese Communist Party's External Propaganda System," *Problems of Post-Communism* 64, no. 3-4 (2017): 203-213.

10   Howard R. Swearer, "The Functions of Soviet Local Elections," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 5, no. 2 (1961): 129-149.

11   Ronald J. Hill, "Continuity and Change in USSR Supreme Soviet Elections," *British Journal of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1972): 47-67.

12   Ronald J. Hill, "The CPSU in a Soviet Election Campaign," *Soviet Studies* 28, no. 4 (1976): 590-598.

13   Victor Zaslavsky & Robert J. Brym, "The Functions of Elections in the USSR," *Soviet Studies* 30, no. 3 (1978): 362-371.

14   L. Saratovskikh, "New Features in Legislation on Elections to the USSR Supreme Soviet," *Soviet Law and Government* 18, no. 2 (1979): 20-26.

Supreme Soviet elections. The process by which the elections took place is examined in detail, from the calling of the election on 16 December 1983, through the nomination, approval, and registration of the candidates, to the pre-election meetings with constituents and the election itself[15]. White and Wightman examined 1989 Soviet elections[16] The article described the significant electoral changes that occurred under Mikhail Gorbachev's term, including the proper use of ballots, public support for competent candidates, and elections akin to Soviet practices. Getty examined constitution and elections in the Soviet Union in the 1930s[17]. Tedin discussed popular support for competitive elections in the Soviet Union. Based on a survey representative of the Moscow oblast and a survey representative of the European USSR conducted in the spring of 1990, it analyzed mass support for the institution of competitive elections[18].

2. Method

The posters used in the election propaganda of the ASSR were accessed from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) library[19]. UCLA Library and the National Library of Armenia (NLA) established the International Digital Ephemera Project (IDEP) Armenian Ephemera Collection "to preserve, digitize, and provide online access to valuable historical materials related to Armenia"[20]. IDEP is "an initiative to digitize, preserve and provide broad public access to print, images, multimedia, and social networking resources produced worldwide". The website presents "collections with content from Armenia, Cuba, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, and South Africa, ranging from fragile early 20th century newspapers to posters, postcards, cellphone videos, and much more". IDEP boasts that it has "developed methods to capture and preserve new forms of knowledge, records, and content"[21].

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15   Stephen White, "Non-Competitive Elections and National Politics: The USSR Supreme Soviet Elections of 1984," *Electoral Studies* 4, no. 3 (1985): 215-229.

16   Stephen White & Gordon Wightman, "Gorbachev's Reforms: the Soviet Elections of 1989," *Parliamentary Affairs* 42, no. 4 (1989): 560-581.

17   J. Arch Getty, "State and Society under Stalin: Constitutions and Elections in the 1930s," *Slavic Review* 50, no. 1 (1991): 18-35.

18   Kent L. Tedin, "Popular Support for Competitive Elections in the Soviet Union," *Comparative Political Studies* 27, no. 2 (1994): 241-271.

19   "Soviet Armenian Posters on Elections." *University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)-International Digital Ephemera Project*, accessed November 5, 2021, https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/subject=Elections&collection=Soviet+Armenian+Posters

20   "About the National Library of Armenia." *University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)-International Digital Ephemera Project*, accessed November 26, 2021, https://idep.library.ucla.edu/national-library-armenia

21   "About." *University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)-International Digital Ephemera Project*, accessed November 26, 2021. https://idep.library.ucla.edu/about

A total of 16 propaganda posters on the subject were reached from the library, and 8 propaganda posters were determined as the sample of the study by using the purposeful sampling method among the accessed propaganda posters. While determining the sample of the study, attention was paid to the presence of both visual and written indicators in the propaganda posters.

In the study, ASSR's propaganda posters were examined using the semiotics method, which is a qualitative research method. Various studies were made to examine ideological discourses on posters used in ASSR. These studies used the concepts by Karl Bühler[22] and Charles William Morris[23]. In the study, the semiotic concepts (syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic) of the US linguist Charles William Morris were used to reveal the propaganda messages given through the propaganda posters and to explain the change in the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of the Armenian people through the propaganda messages.

Since the subject of the study is not Morris' semiotics understanding, Morris' semiotic concepts are explained only with basic information within the scope of the study. Morris stated that the symbol involves memory of the original stimulus in a non-tactual form[24]. And he indicated it is doubtful if mind and matter are so opposed as people ordinarily believe[25]. This explanation leads to questioning the role of the effect of the sign representing the concept in the mind of the people in the process of persuading people on a particular issue. In the study, it was aimed to reveal the representations that were desired to be formed in people's minds through signs through Morris' semiotic concepts. In this way, it was tried to reveal the desired effect on people through the perceptions that signs arouse in the mental world of the people. Thus, it was aimed to shed light on the aims desired to be achieved in the Soviet election propaganda through the indicators on the posters in the ASSR.

Morris was influenced by the linguist Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics understanding and used different concepts in semiotics apart from Peirce's semiotic concepts[26] The syntactic dimension describes the process by which signs are brought together to form a particular message or particular messages.

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22 Baytimur et al., *The Propaganda in Armenia*, 81-102.

23 Sadık Çalışkan & Mehmet Barış Yılmaz, "Ermenistan Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyeti'nde Basında Yer Alan Propaganda Posterleri Üzerinden Vladimir Lenin'in Kült Liderlik İnşası," *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, no. 65 (2020): 75-100.

24 Charles William Morris, *Symbolism and Reality: A Study in the Nature of Mind (Vol. 15)* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1993), 14.

25 Charles William Morris, "The Nature of Mind," *Rice Institute Pamphlet-Rice University Studies* 16, no. 4 (1929): 153.

26 Osman Bozdemir, "Organ Ticaretinin Önlenmesine Yönelik Kampanyalar: ABD Ulusal İnsan Kaçakçılığı Kaynak Merkezinin Kamu Spotlarının Göstergebilimsel İncelemesi," *Göç Araştırmaları Dergisi* 6, no. 2 (2020): 376.

The semantic dimension expresses the meanings of the signs and the message or messages that are intended to be given through the signs. Finally, the pragmatic dimension explains the intended change in people's thoughts, attitudes or behaviors through the message or messages given over the signs[27].

In the study, the posters about the election campaigns of the ASSR were analyzed in terms of propaganda through Morris' syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions, respectively.

3. The Communist Party of Armenia (CPA) and the Election under CPA Power

When the Soviet Union was founded on December 30, 1922, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was the only political party to rule the Soviet Union. In the socialist republics of the Soviet Union, the communist parties, which were the branches of the CPSU, were in a dominant position in political terms. In the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), one of the socialist republics that formed the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of Armenia (CPA) was in power by itself. The CPA was established on December 31, 1920, under the first secretary Gevorg Sargisovich Alikhanian and dissolved on September 7, 1991, shortly before the official collapse of the Soviet Union. The CPA was directly under the influence of the Soviet Union administration and played a leading role in the establishment of the communist regime in Armenia.

The Soviet Republics became a fundamental part of the USSR. The United Soviet Republics were founded in 1922 by the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, and the Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Federation. On January 31, 1924, the first constitution of the USSR was accepted and proclaimed. Chapter 10 of the 1924 Constitution of the USSR is devoted to the regulation of the status of the member republics. All matters included in the competence of the Union were regulated by Article 1 of the USSR Constitution. Decisions such as education, employment, land and property status, economy and budget, military, civil, law and order were under the authority of the Union. In essence, the powers of the Soviet Republics were severely limited. This was intensified during the leadership of Joseph Stalin, who led the Union in a very centralized way. Many issues were forced by Communist Party activities at the central level[28].

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27 Çalışkan & Yılmaz, *Ermenistan*, 75-100.

28 Gülşen Paşayeva, İrada Bağirova, Kamal Makili-Aliyev ve Ferhad Mehdiyev, "SSCB'de Yarı-Özerkliğin Hukuki Durumu: Dağlık Karabağ Özerk Bölgesi Örneği," *Uluslararası Suçlar ve Tarih*, no.14 (2013): 78-79.

During the short period of independence in 1918-20, Armenia did not have a written constitution. Although Armenia was called an "allied republic" in the legal terminology of the period, like other republics during the Soviet Union, it became a country with very limited powers and rights and was dependent on the center. Besides, when communist ideology and party hegemony are mentioned, it becomes clear that the republics did not have any freedom in peripheral relations. Accordingly, like the other Soviet Republics, the constitutions of Armenia that were in force at that time were the same as those of the Russian Federation and later of the Soviet Union[29].

Between 1920 and 1991, when the communists were in power, Armenia was governed by a one-party system. At that time, it was not possible to talk about democracy, protection of human rights, free press and broadcasting, or political freedom in general in Armenia, which was the case in the other Soviet Republics as well. The communist regime did not tolerate opposing views and initiatives, and strenuously prevented oppositional movements. Elections for local and central organs were held in an undemocratic environment, and people who were not members of the Communist Party were not allowed to take part in the state administration mechanism. In local and parliamentary elections, in elections for the General Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, only one candidate was nominated and elected. The first opposition movements in Armenia started in the 1960s, but such activities did not appeal to a large audience, only people's opposition to the regime came to the fore. With the serious measures taken by the central government against the opposition, certain examples of political organizations were not even recorded, and the backbone of the opposition movements as such did not form[30].

Even though Armenia was governed as a one-party regime under the CPA's rule, the citizens of the Soviet Union were given the right to vote in accordance with the Constitution of the Soviet Union. At this stage, the people voted in the Supreme Soviet to determine who would represent them. The people had the right to vote for a single candidate in the elections held every four years. Candidates participating in the elections were able to become candidates as "communist" or "independent", provided that they received the approval of the Communist Party. In the propaganda of the Soviet Union, it was emphasized that Soviet socialism was politically, economically, and culturally superior to capitalism[31]. Through the elections held, it was possible to form the

29 Ali Asker, "Ermenistan'da Anayasal Dönüşüm Süreci ve Anayasa'nın Temel Özellikleri," *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, no. 36 (2010): 217.

30 Hatem Cabbarlı, "Ermenistan Cumhuriyeti'nin Siyasal Dönüşüm Süreci," *Uluslararası Kriz ve Siyaset Araştırmaları Dergisi* 4, no. 1 (2020): 122.

31 George H. Bolsover, "Soviet Ideology and Propaganda," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 24, no. 2 (1948): 178.

image of the propaganda of the Soviet Union that Armenia had a democratic administration. In essence, voting in the Soviet Union can be expressed as a public demonstration of party leadership and affirmation of the Soviet way of life[32].

It is possible to talk about 7 constitutions in the history of the Soviet Union, which were the 1918, 1924, 1925, 1936, 1937, 1977, 1978 constitutions[33]. With each amendment to the constitutions, the previous constitutions were completely repealed. According to the laws in the Soviet Union, the rules regarding elections were not the same for every administrative unit such as an autonomous republic, oblast, or socialist republic, whereas all Soviet Union citizens had the same rights. When evaluated in the context of choice, the 1936 Constitution removed the obstacles to the right to vote and recognized universal suffrage.

Vladimir Lenin, as the central figure in Soviet ideology, argued that an abstract "pure democracy" does not exist. In other words, Lenin asserted that there is no democracy in general. There are only different democracies defined by their class characteristics. According to such an understanding, there are ancient, bourgeois, socialist, and communist democracies[34]. Whatever argument was used, in the communist democracy of the Soviet Union, it was a one-party system of government that dominated the politics of the Union.

4. Elections and Election Propaganda in One-Party Regimes

Democratic regimes were established in many parts of the world since the first half of the 20th century. On the other hand, the spread of democracy was accompanied by the spread of single-party autocracies in other parts of the world[35]. The processes of coming to power of one-party regimes can be different from each other. In China, the Communist Party of China (CPC), led by Mao Zedong, came to power as a result of the civil war against the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) and established the People's Republic of China (PRC), which continues its existence today. The National Fascist Party (PNF), led by Benito Mussolini, came to power in Italy with a march in 1922 and continued its rule until 1943. The National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP), led by Adolf Hitler, came to power through elections and its dominance came to an end in 1945 when Germany lost the Second World War.

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32 Swearer, *Soviet Local Elections*, 149.

33 "Конституции", *Конституции СССР и РСФСР (1918-1978)*, accessed November 30, 2021, http://constitution.garant.ru/history/ussr-rsfsr/

34 Joe Pateman, "VI Lenin on Democracy," *International Critical Thought* 10, no. 4 (2020): 543.

35 Beatriz Magaloni & Ruth Kricheli, "Political Order and One-Party Rule," *Annual Review of Political Science* 13, (2010): 124.

Elections are also held in single-party regimes and which aim to reveal the support of the people to the party in the elections. In this process, the single-party regime can effectively benefit from propaganda in the election process to make the masses adopt its own thought and ideology. Giving the message that the one-party regime is supported by the masses and thus legitimizing the regime in public also constitutes the propaganda purpose of the elections. As a matter of fact, legitimacy comes to the forefront as an important issue in the adoption and implementation of the decisions taken by the single-party regime by the people. In elections held in single-party regimes, public support can reach over 90%, and it can thus be demanded that the decisions of the party be fulfilled without questioning due to the "will of the people". On the other hand, the party that gains legitimacy through elections can accuse any opposition that may arise against it for committing treason and impose various penalties on those who join the opposition.

In a one-party regime, leaders use various strategies to maintain their power[36]. In this respect, elections can be considered as an important tool in increasing the influence of the party leader in the eyes of the public in one-party regimes. The party leader can be brought to the forefront in the election propaganda carried out in single-party regimes, and the leader can be given place in public opinion. In this process, various propaganda activities are carried out to show that the leader spends a significant part of his/her time to ensure the peace and welfare of his/her people, that s/he will make the right decisions for his/her people and that s/he will ensure unity and order in his/her country.

Another propaganda that can be applied during election periods in one-party regimes is the construction of "the enemy". In this process, the single-party regime can turn to hostile discourses against a country or a nation to increase its support in the elections, and thus, it can come to the fore as a savior in the election against the constructed enemy.

Today, some countries such as the PRC, North Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam continue to be governed under the one-party regime, although one-party regimes have ended in many countries.

5. The Findings and the Analysis of Election Posters

In this part of the study, eight propaganda posters about election campaigns in ASSR were analyzed semiotically.

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36   Nina Hachigian, "The Internet and Power in One   Party East Asian States," *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (2002): 41.

5.1. The First Poster

The first election poster was prepared by Sedrak Tigrani Rashmadzyan and Manuk Vakhtangi Arutyunyan and was published in 1937. When analyzed syntactically, the poster features images of Soviet leaders Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin on a red flag. The poster depicts a group of people carrying red flags and walking while smiling under the red flag. In the middle of the poster, there is a picture of a group of people. In the background of the poster, there are images of structures resembling production facilities. The poster reads "We give our votes to the bright people dedicated to the cause of Lenin and Stalin (Մեր քվեն տալիս ենք Լենինի -Ստալինի գործին նվիրված սոցիալիզմի յերկրի լավագույն մարդկանց)".

Poster 1: The First Poster[37]

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37 "Մեր քվեն տալիս ենք Լենինի -Ստալինի գործին նվիրված սոցիալիզմի յերկրի լավագույն մարդկանց", *University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)-International Digital Ephemera Project* accessed November 5, 2021. https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/document/armeniaposters:243

When considered in terms of semantics, it is revealed that the images of Lenin and Stalin on the poster represent the administration of the Soviet Union. The red flags on the poster symbolize the communist ideology. The people walking and smiling in the poster are used as the metonymy of the Armenian people. The images similar to production facilities in the background of the poster represent the production in the Soviet Union. Based on the written indicators on the poster, it is understood that a group of people in the middle of the poster are the candidates in the election.

According to Article 135 of the 1936 Constitution; elections of deputies are general, meaning all citizens of the USSR who have reached the age of 18, regardless of race, nationality, religion, educational background, residence, social origin, property status, and past activity, have the right to participate in the election of deputies[38]. The right to vote of the people of the Soviet Union is directly highlighted on the poster.

From a pragmatic point of view, cult of personality propaganda of both leaders is carried out through the images of Stalin and Lenin on the poster. During the Soviet Union era, Lenin was also identified with the ideology of Communism, apart from being known as the founder of the Union. In the socialist republics of the Soviet Union, Lenin's cult of personality propaganda came to the fore. Stalin's cult of personality propaganda, on the other hand, came to an end with the destalinization implemented in the period of Nikita Khrushchev, who came to the leadership of the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. On the other hand, it is sought to convey the message that Armenia develops economically under the communist regime through images similar to the production facilities in the poster. It is emphasized that the Armenian people have the right to vote in the Soviet Union under the communist regime, highlighted with the images of Lenin and Stalin as well as the red flags in the poster. The poster seeks to convey that the Armenian people are satisfied with the current election order by giving the message that the people, used as metonymy of the Armenian people, smiling and carrying red flags, go to the elections. Through the written indicators on the poster, the message that the Armenian people should directly support the candidates who adopt the ideas of Lenin and Stalin is given. In this way, the people who support the candidates are presented as idealized citizens in the Armenian society and it is thus attempted to prevent the Armenian people from forming or supporting different ideas.

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38 "Конституция 1936", *Статья 135*, accessed November 30, 2021,
    http://constitution.garant.ru/history/ussr-rsfsr/1936/red_1936/3958676/chapter/531f31fc05e8518095
    d555dedbf7915c/

5.2. The Second Poster

The second election poster was prepared by Khachatur Hovhannesi Gyulamiryan and was published in 1958. Taken in the syntactic dimension, the poster depicts a hand holding a white card. On the back of the hand on the poster, the Kremlin is depicted in red. The poster reads "Let's vote for the communist candidates... (Չայն տանք կոմունիստների և անպարտիականների բլոկի թեկնածուների օգտին)".

Poster 2: The Second Poster[39]

From a semantic point of view, it is understood from the written indicator on the poster that the hand on the poster represents the elections in the Soviet Union. The Kremlin in the background of the poster is used as the metonymy of the Soviet Union administration.

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39 "Չայն տանք կոմունիստների և անպարտիականների բլոկի թեկնածուների օգտին", *University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)-International Digital Ephemera Project*, accessed November 5, 2021. https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/document/armeniaposters:120

According to Article 143 of the 1937 Constitution; elections of deputies are held directly. As in; elections for all Soviets of Working People's Deputies, from the village and City Council of Working People's Deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, are held by the citizens through direct elections[40]. The poster also forms a perception that the citizens of the Soviet Union determine their own administration.

When considered in the pragmatic dimension, direct guidance is given on which view the Armenian people should vote for through the written indicator on the poster. In the poster, people who adopt the communist ideology are idealized and the Armenian people are encouraged to vote for these idealized people. On the background of the poster, there is propaganda that the Armenian people have the right to vote, thanks to the Soviet Union's administration, through the image of the Kremlin. In this way, in the election propaganda, it is sought to increase the loyalty of the Armenian public to the Soviet Union administration.

5.3. The Third Poster

The third election poster was prepared by Khachatur Hovhannesi Gyulamiryan and was published in 1962. Syntactically, the poster depicts two smiling men in front of the ASSR flag. One of the men in the poster raises one hand. The poster reads "With all my heart - Election Day, March 18th (Ամբողջ սրտով - ընտրություններ օր, Մարտի 18)".

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40 "Конституция 1937", *Статья 143*, accessed November 30, 2021,
    http://constitution.garant.ru/history/ussr-rsfsr/1937/red_1937/3959896/chapter/45c7159d1431fa030
    f3a50def1cdf355/

Poster 3: The Third Poster[41]

When considered in terms of semantics, the flag on the poster symbolizes ASSR. The two smiling men in the poster are used as the metonymy of the Armenian people.

According to Article 140 of the 1937 Constitution; the elections of deputies are equal: each citizen has one vote and all citizens participate equally in elections[42]. Equality is also emphasized in this poster as well.

When examined from a pragmatic point of view, the message that the Armenian people are satisfied with the electoral system in the Soviet Union is given through the smiles of two men used as the metonymy of the Armenian people on the poster. In this way, the electoral system of the Soviet Union in Armenia is legitimized. The message that the Armenian people are ready for the election

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41 "Ամբողջ սրտով - ընտրություններ օր, Մարտի 18", *University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)-International Digital Ephemera Project*, accessed November 5, 2021, https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/document/armeniaposters:242

42 "Конституция 1937", *Статья 140*, accessed November 30, 2021, http://constitution.garant.ru/history/ussr-rsfsr/1937/red_1937/3959896/chapter/39508de81c29ab8e2f1ebbd63918d25c/

is given through the written indicator on the poster and the raising of a hand by one of the men on the poster. In this way, the Armenian people are also encouraged to vote.

5.4. The Fourth Poster

The fourth election poster was prepared by Aram Boris Zakarian and was published in 1964-1965. Considered syntactically, the poster depicts a group of people in front of a factory. A man in the poster raises one hand in the air and invites people from the poster with the other hand. A figure resembling a woman wearing white scarf over her cap with a determined facial expression stands on the left corner. The poster reads "Let us all go to the voting booths (Բոլորս դեպի քվեատուփերը)".

Poster 4: The Fourth Poster[43]

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43 "Բոլորս դեպի քվեատուփերը", *University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)-International Digital Ephemera Project*, accessed November 5, 2021, https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/document/armeniaposters:244

From a semantic point of view, it is understood from the visual indicators on the poster that the people on the poster represent the working class in Armenia. The factory image in the poster is used as the metonymy of the production facilities in Armenia.

According to Article 141 of the 1937 Constitution; women have the right to vote and to be elected on equal terms with men[44]. The poster also emphasizes the equality of voting between men and women.

Considering the pragmatic dimension, when the visual and written indicators on the poster are evaluated as a whole, it is revealed that the Armenian people are encouraged to participate in the elections whether they are men or women. In the poster, Armenians working in the factory are highlighted, emphasizing the working class in Armenia, and asking the working class to vote in the elections. In this way, it can be argued that the aim is to ensure as much participation as possible in the elections, and to put forward the message that the Armenian people attach importance to the elections in the Soviet Union.

5.5. The Fifth Poster

The fifth election poster was prepared by D. Sargsyan and was published between sometime between 1970 and 1980. When analyzed syntactically, it is seen that three men and a woman are depicted on a red background in the poster. There is a perception that the men in the poster wear workers' clothes. The poster reads, "In the Soviet countries, we choose worthy people (Սովետներում ընտրենք արժանի մարդկանց)".

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44 "Конституция 1937", *Статья 141*, accessed November 30, 2021.
http://constitution.garant.ru/history/ussr-rsfsr/1937/red_1937/3959896/chapter/4409e3d130a818a2b5323978ad10f4c3/
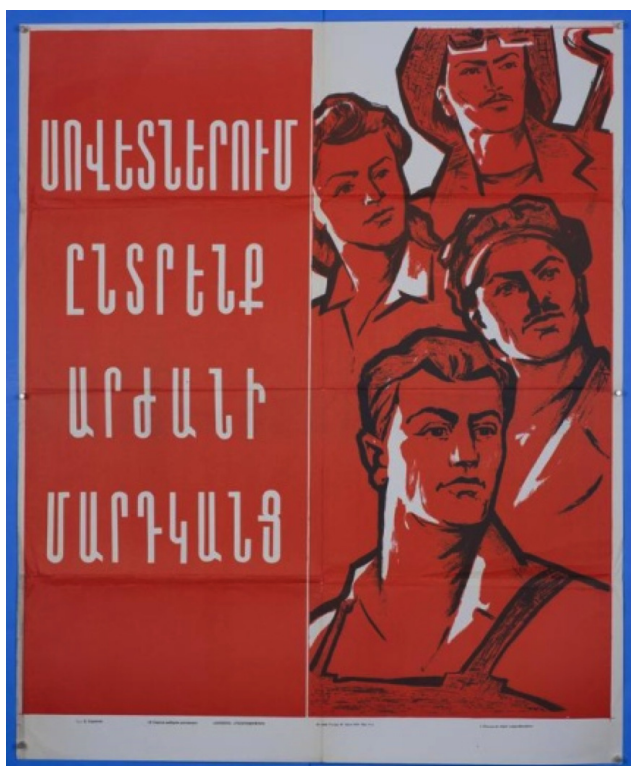
Poster 5: The Fifth Poster[45]

When considered in terms of semantics, the people in the poster are used as
the metonymy of the working Armenian people. From the visual indicators on
the poster, it is understood that the working class is emphasized in the poster.
The red background in the poster symbolizes the communist ideology.

According to Article 97 of the 1977 Constitution; the elections of deputies are
equal; each elector has one vote and all voters participate equally in the
elections[46]. The emphasis on equality is also prominent in the poster.

From a pragmatic point of view, the poster gives the message that the Armenian
people participated in the elections in the Soviet Union, which was governed
under the ideology of Communism. In this process, the poster highlights the
working class in Armenia and encourages them to choose the candidates they
think are the best for the administration of the Soviet Union.

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45 "Սովետներում ընտրենք արժանի մարդկանց", *University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)-
    International Digital Ephemera Project*, accessed November 5, 2021,
    https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/document/armeniaposters:229

46 "Конституция 1977", *Статья 97*, accessed November 30, 2021,
    http://constitution.garant.ru/history/ussr-rsfsr/1977/red_1977/5478732/

5.6. The Sixth Poster

The sixth election poster was prepared by E. Khachatryan and was published sometime between 1970 and 1980. Considered syntactically, the poster features a woman in a worker's outfit holding a card in one hand and flowers in the other. In the background of the poster, a factory, a shipyard, a construction site or a similar place is depicted. The poster reads "Towards the Elections (Դեպի ընտրությունները)".

Poster 6: The Sixth Poster[47]

When analyzed from a semantic point of view, the image of the woman on the poster is used as the metonymy of the Armenian people. The paper in one hand of the woman represents the voting of the Armenian people, and the flowers

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47 "Դեպի ընտրությունները", *University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)-International Digital Ephemera Project*, accessed November 5, 2021,
https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/document/armeniaposters:230

in the other hand represent peace and happiness. The visual representing the factory, shipyard, construction site or similar place in the background of the poster refers to the development of Armenia.

On the poster, women's suffrage comes to the fore within the framework of the Soviet Union's constitution.

In the pragmatic dimension, it is sought to convey the message that the Armenian people happily participated in the elections in the Soviet Union through the visual indicators on the poster. In this way, the perception is formed that the elections took place voluntarily, and not by imposition on the Armenian people. On the poster, Armenians working in factories and willingly participating in the elections are presented as ideal Armenian citizens. On the other hand, women's participation in working life in Armenia is supported through the depiction of the woman in the poster. Through the poster, the message is given that women both take an active role in working life and gain the right to vote in the elections in the Soviet Union administration. Finally, the flowers in the woman's try to convey the message that Armenia is at peace under the rule of the Soviet Union.

5.7. The Seventh Poster

The seventh election poster was prepared by S.S. Mkrtchyan and M.M. Baghdasaryan and was published in 1985. When analyzed syntactically, the poster depicts a group of papers on the map of Armenia. On the poster, there is a hole on the map of Armenia and one of the papers goes inside this hole. On the right side of the poster is a wheat spike, a machine gear, a laboratory tube, and a microscope. The poster reads "24th February 1985 -We are all going to the Armenian SSR Supreme Soviet and local Soviet national deputy elections (1985 թվականի փետրվարի 24-ին բոլորս դեպի Հայկական ՍՍՀ Գերագույն սովետի և ժողովրդական դեպուտատների տեղական սովետների ընտրությունները)".

Poster 7: The Seventh Poster [48]

When considered in terms of semantics, a message that the Armenian people go to the elections is given from the written and visual indicators on the poster. The spike in the poster symbolizes agricultural production in Armenia, the machine gear symbolizes industrial production in Armenia, and the laboratory tube and microscope symbolize scientific endeavors in Armenia.

The right to vote given to the citizens of the Soviet Union by the Soviet constitution comes to the fore.

From a pragmatic point of view, it is revealed that the poster encourages the Armenian people to participate in the elections. Through the visual indicators in the poster, agricultural, industrial, and scientific development is emphasized in Armenia under the communist ideology. When the indicators in the poster are evaluated as a whole, there is a perception that the development in Armenia

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48 "1985 թվականի փետրվարի 24-ին բոլորս դեպի Հայկական ՍՍՀ Գերագույն սովետի և ժողովրդական դեպուտատների տեղական սովետների ընտրությունները", *University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)-International Digital Ephemera Project*, accessed November 5, 2021, https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/document/armeniaposters:105

can only be possible if the Armenian people participate in the elections and elect their administrators. At this stage, it can be argued that by forming the perception that the elections play an important role in the development in Armenia, it is sought to increase the motivation of the Armenian people to participate in the elections.

5.8. The Eighth Poster

The eighth and final election poster was prepared by Daniel Davidi Sargsyan. Information about its preparation date is not available. When considered syntactically, a woman and two men are depicted on the poster. One of the men in the poster wears a working overall with a sickle and hammer. A fighter jet taking off, or a missile or a rocket being launched is depicted in the background of the poster. The poster reads "June 19 is the day of local council elections (Հունիսի 19 տեղական սովետների ընտրությունների օրն է)" and "The government - that is us! (Պետությունը այդ մենք ենք)".

Poster 8: The Eighth Poster [49]

From a semantic point of view, the people in the poster are used as the metonymy of the Armenian people. The sickle and hammer on one of the men in the poster symbolizes the ideology of Communism. The fighter

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49 "Պետությունը այդ մենք ենք", *University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)-International Digital Ephemera Project*, accessed November 5, 2021,
https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/document/armeniaposters:385

jet/missile/rocket in the background of the poster refers to the technological development in the Soviet Union.

In the poster, the equality of the people of the Soviet Union regarding elections within the framework of the Soviet Union's constitution comes to the fore.

When considered pragmatically, it is revealed that the poster encourages the Armenian people to participate in the elections. At this stage, the Armenian citizen, who has adopted the communist ideology, is presented as an idealized citizen in the Soviet Union through the image of the sickle and hammer on the overalls of the person on the poster. When evaluated in general, the message is sought to be given that the Armenian people live in a democratic and technologically developed country under the ideology of Communism.

Conclusion

When the propaganda posters used in the study were evaluated in general, it was revealed that the propaganda of the Soviet Union benefited from the band wagoning effect of the propaganda in the election posters. In this way, it was sought to convey the message that the people of the Soviet Union were satisfied with the elections and participated in the elections voluntarily. The visual and written indications on the propaganda posters were shaped within the framework of the electoral rights granted to the people of the Soviet Union by the Soviet Union's constitutions. At the same time, the messages on the poster also emphasized the electoral rights themselves.

Despite the one-party rule in the ASSR, holding elections was important in terms of legitimizing the communist regime in domestic and foreign public opinion. It can be stated that high participation in the elections was aimed by encouraging the Armenian people to participate as much as possible through the propaganda posters. In this way, it can be argued that the aim was to prevent the rise of questions over the legitimacy of the communist regime in the foreign public opinion. In propaganda posters, Armenians who adopted the communist ideology and voted in the elections were presented as idealized citizens by the regime. In this respect, it can be stated that the election-themed propaganda posters of the ASSR tried to form a direct guiding effect on the thoughts and behaviors of Armenians in line with the aims of the communist regime.

The posters contained propaganda about how the Armenian people would use the right to vote granted to the Armenian people by the Constitution of the Soviet Union. In this respect, the posters are important in that they reflect the Communist regime's domination of the Armenian people in the electoral process. The findings obtained in the study revealed that the posters in the

election propaganda were used to glorify Communism and the communist regime, something that was revealed as well in Çalışkan and Yılmaz's study on Lenin's cult of leadership propaganda[50] and Baytimur et al.'s study on the propaganda of the five-year plans of the Soviet Union[51].

When evaluated in general, it was concluded that the election propaganda in the ASSR was used as a tool for the Armenian people to adopt the ideology of Communism and to support the communist regime. In the study, it was revealed that unlike the election campaigns in the democratic regimes of countries in the Western Bloc in which political parties with different views and ideologies struggled to come to power, the election propaganda in the ASSR directly aimed to increase the loyalty of the Armenian people to the administration and to ensure that the current regime received public support. As a result, it can be argued that the election propaganda of the ASSR, especially during the Cold War period, served to form a democratic government image in the competition of the Soviet Union against Western democratic countries. In future studies, it is thought that it will be possible to reveal the election propaganda of the Soviet Union more comprehensively by examining the election propaganda methods utilized in different Soviet socialist republics.

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50 Çalışkan & Yılmaz, *Ermenistan*, 75-100.
51 Baytimur et al., *The Propaganda in Armenia*, 81-102.

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