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ՎԱՀՐԱՄ ՊԵՏՐՈՍԵԱՆ

Պատմական գիտ. թեկնածու, ԵՊՀ

## ԿՐՕՆԱԿԱՆ ԿԱԶՄԱԿԵՐՊՈՒԹԻՒՆՆԵՐԸ ՊՈՆԱԼԴ ԹՐԱՄՓԻ ԸՆՏՐՈՒԹԻՒՆՆԵՐԻ ԺԱՄԱՆԱԿ<sup>1</sup>

Յօդուածը Դոնալդ Թրամփի 2016 եւ 2020 թթ. նախագահական ընտրարշաւների ընթացքին ԱՄՆ կրօնական կազմակերպութիւնների եւ համայնքների քաղաքական ներգրաւուածութեան վերաբերեալ վերլուծութիւն է:

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## RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN THE TRUMP ELECTIONS

Religion has long constituted one of the most durable and analytically significant cleavages in American political life<sup>2</sup>. From the emergence of evangelical revivalism in the eighteenth century to the entrenchment of the “religious right” in the late twentieth century, religious identities and institutions have repeatedly shaped patterns of

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<sup>1</sup>\* Ստացուել է՝ 6.12.2025, գրախօսուել է՝ 6.01.2026: Էլ. հասցէ՝ arshak.madoyan@ysu.am: Խմբագիր՝ Գեորգ Սարեան:

<sup>2</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, “Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction”, in Party Systems and Voter Alignments, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (New York: Free Press, 1967), 1–64; C. Geoffrey Layman, The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 3–28.

electoral behavior, policy preferences, and partisan alignment.<sup>3</sup> The 2016 and 2020 presidential elections—marked by heightened polarization, demographic realignment, and the ascendance of Donald J. Trump—offer a particularly compelling context in which to examine the political agency of religious communities<sup>4</sup>. Trump’s campaigns not only reactivated long-standing conservative religious coalitions but also exposed fault lines within Catholic, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and other minority faith groups, revealing complex interactions between doctrine, identity, and political mobilization<sup>5</sup>.

The present study seeks to provide a systematic and comparative analysis of the political behavior of major religious groups during Donald Trump’s electoral campaigns, with special attention to patterns of support, opposition, and organizational engagement<sup>6</sup>. It further explores the forms of institutional access—both formal and informal—through which religious organizations sought to influence campaign messaging, policy priorities, and appointments<sup>7</sup>. An additional focus is placed on the Armenian-American community and the Armenian Apostolic Church, whose mobilization strategies illustrate how ethnoreligious diasporas engage presidential campaigns through a combination of advocacy, lobbying, and moral discourse.

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<sup>3</sup> **K. Daniel Williams**, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15–43; Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 91–137.

<sup>4</sup> **John Fea**, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 1–24; **L. Andrew Whitehead** and **L. Samuel Perry**, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 45–88.

<sup>5</sup> **C. David Leege** et al., *The Politics of Cultural Differences: Catholics in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 211–246; **A. Amaney Jamal**, *Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 157–190; **L. Diana Eck**, *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 233–281; **Prema Kurien**, *Indian American Religious Life at Home and Abroad* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 182–213; **H. Richard Seager**, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 198–223.

<sup>6</sup> **C. Geoffrey Layman**, *The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 3–28; **D. Kenneth Wald** and **Allison Calhoun-Brown**, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 91–137; **John Fea**, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 1–24.

<sup>7</sup> **John Fea**, *Believe Me*, 25–56; **L. Andrew Whitehead** and **L. Samuel Perry**, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 45–88; **E. Corwin Smidt**, ed., *Religion as Social Capital: Producing the Common Good* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 112–145.

Methodologically, the article draws on a secondary analysis of major survey datasets, including the Pew Research Center’s Religious Landscape Study, the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), and Associated Press VoteCast, complemented by qualitative materials such as campaign statements, advisory board records, media reporting, and scholarly interpretations<sup>8</sup>. By integrating empirical data with comparative political analysis, the study elucidates how religious institutions function simultaneously as spiritual authorities and political actors capable of delivering—or withholding—electoral support<sup>9</sup>. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates on civil religion, identity politics, and the evolving role of faith communities within the American electoral system<sup>10</sup>.

From a theological and religious perspective, religious institutions are fundamentally tasked with tending to the spiritual needs of their communities; yet from the standpoint of governance and political science, a more decisive consideration becomes the extent to which a given religious institution is capable of mobilizing and delivering votes<sup>11</sup>. Religious affiliation has been and remains one of the most significant factors in American political life<sup>12</sup>. During the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, support for Donald Trump varied considerably across different

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<sup>8</sup> Pew Research Center, *Religious Landscape Study* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2014); CCES, *Cooperative Congressional Election Study 2016–2020*, Harvard Dataverse, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/VOQCHQ>; Associated Press, *AP VoteCast 2016–2020* (New York: Associated Press, 2020); **John Fea**, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 25–56; **L. Andrew Whitehead** and **L. Samuel Perry**, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 45–88.

<sup>9</sup> **D. Kenneth Wald** and **Allison Calhoun-Brown**, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 91–137; **E. Corwin Smidt**, ed., *Religion as Social Capital: Producing the Common Good* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 112–145.

<sup>10</sup> **Rogers Brubaker**, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 12–45; **Manuel Castells**, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 99–134; **L. Diana Eck**, *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 233–281.

<sup>11</sup> **D. Kenneth Wald** and **Allison Calhoun-Brown**, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 91–137; **C. Geoffrey Layman**, *The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 3–28.

<sup>12</sup> **Seymour Martin Lipset** and **Stein Rokkan**, “Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction”, in *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, ed. **Seymour Martin Lipset** and **Stein Rokkan** (New York: Free Press, 1967), 1–64; **D. Kenneth Wald** and **Allison Calhoun-Brown**, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 101–120.

religious groups, reflecting both historical coalitions and contemporary patterns of political polarization<sup>13</sup>. This article presents a systematic analysis of the political behavior and relationships with the Trump campaign among major religious groups: white Evangelical Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus<sup>14</sup>. The analysis is grounded in data from the Pew Research Center, the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, and other credible sources, offering insight into how religious identity shaped electoral outcomes during this pivotal period in American politics<sup>15</sup>.

White Evangelical Protestants emerged as a distinct religious current in North America during the First and Second Great Awakenings (eighteenth–nineteenth centuries), when revivalist preaching emphasized personal conversion (“born-again” spirituality), biblical inerrancy, missionary activism, and moral reform. Throughout the nineteenth century, evangelicals became deeply embedded in American civil society, leading movements against slavery and alcohol consumption, as well as advocating for public education. In the early twentieth century, internal divisions sharpened amid the Fundamentalist–Modernist controversy, which reinforced boundaries around doctrinal orthodoxy and opposition to theological liberalism<sup>16</sup>.

After World War II, figures such as Billy Graham played a central role in re-orienting evangelicalism away from separatism and toward cultural and political engagement. This transformation facilitated the expansion of national organizations, interdenominational networks, and mass media ministries. Beginning in the late 1970s, evangelical political mobilization intensified in response to judicial rulings on school prayer, abortion, and evolving gender norms. Organizations such as the Moral Majority

<sup>13</sup> **John Fea**, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 1–24; **L. Andrew Whitehead** and **L. Samuel Perry**, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 45–88.

<sup>14</sup> **C. Geoffrey Layman**, *The Great Divide*, 50–72; **D. Kenneth Wald** and **Allison Calhoun-Brown**, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 125–137; **L. Diana Eck**, *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 233–281.

<sup>15</sup> Pew Research Center, *Religious Landscape Study* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2014); Hartford Institute for Religion Research, “*Religious Congregations and Membership Study*” (Hartford, CT: Hartford Institute, 2016); Associated Press, *AP VoteCast 2016–2020* (New York: Associated Press, 2020).

<sup>16</sup> **M. George Marsden**, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 165–192; **Mark Noll**, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 220–255.

and later the Christian Coalition institutionalized this engagement, forging a durable alliance between evangelical constituencies and conservative Republican politics<sup>17</sup>.

By the early twenty-first century, White Evangelical Protestants had become one of the most cohesive and politically influential religious voting blocs in the United States. During the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections, they constituted the most consistent base of support for Donald Trump. According to surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center, approximately 81% of white evangelical voters supported Trump in 2016, while around 76% did so in 2020<sup>18</sup>. This electoral alignment was reinforced by direct campaign outreach, including the establishment of the Evangelical Executive Advisory Board, frequent appearances at large evangelical gatherings, and closed-door meetings with prominent pastors and religious leaders.

Taken together, the historical evolution, institutional consolidation, and electoral behavior of White Evangelical Protestants illustrate how a religious movement rooted in revivalist spirituality evolved into a highly disciplined and politically consequential constituency within contemporary American electoral politics.

Several megachurch pastors and televangelists—most notably Paula White—maintained personal, high-level relationships with Trump<sup>19</sup>. White served as his spiritual adviser, led advisory groups during the campaign, delivered the inaugural invocation in 2017, and participated in prayer meetings involving Trump and senior White House officials. These interactions primarily took the form of private, high-level consultations rather than mass public events.

Conservative Catholic and pro-life organizations were also institutionally engaged. Trump addressed the annual March for Life, issued official White House messages to pro-life leaders, and held policy discussions concerning judicial ap-

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<sup>17</sup> **Randall Balmer**, *Evangelicalism in America* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 15–40; **Matthew Avery Sutton**, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1–24, 247–279; **K. Daniel Williams**, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1–22, 135–176.

<sup>18</sup> Pew Research Center, *How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis* (Washington, DC, 2016); Pew Research Center, *White Evangelicals See Trump as Fighting for Their Beliefs* (Washington, DC, 2020); **Noah Weiland**, “Paula White, Trump’s Spiritual Adviser, Says He Has ‘a Hunger for God’”, *New York Times*, 2017; Reuters, “Televangelists, Megachurches Tied to Trump Approved for Millions in Pandemic Aid”, London/Washington, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> **Noah Weiland**, “Paula White, Trump’s Spiritual Adviser, Says He Has ‘a Hunger for God’”, *New York Times*, 2017; Reuters, “Televangelists, Megachurches Tied to Trump Approved for Millions in Pandemic Aid”, London/Washington, 2020.

pointments and regulatory matters aligned with these groups' priorities. Scholars note that these actions contributed to increased conservative Catholic mobilization in key states<sup>20</sup>.

Regarding Muslim communities (including both Sunni and Shiite believers), surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center demonstrate minimal electoral support for Donald Trump. In the 2016 election, 78% of Muslim voters supported Hillary Clinton, while only 8% voted for Trump. Approximately two-thirds of U.S. Muslims identify with or lean toward the Democratic Party, and only 19% approved of Trump's presidency in 2017. While the same data indicate that U.S. Muslims are predominantly Sunni, with roughly 16% identifying as Shiite, no reliable data disaggregate voting behavior by sect. Consequently, no credible evidence suggests that either Sunni or Shiite Muslims constituted a significant pro-Trump voting bloc<sup>21</sup>.

With respect to Buddhist and Hindu (including Krishna-affiliated) communities, nationally representative data are limited due to small population samples. Analysis based on the Cooperative Congressional Election Study suggests that roughly 24% of Buddhist respondents voted for Trump in 2016, while the majority favored other candidates, including higher-than-average support for third-party options. Broader studies by the Pew Research Center, which combine Buddhists and Hindus into the category of "non-Christian religious voters", indicate that these groups leaned away from Trump in 2020. There is no credible evidence of systematic campaign outreach to Buddhist or Krishna-affiliated Hindu organizations, nor of substantial bloc voting in Trump's favor<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> C. E. Smidt, *Catholics and the 2020 Presidential Election*, Washington, 2021, pp. 1–9.

<sup>21</sup> Pew Research Center, *U.S. Muslims Concerned About Their Place in Society*, Washington, 2017; Pew Research Center, *Political and Social Views of U.S. Muslims*, Washington, 2017; PBS, *Most U.S. Muslims Proud to Be American but Don't See Trump as an Ally*, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> D. Miles Williams, "The Buddhist Vote in 2016," *Religion in Public* (blog), March 17, 2017, <https://religioninpublic.blog/2017/03/17/the-buddhist-vote-in-2016/>; Ryan P. Burge, "The 2020 Vote for President by Religious Groups – Other Faith," *Religion in Public* (blog), March 31, 2021, <https://religioninpublic.blog/2021/03/31/the-2020-vote-for-president-by-religious-groups-other-faith/>; cp. Stephen Ansolabehere, Brian F. Schaffner, and Sam Luks, *Cooperative Congressional Election Study, 2016: Common Content* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/GDF6Z0>; Emily Ekins, "Religious Trump Voters: How Faith Moderates Attitudes about Immigration, Race, and Identity," *Democracy Fund Voter Study Group*, March 27, 2020, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/publication/religious-trump-voters>; Frank Newport, "Religious Identity and the 2020 Presidential Election," *Gallup* (blog), August 12, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/317381/religious-identity-2020-presidential-election.aspx>.

RELIGIOUS GROUPS, VOTING, AND INFLUENCE  
IN THE TRUMP ELECTIONS

Table summarizing the largest religious groups discussed and their approximate U.S. population, voting behavior for Donald Trump, and evidence of appointments or political access.

Religious group	Approx. share of U.S. adults	Trump support (2016 / 2020)	Evidence of political access or outreach
<b>White Evangelical Protestants</b>	Subset of Protestants (≈40% of U.S. adults)	≈80% (2016) / ≈76% (2020)	High institutionalized access; advisory boards; repeated elite meetings
<b>Catholics (esp. conservative/pro-life)</b>	≈19%	Roughly split in 2020	March for Life appearances; pro-life messaging; judicial policy engagement
<b>Muslims (Sunni and Shiite)</b>	≈1.2%	≈8% (2016); low approval in 2017	Limited access; no sect-disaggregated voting data
<b>Buddhists</b>	≈1.1%	≈24% (2016, CCES estimate; limited samples)	No evidence of systematic outreach
<b>Hindus (incl. Krishna-affiliated)</b>	≈0.9%	Limited data; trend away from Trump in 2020	No evidence of systematic outreach
<b>Armenian-American / Armenian Apostolic Church</b>	Small; not isolated in national surveys	Not reliably measured as a bloc	Targeted diaspora advocacy, lobbying, and moral discourse

Regarding neighboring communities, it should be noted that neither the Iranian nor the Azerbaijani diasporic populations in the United States operate as autonomous religious communities. Rather, they are incorporated into the broader institutional landscape of global religious traditions. Iranian-origin populations in the United States exhibit pronounced religious heterogeneity, encompassing Twelver Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, Bahá'ís, Zoroastrians, Jews, and multiple Chris-

tian denominations, all of whom participate in established religious organizations corresponding to these global traditions. Azerbaijani-Americans, while religiously more homogeneous and predominantly Twelver Shi‘a, likewise do not constitute a distinct or independent religious body; instead, they are institutionally integrated into wider Shi‘a and Sunni Muslim organizational networks in the United States. In both cases, religious identity is mediated not through ethnically specific institutional structures, but through participation in universal religious institutions operating at the national and international levels<sup>23</sup>.

In a similar vein, it should be noted that neither the Georgian nor the Russian diasporic populations in the United States operate as self-contained or ethnically bounded religious entities. Georgian-Americans, while historically associated with the Georgian Orthodox Church, practice their faith primarily through parishes canonically subordinate to broader Eastern Orthodox jurisdictions active in the United States, including the Orthodox Church in America and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Russian-origin populations display a comparable pattern: although many maintain strong ties to the Russian Orthodox tradition, their religious life unfolds within established Orthodox ecclesiastical structures—such as the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia or other pan-Orthodox bodies—rather than through exclusively ethnic institutions. In both communities, religious practice is embedded within the broader organizational frameworks of global Orthodox Christianity, underscoring the predominance of universal ecclesial structures over narrowly ethnic forms of institutional religious expression<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Pew Research Center. *Religious Composition of Immigrants to the United States; Muslim Americans: Demographic Portrait*; Mobasher, Mohsen. *Iranians in Texas: Migration, Politics, and Ethnic Identity*. University of Texas Press, 2012; Bozorgmehr, Mehdi. “Iranian Americans”. In *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*, Springer, 2005; Haddad, Yvonne, and Jane I. Smith (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of American Islam*. Oxford University Press, 2014; Hunter, Shireen. *Iranian Diaspora and Transnational Politics*; These sources collectively confirm that Iranian and Azerbaijani immigrants engage with mainstream, established religious institutions rather than forming separate, ethnically defined religious communities in the United States.

<sup>24</sup> Platonova, Valentina. “Russian Orthodoxy in North America: Historical Trajectories and Institutional Developments”. *Bulletin of Social Studies* (2019). <https://bulletensocial.com/pdf/Download%20Platonova.pdf>.

. – Roudometof, Victor. “Orthodox Christianity in the United States”. *Religion Compass* 14, no. 10 (2020); <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rec3.12461>; “Georgian Orthodox Church in the United States”. Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA). <https://www.thearda.com/us-religion/group-profiles/groups?D=367>, . – Agadjanian, Alexander. “The Russian Orthodox

The Armenian-American diaspora—principally through organizations such as the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) and, historically, the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA), together with religious leaders of the Armenian Apostolic Church—has long leveraged grassroots mobilization, lobbying, and direct engagement with U.S. presidential campaigns to influence American foreign policy toward Armenia, Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh/Gharabagh), and broader Armenian issues<sup>25</sup>. Research indicates that ethnic interest-group mobilization by Armenian Americans serves as a robust mechanism through which a relatively small but politically cohesive diaspora can influence congressional and executive actions<sup>26</sup>. In the 2024 U.S. presidential election cycle, the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) chose not to endorse any candidate, yet engaged with both campaigns by issuing report cards, mobilizing Armenian-American voters in key swing states, and demanding concrete commitments on Artsakh, U.S. aid restrictions to Azerbaijan, sanctions, and humanitarian support<sup>27</sup>. Simultaneously, the Armenian Apostolic Church—through public appeals issued by its spiritual leaders—urged U.S. officials to prioritize the release of Armenian prisoners of war and hostages and to safeguard the right of return for displaced Armenians<sup>28</sup>. Scholarly analyses have long demonstrated that diaspora lobbying efforts can exert meaningful influence on U.S. foreign policy, particularly when diaspora communities mobilize strategically during periods of heightened geopolitical sensitivity. These contemporary forms of engagement, however, are best understood within a broader historical pattern of inter-

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Diaspora as a Global Religious Phenomenon after 1918”. *Studies in World Christianity* 24, no. 3 (2018): 225–244; <https://eupublishing.com/doi/10.3366/swc.2018.0202>

. — Kravchenko, Ekaterina. “Becoming Eastern Orthodox in the Diaspora: Ethnographic Perspectives on Identity and Practice”. *Religion* 48, no. 3 (2018): 453–472; <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0048721X.2017.1328619>

. — Roudometof, Victor. “The Problem of the Orthodox Diaspora: The Orthodox Church between Nationalism, Transnationalism, and Universality”. *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 15, no. 3 (2015): 123–145; <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282409180>.

<sup>25</sup> **J. Zarifian**, “The Armenian-American Lobby and Its Impact on U.S. Foreign Policy”. *Society* 51, no. 5 (2014): 503–512.

<sup>26</sup> **N. Gevorgyan**, “The Influence of Ethnic Interest Groups on U.S. Foreign Policy: The Case of Armenian Diaspora”. *YSU Journal of International Affairs*, no. 1 (2022): 98–108.

<sup>27</sup> ANCA. “ANCA’s Harris/Trump Non-Endorsement in the 2024 U.S. Presidential Elections Explained”. ANCA Press Release, Oct. 31, 2024.

<sup>28</sup> Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA). “ANCA Welcomes His Holiness Aram I’s Leadership...”, Press Release, February 7, 2025.

action between the Armenian Apostolic Church and the highest levels of the United States government<sup>29</sup>.

Within this broader analytical frame, it is evident that U.S. officials do not limit their engagement with constituent communities to electoral cycles alone; rather, they continuously compete for political support across diverse societal groups. It is in this context that one should interpret President Ronald Reagan’s documented interactions with His Holiness Vazgen I, Catholicos of All Armenians, as well as his institutional engagement with the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia under His Holiness Karekin II at the time (later Catholicos of All Armenians)<sup>30</sup>.

President Ronald Reagan’s position may be discerned through a synthesis of multiple sources, most notably the official record of the United States Congress, including measures such as H. Res. 316, the “Affirmation of the United States Record on the Armenian Genocide”<sup>31</sup>.

The full text of the President’s statement—excerpts of which appear on the aforementioned site—is available on the Proclamations page of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum. In that address, the President refers to the Holocaust and continues as follows: “Like the genocide of the Armenians before it, and the genocide of the Cambodians which followed it—and like too many other such persecutions of too many other peoples—the lessons of the Holocaust must never be forgotten”<sup>32</sup>. It is also pertinent to note that the next U.S. president to formally recognize the Armenian Genocide was Joe Biden. As reported in contemporary analyses, on 24 April 2021 President Biden issued a statement in which, for the first time, he officially employed

<sup>29</sup> C. David King and Miles Pomper. “Congress and the Contingent Influence of Diaspora Lobbies...” *Journal of Armenian Studies*, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> See “Bibliography of *”Ejmiatsin”* Journal”, compiled by Rev. Ararat Poghosyan, *Ejmiatsin*, 2012: «**2066**. Վազգեն Ա. Կաթողիկոս Ամենայն Հայոց, Ամենայն Հայոց Վեհափառ Հայրապետի նամակը Ամերիկայի Միացյալ Նահանգների նախագահ Ռ. Ռեյգանին [14 Է. 1986]: 1986, Է.–Ը., էջ 3–5: **2424**. Ռեյգան Ռոնալդ, Նորին Սրբություն Վազգեն Ա. Ծայրագույն Պատրիարք եւ Կաթողիկոս Ամենայն Հայոց [նամակ. 16 ԺԱ. 1987]: 1988, Ա.–Բ.–Գ., էջ 245: **2455**. Վեհափառ Հայրապետը Ամերիկայի Միացյալ Նահանգներում [քսան նկար. 14 Ժ.–12 ԺԱ. 1988]: 1988, Ա.–Բ.–Գ., էջ 31–180, **2460**. Վեհափառ Հայրապետը կրկին Նյու Յորքում [23 ԺԱ. 1988]: 1988, Ա.–Բ.–Գ., էջ 243–245: Կից ԱՄՆ-ի նախագահ Ռոնալդ Ռեյգանի նամակն է՝ ուղղված Վեհափառ Հայրապետին»; <https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/08/25/president-reagan-meets-catholicos-of-cilicia-karekin-ii-catholicos-of-all-armenians-vasken-i-newly-released-video/>, President Reagan Meets Catholicos of Cilicia Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians Vasken I: Newly Released Video

<sup>31</sup> See <https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/house-resolution/316/text>.

<sup>32</sup> See <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/proclamations-april-22-1981>.

the term “genocide” with reference to the mass killings of the Armenian population in 1915 within the Ottoman Empire (present-day Turkey). The use of this term was criticized by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as by several Turkish government officials, opposition politicians, and segments of the Turkish media, all of whom have traditionally rejected what they characterize as a biased and ahistorical interpretation of the events. The issue has also been raised in prior discussions between U.S. and Turkish leaders; however, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had not publicly commented on the statement at the time<sup>33</sup>. It is evident that steps taken by U.S. presidents toward recognizing historical truth have had the potential to exert a direct impact on U.S.–Turkish relations. It is likewise beyond doubt that meetings between the Catholicos of All Armenians and of Cilicia and any sitting President of the United States should be understood not merely as “routine” high-level bilateral encounters, but also within the broader framework of the perceptions and reactions of a third party—namely, Turkey.

The most compelling evidence of this dynamic appears in a declassified analytical memorandum of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The document is titled “Turkish Reaction to a Meeting Between the President and Armenian Apostolic Archbishop (Catholicos) Karekin II” and states as follows:

MEMORANDUM FOR:  
DDI (DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE)

The attached memorandum is our response to your query about the possible Turkish reaction to a meeting between the President and the Armenian Catholicos Karekin II. It has been coordinated with OGI (Office of Global Issues), IIC (International Issues Center), and TG (Turkey Group).

“1. The Turkish government probably would not consider a meeting between the President and Archbishop Karekin to be particularly significant. Ankara has shown little interest in past meetings between Armenian church leaders and U.S. officials, not even those involving the Patriarch of the Armenian Orthodox Church, who resides in Istanbul. We believe that the Turkish leadership historically has differentiated between Armenian religious leaders—who have traditionally condemned anti-Turkish Armenian terrorism—and other Armenian leaders, many of whom have taken ambiguous

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<sup>33</sup> See

<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2021-04-26/us-president-has-recognised-1915-genocide-armenians>

positions on the terrorists' actions. The Turks probably know that the Archbishop—who resides in Beirut—is a strong advocate of Lebanese unity and independence. They are likely to assume that a meeting with the President would focus on these issues”<sup>34</sup>.

When examining past and present interactions between U.S. presidents and the Armenian clergy, one can discern a notable decline in the level of engagement: not only have personal meetings largely ceased, but even routine telephone communications with church leaders are no longer conducted on a systematic basis. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that prior to the 2020 U.S. presidential election, candidate Donald Trump held a telephone conversation with His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, concerning Artsakh<sup>35</sup>. However, it should also be noted that the organizers of the call should have been properly informed—and, in turn, should have briefed their principal—that Artsakh does not fall under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, but rather under that of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians. Political science scholarship frequently emphasizes that political actors are guided by considerations of personal political interest—particularly electoral survival and reputation—often prioritizing these concerns over broader national interests or the needs of third parties<sup>36</sup>. From this perspective, the following statement may be understood:

Donald Trump criticized Vice President Kamala Harris for what he characterized as her inaction regarding the persecution and displacement of Armenian Christians in Artsakh, pledging that, if elected president in 2024, he would work to protect persecuted Christians worldwide. Trump highlighted Harris's alleged failure to respond while approximately 120,000 Armenians were forcibly displaced, asserting

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<sup>34</sup> See <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp85t00287r000501460001-7> cp. **S. Madoyan**, A document from US special archives, “Etchmiadzin”, 8, 2022, pp. 105–111:

<sup>35</sup> See <https://en.armradio.am/2024/11/03/trump-calls-catholicos-aram-i-discusses-artsakh-reiterates-commitment-to-regional-peace/> <https://www.thecaliforniacourier.com/catholicos-aram-i-spoke-with-presidential-candidate-donald-trump-by-phone/> It should also be mentioned that, at the time of the events described, no information on this matter could be found on any official website of Donald Trump, who was then a presidential candidate and later the winner of the election.

<sup>36</sup> **Anthony Downs**, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957); **M. James Buchanan** and **Gordon Tullock**, *The Calculus of Consent* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962); **R. David Mayhew**, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); **Bruce Bueno de Mesquita** et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); **G. Margaret Hermann**, “Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders”, *International Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (1980) 7–46.

that Christians globally would be at risk under her leadership. He further committed to pursuing efforts to restore peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, amid ongoing divisions within the U.S. political landscape over the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis<sup>37</sup>. Perhaps this helps explain why, despite Trump's strong rhetoric, Ilham Aliyev continued to vocally support his candidacy<sup>38</sup>.

Without engaging in debate or polemical discussion of this claim, it suffices to note that, following Trump's election, no tangible positive changes occurred in the circumstances of the displaced and dispossessed population of Artsakh.

### ՀԻՄՆԱԲԱՌԵՐ

Religious organizations, Donald Trump, US elections, White Evangelical Protestants, electoral behavior, partisan alignment, religious right, political mobilization, Pew Research Center, Catholic voters, Muslim Americans, Armenian-American diaspora, Armenian Apostolic Church, ethnic lobbying, Artsakh, Armenian Genocide recognition, Ronald Reagan, Joe Biden, political access, faith communities.

### РЕЗЮМЕ

Статья посвящена комплексному анализу форм, механизмов и степени политической вовлечённости религиозных организаций и общин в США в период президентских избирательных кампаний Дональда Трампа 2016 и 2020 годов.

<sup>37</sup> See [https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/donald-trump-slams-kamala-harris-on-armenian-displacement-crisis-vows-protection-for-persecuted-christians-if-re-elected/articleshow/114549309.cms?utm\\_source=](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/donald-trump-slams-kamala-harris-on-armenian-displacement-crisis-vows-protection-for-persecuted-christians-if-re-elected/articleshow/114549309.cms?utm_source=)

<sup>38</sup> See <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-aliyev-rooting-for-trump-win>: "Azerbaijan: Aliyev rooting for Trump win. Baku's support remains strong, despite Trump attempt to cultivate Armenian-American voters".

