



country report

Regional Programme Political Dialogue South Caucasus



Armenia ahead of landmark parliamentary elections

Despite a polarized election campaign and pressure from Russia, Prime Minister Pashinyan has good prospects of re-election

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Armenia is heading into a landmark parliamentary election of significance beyond the region — perhaps never before has the international community observed an election in the Caucasus republic so closely: As Trump endorses the incumbent, Putin makes harsh threats, and Aliyev makes demands, the European Union is providing the country with a new mission against disinformation and cyberattacks to strengthen it as a democratic pioneer in a largely authoritarian neighborhood. Domestically, the country is experiencing a polarized and often emotional, personalized election campaign. Yet according to polls, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his Civil Contract party have good chances of securing another mandate.

The first regularly scheduled election since 2017

When almost 2.5 million Armenians are called to the polls on 7 June 2026, it will be the first regular parliamentary election in almost ten years. This circumstance alone gives an idea of the upheavals that the country has gone through in recent years. The Velvet Revolution of 2018 had made early elections necessary. The same was true in 2021 for the crisis following the second Nagorno-Karabakh War. The election period that is now coming to an end included the traumatic loss of Nagorno-Karabakh, the admission of 100,000 Karabakhi refugees to the country, several coup attempts, as well as wars and deep crises in the immediate neighbourhood. This led to both bitter conflicts and the formulation of visionary ideas in domestic politics – but there was little room for "orderly" political competition.

In the current election campaign, too, the country is hardly finding its way back to a quieter political scene. Rather, the polarized, emotionalized and highly personalized campaign is characterized by massive accusations, controversial campaign appearances, a historic Trump endorsement for the incumbent and external attempts at influence, including hybrid disinformation

campaigns and sometimes blatant threats from Russia.

Despite these challenges, Armenia is expected to hold free elections for the third consecutive year, after 2018 and 2021, in which democratic standards are largely respected. About 70 percent of people expect free elections, according to a recent IRI poll¹. How *fair* the process will be in detail is not least in the hands of the government.

Incumbent clearly in the lead

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his Civil Contract (ZV) party are campaigning for a third term in office and are entering the race as clear favorites. They are being helped by the general mood in the country, which according to polls has recently developed into real momentum. While in summer 2025 almost half of citizens still believed their country was on the wrong track and only 36 percent said it was moving in the right direction, the number of optimists has since almost doubled to 61 percent — the highest level in seven years. These figures are almost identical to the measured trust in the office of the prime minister. Polls show that important positive developments are attributed to the government. Although only about every second person is generally satisfied with the government's work,

approval is significantly higher in several key policy areas, such as efforts toward peace at 82 percent or the fight against unemployment at 58 percent.²

Substantively, the mandate the government is seeking is about continuing the policies of recent years. Externally, this means concluding peace with formerly hostile neighbors Azerbaijan and Turkey, opening previously closed borders to trade and passenger traffic, and integrating Armenia more firmly into the Middle Corridor's trade and transport networks between Europe and Asia. This is intended to secure stability and growth, with the United States also playing a decisive role through the "TRIPP" project. This is accompanied by a clear intention to move closer to the European Union, while at the same time diversifying Armenia's international partnerships, emancipating the country from its former protector Russia, and maintaining good relations with Tehran. Domestically, Pashinyan links this to a clear departure from earlier central elements of Armenian self-understanding — such as making recognition of the 1915 genocide a condition or the focus on Nagorno-Karabakh.

The government can also point to achievements in economic and social policy that have resonated with voters. Since it took office, gross domestic product has increased by 60 percent. Public-sector wages have in some cases tripled — a move critics accuse the government of presenting as "election gifts." When asked about the government's greatest successes over the past six months, respondents cite, among other things, the introduction of universal health insurance, pension increases, and improvements in education and infrastructure. Nevertheless, almost one-third of Armenians still believe the country is heading in the wrong direction, while fundamental resistance is increasingly emerging from the opposition.³

A crowded and polarized field of candidates

In addition to Civil Contract, another 15 parties and two alliances are competing for the 101 seats in the National Assembly. The main challenger to Civil Contract is considered to be "Strong

Armenia," an electoral alliance founded only at the end of 2025 by Russian-Armenian businessman Samvel Karapetyan. His critics see him as Moscow's man. A recent report by *The Insider*⁴ pointed to direct links to Russia's FSB. Others see the billionaire — who, as the holder of several citizenships, cannot himself run in the election and whose nephew therefore acts as the party's frontman — as Pashinyan's political prisoner.⁵ Due to accusations including corruption and calls for overthrow, Karapetyan is under house arrest, and parts of his assets, including shares in Armenia's electricity grid, have been expropriated.

Fundamental criticism of Civil Contract also comes from the "Armenia Alliance" of former President Robert Kocharyan, who served from 1998 to 2008 and whose alliance emerged as the second-strongest force in the last elections. His alliance also positions itself as close to Russia. The colorful businessman Gagik Tsarukyan, who is running with the Prosperous Armenia party, is also making headlines. He describes himself as one of Alexander Lukashenka's best friends⁶ and most recently mainly appeared as the financier of a gigantic statue of Jesus.⁷ A huge replica of Noah's Ark is also part of Tsarukyan's election promises.⁸

Former Human Rights Ombudsman Arman Tatoyan presents himself in a noticeably more serious manner, running with the Wings of Unity party in an attempt to position himself as a "reasonable" third force. Meanwhile, the candidacy of Pashinyan's former ally Hayk Marutyan is likely to be uncomfortable for the prime minister. The former mayor of Yerevan, who led the capital from 2018 to 2021 and became known as a comedian, is entering the campaign with his New Force Reform Party as a pro-European alternative.

Another force is also competing for attention with the prime minister, who is himself quite social-media-savvy: the "I Am Against All" movement appears at events in superhero costumes, and party members sometimes show up to televised election debates carrying popcorn bags. Still, with their satirical appearance and vague promise to overhaul the system, they

strike a chord with many voters who have serious misgivings about the government but also consider the opposition unelectable.

Beyond colorful personalities, the political positions also differ clearly in some areas.¹ A unique and, in some respects, unprecedented insight is offered by the platform VoteArmenia.am, an Armenian version of Germany's Wahl-O-Mat voting advice tool, which the Konrad Adenauer Foundation has developed since autumn 2025 together with Yerevan State University and the Tree Company. Seventeen of the 19 participating parties and alliances answered a catalog of 60 key future-oriented questions, 30 of which are publicly visible. In comparison, they paint an illuminating picture of lines of conflict but also hidden coalition potential. The often-described polarization becomes visible in both domestic and foreign policy questions — for example regarding a peace treaty with Azerbaijan, the political participation of Armenians abroad and the Armenian diaspora, or the design of foreign policy partnerships.

Remarkably, Civil Contract's answers show by far the fewest substantive overlaps with those of its competitors. While other parties agree on as many as half of the questions, Civil Contract agrees on less than 30 percent. The ruling party is thus the most programmatically independent force in the field — or, put more politically: the party that most clearly sets itself apart from the rest of the candidate field.

Between a contest of ideas and a mudslinging battle

Sensitive questions — how Armenia should process the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and integrate the displaced Armenians, under what conditions rapprochement with former arch-enemies can succeed, and how far estrangement from Russia and integration with Europe may be possible in the foreseeable future — offer numerous points of entry for demagoguery.

Pashinyan and his Civil Contract party summarize their political offer, outlined at the beginning, under the slogan of “real Armenia”: a republic that soberly recognizes security and geopolitical realities and national borders, but reinterprets them from a position of isolation into an “asset,” as a country in the middle that builds bridges — or rather pipelines, railways, and roads — to its neighbors. What Pashinyan understands as pragmatism and realpolitik is, for his opponents, betrayal, capitulation, and sellout. In particular, the alliances around Karapetyan and Kocharyan portray him as a corrupt tyrant or even an Antichrist. Since the confrontation between Pashinyan and the Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church escalated last summer, his opponents have accused him of wanting to undermine this institution, and to destroy traditional values. Combined with the departure from Russia, this is portrayed as the surrender of national interests and Armenian land, to be followed by even more far-reaching concessions to Baku and Ankara. Such claims are supported by horror scenarios — some illustrated with AI videos — alleging that the government has secret plans to bring hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis into the country.⁹ Such questionable claims, which Pashinyan calls “fabricated lies,” have had an effect because they tap into continuing fears and traumas of war, violence, and displacement.

Yet the incumbent also knows how to use this kind of rhetoric, for example when he claims that his electoral defeat could soon lead to a new “devastating war” with Azerbaijan.¹⁰ Even some of his supporters are unsettled by the impulsive prime minister's frequent verbal outbursts. Nevertheless, he enjoys by far the highest level of trust of any politician.¹¹ And the positions of his party are clearly recognizable: peace, opening, Europe, realism.

On the other hand, as fiercely as the major opposition blocs attack the government – and sometimes each other – their own programmatic offer remains vague. Karapetyan's “Strong Armenia”, for example, promises huge numbers

¹ Most parties in Armenia do not have detailed written election manifestos. Several parties reported back to us that the invitation to participate in VoteArmenia.am and

the sending of the questionnaire had led to them developing a position at all.

of new jobs, economic upswing, tax cuts, lower medicine prices, and affordable housing. How all this is to be financed, administratively implemented and secured in foreign policy terms remains unclear – especially if his party seeks rapprochement with an economically struggling Russia at war, rather than continuing the diversification of political and economic partnerships that has begun. This lack of planning is also reflected in voters' perceptions. On questions of concrete policy competence, people rate the opposition as clearly inferior.

On the border of legality

However, the campaign is not only characterized by verbal battles and polarizing rhetoric. Criminally relevant accusations of election manipulation, bribery, corruption, politicization of the judiciary, and abuse of administrative resources are also in the air. Radical opponents of Pashinyan accuse the government of systematically falsifying the elections. The former ruling Republican Party is not even taking part in the election for this reason. Yet while Civil Contract is trying to present itself as a democratic force that has broken with the authoritarian practices of the past, there have been various reports that local officials or teachers were mobilized to attend the prime minister's campaign events. In one specific case in Aragatsothn Province, Pashinyan tried to counteract this and had four accused school principals temporarily suspended from duty.¹²

There is also criticism of the arrests of opposition figures, although according to the government many cases are themselves connected to alleged election crimes.² A close associate of Karapetyan, for example, is said to have paid people to participate in demonstrations and prepared vote buying.¹³ While isolated charges have been brought against members of the "Armenia" alliance and the Prosperous Armenia party for attempted bribery, the number of arrests around "Strong Armenia" stands out. More than 30 members and leaders of the alliance have been

arrested so far.¹⁴ The opposition speaks of a targeted campaign and denies all allegations. Especially sensitive is the suspicion that bribery attempts may also have been facilitated with Russian money. What is clear is that Armenia is not only facing a domestic political directional decision, but also stands at the center of exceptionally intense foreign engagement — with the motives, means, and relationship of the individual actors to law and transparency differing considerably.

Divorce greetings from Moscow

It would not be an election in the South Caucasus if Russia did not also have a hand in it. Relations between Yerevan and Moscow have already cooled in recent years; before the elections, alienation is now reaching a new dimension. While Putin had admonished Pashinyan at a meeting in the Kremlin in April to allow "pro-Russian" parties to vote,¹⁵ the rhetoric has been escalating visibly for weeks. Moscow has repeatedly called on Armenia to change its EU course or, failing that, hold a "divorce referendum" and withdraw from the Eurasian Economic Union – which would have drastic consequences for Armenia at this stage. Moscow perceived Volodymyr Seyensky's visit to Yerevan as part of the EPC summit as an affront and is also threatening Armenia with a "Ukrainian scenario".¹⁶ Pashinyan's government, on the other hand, is outwardly unimpressed, speaks of a natural development of "open and honest" relations and refers to Armenia's sovereign right to choose its own partnerships according to the national interest.¹⁷

In May, the Kremlin tightened the screws and imposed import bans on Armenian products: among them more than 60 million bottles of the popular mineral water Jermuk, but also alcohol, flowers, and fruit — allegedly due to quality defects.¹⁸ Aware of Armenia's dependence on imported energy sources, Moscow is also openly considering raising the gas price and withdrawing further tax privileges. Such economic pressure is

² In this study, KAS and its partners have worked out what constitutes criminal offences in the context of elections under Armenian law: <https://www.kas.de/en/web/suedkaukasus/publikatione>

n/einzeltitel/-/content/criminal-law-protection-of-the-right-to-participate-in-elections-and-referendums-in-the-republic-of-

accompanied by disinformation campaigns and further elements of hybrid influence.

At the end of May, the team of Russian opposition politician Mikhail Khodorkovsky presented a leaked plan according to which Moscow was pursuing a comprehensive strategy to oust Pashinyan from power and rely on figures like Karapetyan.¹⁹ In addition, there are accusations that Russia has not only already invested millions in propaganda, but also wants to send hundreds of thousands of Armenians living in Russia on "home leave" to vote against the government there.²⁰ Meanwhile, a completely different wind is blowing from the west.

Trump: Make Armenia great again!

It is not always advantageous when Donald Trump issues an election recommendation. But in the case of Pashinyan, it could come in handy. It is a historic novelty for an American president to "endorse" a candidate in the Armenian election campaign. On his Truth Social platform, Trump called Pashinyan a "great leader" with the demand "Make Armenia Great Again".²¹ This was preceded by visits by JD Vance in the spring and Foreign Minister Rubio to Yerevan at the end of May, which signaled not only political support, but also concrete progress in the implementation of the "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity" (TRIPP). According to surveys, only 27 percent of Armenians still consider the United States to be one of their country's most important political partners – half as many as three years ago.²² Nevertheless, the demonstrative support of the US administration is a reminder of the Washington Peace Declaration of August 2025, a key foreign policy success of Pashinyan.²³ This strengthens his central election campaign narrative of peace, openness and its safeguarding through strong, especially Western partnerships.

The EU at the Center of It All

The European Union has also long been more than a spectator in Armenia. Since 2023, it has been making a noticeable contribution to stabilising the situation in the border area with the EUMA monitoring mission. At Yerevan's

invitation, Europe's presence has recently increased sharply again in the form of election observation, disinformation prevention, summits and a concrete integration agenda. The first EU-Armenia summit at the beginning of May and the meeting of the European Political Community in Yerevan were a beacon at which the EU responded positively to Yerevan's declaration of intent on accession prospects.²⁴ Pashinyan's joint appearances with French President Macron not only gave European support an eloquent and personal touch, but also let France shoot – again – to first place in polls after its most important international partner.²⁵

The pro-Russian camp immediately lamented Western interference, referring²⁶ specifically to the EU mission decided in April to strengthen the fight against Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI).²⁷ In fact, however, Europe's commitment is long-term, transparent, institutionally anchored and – unlike the Russian campaigns – based on international agreements, partnership cooperation and a clear legal basis. Even before the election, Brussels sent a Rapid Response Team to counter hybrid threats, which, at the request of the Armenian state, is to help identify disinformation campaigns regardless of their origin and to support Armenia in countering them.²⁸ This makes it clear that Europe's commitment against FIMI is not short-term election campaign interference or support for a single party, but part of a long-term strategy to strengthen Armenia's democratic resilience against foreign manipulation in partnership.

The Armenian government's announcement that it intends to export more goods affected by Russian embargoes to Europe in the future fits into this picture that the rapprochement with the EU also serves economic diversification.²⁹

Forecast: What the polls say

According to polling data from an International Republican Institute survey published two weeks before the election, Pashinyan's Civil Contract would receive 32 percent.³⁰ The "Strong Armenia" electoral alliance of Karapetyan follows in second place with only six percent, while the Armenia Alliance of Kocharyan is far behind in third place

with three percent. Viewed in isolation, these two main challengers would fail to cross the eight-percent threshold that applies to alliances of up to three parties. The remaining 15 political forces are distributed behind them, far below the four-percent threshold that applies to individual parties.

What is decisive in this poll, however, is that almost half of participants did not state a preference. Twenty-three percent of respondents were undecided; another 21 percent refused to answer. If the party preferences of these people ultimately end up distributed roughly like those of the rest, Pashinyan would obtain an absolute majority — perhaps even a constitution-making one. The Karapetyan alliance, by contrast, would in that calculation land between 11 and 15 percent, depending on how many other competitors make it into parliament. If none of the others manage to clear the threshold, a special rule comes into effect that is intended to guarantee that at least three political forces are represented in parliament. The percentage threshold would be waived for the party or alliance that came closest to the threshold applicable to it.

Much will also depend on voter mobilization. In the same IRI poll, an impressive 92 percent said

they intended to vote. In the last two parliamentary elections, however, turnout remained below 50 percent. The higher the turnout, the less influence would be carried by the votes of Russia-based Armenians flown in for the election.

Beyond the suspense over vote shares and the distribution of seats, Armenians and international partners will be watching closely on Sunday evening to see above all how free and fair the election was. Some opposition parties have already announced demonstrations, as they — like Russian propaganda — are calling the integrity of the electoral process into question in advance.

If independent election observers issue a positive assessment after Sunday, this would be more than a domestic political success. It would also send an important signal beyond Armenia itself: that the country is staying on its democratic course despite external pressure, deep polarization, and regional upheaval. In a region dominated by authoritarian regimes and shrinking democratic space, Armenia's relevance for Europe would grow further — politically, strategically, and symbolically. The prospects for this are good.

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- ¹ IRI (2026): [Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia | May 2026, Retrieved](#) : June 2026.
- ² All figures quoted in this paragraph refer to the IRI study *ibid*.
- ³ *Ibid*.
- ⁴ Kanev Sergey (2026): [Grabbing him by the "Beard": The Insider identifies the FSB, GRU, and SVR agents Russia sent to Armenia to take on PM Nikol Pashinyan, The Insider](#), accessed June 2026.
- ⁵ Aysor.am (2025): [64.9% of respondents consider Samvel Karapetyan a political prisoner](#) Retrieved, June 2026
- ⁶ News.am (2018): [Leader of Armenian party says he has great relations with Lukashenko -](#), accessed June 2026
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- ¹¹ IRI (2026), *supra* note 1, p. 17.
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- ¹⁴ Barseghyan, Arshaluys (2026): [Criminal cases, insults and claims of foreign control: Armenia's pre-election campaign heats up](#), accessed June 2026; Armenpress (2026): [Prosperous Armenia representative gave bribes to voters in exchange for support, Anti-Corruption Committee says - ARMENPRESS Armenian News Agency](#), accessed June 2026
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- ¹⁷ Armenpress (2026): [Pashinyan says Armenia–Russia relations are "open and sincere"](#), accessed June 2026
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²² IRI (2026), see footnote 1.

²³ [Joint Declaration by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia on the outcomes of their meeting in Washington D.C., United States of America](#) (2025), accessed June 2026

²⁴ European Council (2026): [EU-Armenia summit - Consilium](#), accessed June 2026

²⁵ IRI (2026), supra note 1, p. 41.

²⁶ Butylin, Nicolas (2026): [Election interference in Armenia: Macron sets the mood for Pashinyan](#) | Berliner Zeitung, accessed June 2026

²⁷ Council of the EU (2026): [Armenia: EU establishes a new civilian mission to contribute strengthening the country's resilience](#), accessed June 2026

²⁸ Azatutyun (2026): [EU To Send Hybrid Rapid Response Team To Armenia Ahead Of Elections](#), accessed June 2026

²⁹ Armenpress (2026): [Pashinyan says new markets secured for Armenian exports amid Russian ban | ARMENPRESS Armenian News Agency](#), accessed June 2026

³⁰ IRI (2026), see footnote 1.

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