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Elections in Armenia: geopolitics on the ballot



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It is probably safe to say that Armenia has never before experienced so much high-level international presence as it did on 4-6 May 2026. Representatives from 34 countries converged on capital Yerevan for two back-to-back summits: the 8th European Political Community, and the first ever EU-Armenia summit. For days Armenian social media overflowed with imagery of European and world leaders [strolling](#) along Yerevan's streets, going on [morning runs](#) and visiting local cafés. Various leaders proclaimed their dedication to the small Caucasian nation's democratic development and spoke of its belonging to a common European culture.

The timing of the summits was hardly accidental. The high-level visits came only a month before crucial parliamentary elections that one Armenian expert, in a conversation with the author,¹ referred to as “the most geopoliticised elections” Armenia has ever seen. Indeed, foreign policy and the country's geopolitical vector have never been on the campaign agenda to quite such an extent. Having been forced to make some crucial and significant strategic choices over the past years, the country finds itself balancing between various regional and great

1 Clingendael interview, 6 May 2026.

Clingendael Alert

power interests, without a safety net. What are the decisions facing Armenia on June 7th, and what could be their consequences?

This alert will first analyse the various geopolitical magnetic fields that Armenia is subject to through the prism of two major narrative pillars in the electoral campaign: Russia vs. the West and the peace deal with Azerbaijan. It will then look into the prospects for the main actors in the election, and finish with some thoughts on the post-election period, as well as some steps and developments necessary to solidify Armenia's geopolitical reorientation.

Europe vs. Eurasia

Two major gravitational fields now impacting Armenia are those of the West (EU and US) on the one hand and Russia on the other. With its strategy of foreign policy diversification, Yerevan has actively been reorienting away from Russia and towards other actors, of which the US and Europe have emerged as an important – perhaps even a leading – direction. To name a few examples, in the past year alone Yerevan has signed a [strategic partnership agreement](#) with the US, launched the [EU-Armenia strategic agenda](#), strategic partnerships with [France](#) and the [UK](#), and reached a number of agreements to deepen cooperation in areas including defence, tech and energy. The Armenian parliament, with the support of the government, has also passed a – for now highly symbolic – law declaring its ambition to join the EU. Western actors themselves also did not remain idle. The EU's presence in the country was upgraded in 2022 with the EU civil monitoring mission along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, and the US solidified its footprint through its facilitation of the Trump Route for Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), that will connect Azerbaijan with its exclave of Nakhchivan through Armenian territory.

For the EU, the focus on Armenia may be an attempt to redeem itself after the loss of (the government of) neighbouring Georgia as a reliable and ideologically aligned partner in the region. In fact, Georgia's U-turn on democracy

and geopolitical orientation can be seen as a test for the EU as a geostrategic actor, in which the Union did not fare well. What happens with Armenia is shaping up to become another one.

In parallel – and in contrast – Armenia has been [downgrading](#) its relations with Russia following Russia's failure to come to its aid in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Yerevan has frozen its membership in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), gradually reduced the presence of Russian border guards along its borders and actively and successfully sought alternatives to its previously overwhelming focus on Russian military cooperation and procurements. While many dependencies remain, notably in the economy and energy fields, the relationship has been undergoing a drastic change of tone and focus. Although Russia's reaction to Armenia's reorientation generally remained relatively mild considering its enormous leverage, it is clearly unhappy. Moscow has used its usual instruments to increase the pressure on Yerevan, with import bans and/or restrictions – including [dairy](#), [agricultural products](#) and [brandy](#) – [diplomatic threats](#) and [disinformation campaigns](#). The latter two seem to have increased during the last phase of the election period.

On May 27th, Moscow [threatened](#) Armenia with unilaterally tearing up a 2013 agreement that guarantees cheap gas deliveries if Yerevan continues to seek EU membership. In addition, according to a recent [publication](#) of leaked documents by the fact-checking Fact Investigation Platform (FIP), Russia has engaged in “coordinated political and information operations” in Armenia, just as in other European countries. According to the FIP, tools used by the Kremlin include “the creation of doppelgänger websites, the spread of fake news, the organisation of street protests, sabotage and other operations on the ground, as well as the involvement of experts and influencers to promote preferred narratives”. Recent investigations, including by [The Insider](#) and Mikhail Khodorkovsky's Dossier Center, claimed a close linkage between some Armenian opposition figures and the Russian authorities. According

to The Insider, one is the main challenger for current Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan: Strong Armenia party leader and Russian-Armenian oligarch Samvel Karapetyan. The other is a long-time prominent politician: Prosperous Armenia Party leader and oligarch Gagik Tsarukyan. In particular, in its investigation The Insider suggests that Karapetyan has ties to the Russian security service FSB and that Tsarukyan received financing for his 2017 campaign from the Russian Presidential Administration. Dossier Center's [investigation](#) of leaked documents, in turn, describes an extensive Russian involvement in the Armenian electoral field, with strategies seeking to support different candidates, first and foremost Karapetyan.

In general, the Russian attention to the Armenian election is certainly no surprise. For Moscow, Armenia represents its last remaining, tangible foothold in South Caucasus, at least for now. Russia lacks strong leverage over Azerbaijan, and Georgia's government has not (yet?) reached the point at which it can openly normalise its relations with Moscow.

In any case, despite the negative reaction from Russia, Armenia's ruling party, Civil Contract, has made its geopolitical choice against Moscow and in favour of the West a pillar of its electoral campaign. In terms of narratives, Prime Minister Pashinyan has [translated](#) this into the notion that, under his leadership, Armenia is finally gaining its independence from Russia. As such, when choosing their representatives, Armenian voters will, at least in part, also be keeping this strategic choice and its implications in mind. Russia has largely lost its standing and appeal to Armenians following its failure to assist the country in its conflict with Azerbaijan. On the other hand, the high-level Western attention and recent visits have been welcomed by the Armenian public, but leaving aside the larger strategic frameworks that have been put in place, the more tangible results of this closer cooperation are mostly yet to be felt by ordinary Armenians. One promising direction in this regard is the EU-Armenia visa liberalisation dialogue. While it has made progress, it is not in a position to deliver tangible results before the June elections.

The peace deal

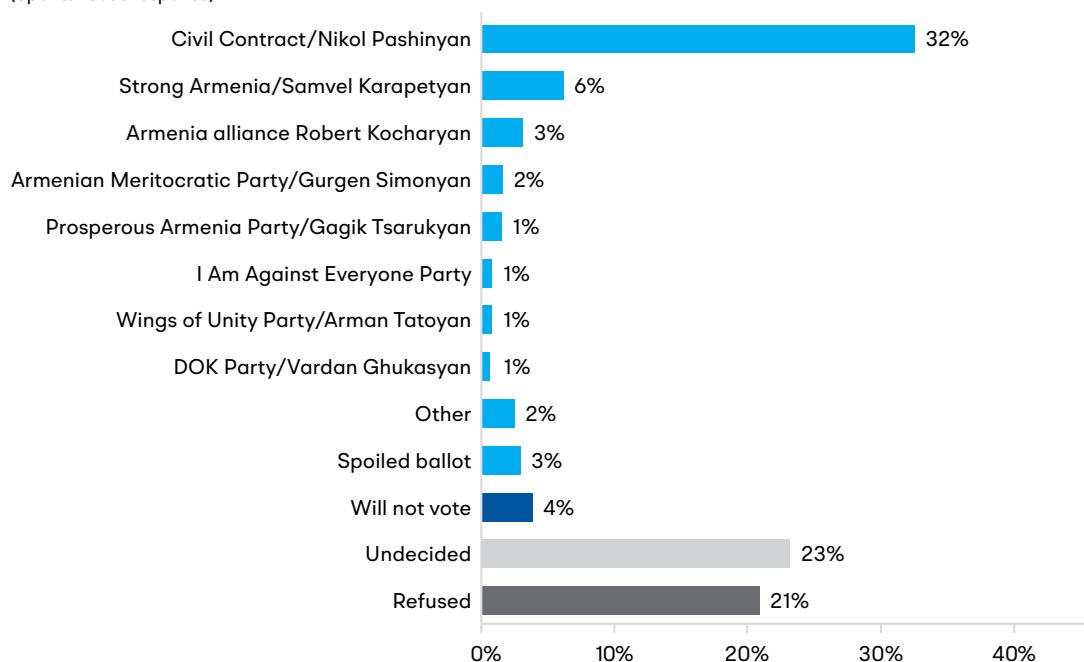
Another major pillar of the ruling Civil Contract party's campaign is the [peace deal](#) that was reached with Azerbaijan last year. The deal has yet to be signed and the practical implementation of its stipulations on the ground – notably the TRIPP and the border demarcation – is slow and partly [unclear](#), but it nevertheless represents an unprecedented amount of progress in the peace process. In dealing with the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan in 2023,² which remains painful for many Armenians, PM Pashinyan and his party have woven the peace deal into a narrative of the “real Armenia,” stressing the country's current, internationally recognised borders over the concept of a historic, “Greater Armenia” in [speeches](#), campaign materials and [official documents](#).

The peace deal and peace process remain a controversial and divisive issue, however, both within Armenia and between Armenia and its sizable diaspora. Supporters hail the progress made as a step towards a much longed-for lasting peace. In fact, in a February [opinion poll](#) “ensuring peace and security” was named by respondents as the government's biggest success in the past six months. In [May](#), it was named as the second biggest achievement. Critics, however, accuse Pashinyan of erasing Armenia's history, they question Azerbaijan's motives and actual commitment to peace, and accuse Pashinyan and his government of making too many concessions with too little reciprocity. One visible result of this division has been a series of [heated exchanges](#) the Prime Minister has had on the campaign trail, with ordinary citizens and especially refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, that have become their own controversy.

2 Nagorno-Karabakh was an Armenian-populated region within the internationally recognised borders of Azerbaijan that saw three major wars fought over it between the local Armenians, backed by the Republic of Armenia, on the one hand and Azerbaijan on the other. *De facto*, it had been governed by local Armenians between the early 1990s and 2023, having unilaterally proclaimed its independence in 1991. *De jure* it had not been recognised as an independent state by any country.

Please tell me which political party or alliance you would vote for on June 7, 2026 national parliamentary elections.

(Spontaneous response)



Opinion poll by the International Republican Institute (IRI), May 2026

The election

Despite the difficult messages, complicated regional situation and controversial campaign incidents, the ruling Civil Contract seems on course to again attain a majority in the next Armenian parliament. In a [February IRI opinion poll](#), Prime Minister Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party led with 24% against runner-up Karapetyan’s 9%. [In May](#), his lead increased to 32% against Karapetyan’s (Strong Armenia) 6%. Other opposition parties trail behind. According to most polls, as things stand now, even if the opposition field were to unite it would still struggle to overtake Civil Contract. Although it should be mentioned that about a quarter of the voters is still undecided.

At the same time, Civil Contract’s and PM Pashinyan’s relative popularity seems to rely to a great extent on the absence of true alternatives. At the moment, the main body of opposition challengers consist of individuals and parties that are either related to the former regime that

was ousted in a massive popular uprising in 2018, or appear to have a strong connection to Russia, or both. In other words, in these elections no viable parties or candidates have emerged outside Civil Contract that would combine a professional political organisation and mobilising powers with an image untarnished by a questionable (political) past and/or connections to Russia. This could change in the future.

The long(er) term

From a geopolitical perspective, at the time of this writing it looks like the diversified – and more pro-Western – foreign policy course will be secured with a Civil Contract victory on June 7th. However, ensuring it for the long term and making it truly sustainable will require more than just an electoral victory.

Firstly, experience from countries like Moldova and Georgia shows that a democratic, pro-European course is fragile if it is overly

personified by a single politician or party.³ That is especially the case if that party has been facing some controversy and criticism related to its democratic credentials both [inside](#) and [outside](#) the country. A healthier and more conducive environment for ensuring such a pro-European course would see the emergence of a pluralistic ecosystem comprising various viable and strong parties and politicians committed to that course. Otherwise, any controversies or criticism surrounding the person of the Prime-Minister or his party could also have negative consequences for the public's perception of their chosen strategy of rapprochement with the West. In fact, also from the perspective of a healthy, democratic environment in general, a plurality of choice, including within a pro-European quadrant, would be preferable. The EU can play a role in this, by keeping a close eye on Armenia's further democratic development and employing a conditional approach.

Secondly, while the ruling party's urge to turn a leaf on what have been traumatic years for Armenia and to focus on the future is understandable, it risks ignoring legitimate concerns and grievances that are present in society, and thus unnecessarily alienating part of the population. At some point it will be crucial for the Armenian government to find a way to harmonise Armenians' perception of their – ancient as well as modern – history with today's realities without appearing to negate or ignore either. The government will also have to find a way to deal with the fears that stem from the uncertainties of the peace process. To be fair, the best remedy for that may be demonstrable progress and tangible success in the peace process, like a signed peace deal or the opening

of the Turkish-Armenian border, which is not entirely within the ruling party's span of control. But as long as these fears and concerns are not addressed in a way that would truly allay them, a significant part of the electorate that is currently disappointed or disillusioned will simply be waiting for a better alternative, and not fully committing to any course set out by the ruling party. This undermines the sustainability of that course.

As a final point, it should be remembered that the risks described above are not abstract concerns for the longer term, but highly relevant in the near future, as Armenia will not be done with political controversy and emotional public debate after the 7 June elections. The next issue that may very well become a focal point for rising societal tensions is already on the horizon: the envisaged referendum to change the Armenian constitution. These plans had already been made by the Armenian authorities but have also been demanded by Azerbaijan as a condition for signing the peace agreement. Although the exact timing of the referendum is not yet clear, it is already shaping up to become a major point of upheaval in the Armenian society, with emotions running high on both its content (which includes abolishing an indirect reference to Nagorno-Karabakh) and its context (being a demand by Azerbaijan). If the ruling party indeed manages to secure a renewed mandate on June 7th, it will have a major task in convincing the Armenian public to approve the new constitution. And, as with the upcoming election, it may well become another highly geopoliticised event that will feature regional and great powers' push and pull on the country's public debate, not to mention a renewed opportunity for Russian malign interference.

3 In Moldova, the Democratic Party and the Liberal Democratic Party, while actively claiming a pro-European political identity, eventually got entangled in controversies and scandals. This to some extent tarnished the EU's image for many Moldovans. In Georgia, during his time in power President Saakashvili almost exclusively claimed the pro-Western direction of the country. But as his rule gradually became unpopular it opened the way for Georgian Dream, a party less committed to that direction – and in hindsight much more comfortable with a more Russia-oriented course – to win the elections.

About the Clingendael Institute

Clingendael – the Netherlands Institute of International Relations – is a leading think tank and academy on international affairs. Through our analyses, training and public debate we aim to inspire and equip governments, businesses, and civil society in order to contribute to a secure, sustainable and just world.

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