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Elections in Armenia: Nikol Pashinyan Remains in Power

On Sunday, 7 June, parliamentary elections were held in Armenia, with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's party, the Civil Contract, securing victory for the third time in a row. This result is likely to mean a continuation of the political course adopted by Armenia in recent years, in both foreign and domestic policy. Nevertheless, the results confirm deep social polarisation, driven by conflicting visions of Armenia's geopolitical future.

According to preliminary results released by the Central Election Commission, the Civil Contract party secured 49.81% of the vote. Also entering parliament will be Strong Armenia, the pro-Russian party led by the Russian-Armenian oligarch Samvel Karapetyan (23.29%), and the Armenia Alliance coalition led by former president Robert Kocharyan (9.94%). If the results are confirmed, this will allow the Social Contract to form a government on its own, though it does not give the Civil Contract a constitutional majority (two-thirds of the seats in parliament). Given the Prime Minister's announcement that opposition leaders, viewed as part of an oligarchic system, will be held to account and prosecuted, it is difficult to predict what the post-election climate will be.

Background. This is the first election since 2017 to have taken place within the constitutional timeframe. At that time, elections that fell significantly short of fully democratic standards resulted in the Republican Party, which had ruled Armenia since the late 1990s, remaining in power. Corruption, nepotism, and stagnation, followed by an attempt by then-President Serzh Sargsyan to retain power by assuming the post of Prime Minister after the end of his second presidential term, led to the 'Velvet Revolution' and the bloodless takeover of power by the protest leader, Nikol Pashinyan¹. The post-revolutionary deadlock in parliament led to snap elections, in which Pashinyan's My Step coalition secured over 70% of the vote. In 2021, the snap elections were a consequence of defeat in the Second Karabakh War. They maintained the legitimacy of the post-revolutionary elites, above all Prime Minister Pashinyan himself, whose Civil Contract party secured 54% of the vote, and thus 71 out of 101 seats in the unicameral parliament. In the five years since the last election, Armenia has lost control of the rest of Nagorno-Karabakh. At the same time, this period has been characterised by constant political and military pressure from Azerbaijan and ongoing negotiations regarding a future peace treaty, culminating in the Washington Declaration in August 2025. The defeat in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Russian invasion of Ukraine also led to profound changes in bilateral relations with Moscow and a renegotiation of Armenia's geostrategic position. In domestic politics, the fight against corruption and oligarchic networks was of key importance, as was the policy of deep democratisation and the implementation of transparency in political life, which remained a constant feature of official rhetoric. Pashinyan also promoted a major identity project, which aims to shift the basis of national consciousness from the idea of ethno-nationalism to the concept of citizenship, and to replace immersion in history with multidimensional modernisation.

Pashinyan's success? The Prime Minister's critics point out that, paradoxically, he has turned the crushing defeat in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict into a political success by creating a false impression of the revolutionary transformation of Armenia's national identity. This is said to be based on a 'real Armenia', within its modern borders, and without reference to historical losses. However, several other factors contributed independently to Pashinyan's relative success. Firstly, since 2018, Armenia has failed to establish a strong, consolidated opposition that would be acceptable as a viable alternative to Pashinyan's government. This applies both to individual political parties and alliances, which, in simple terms, might be described as pro-Russian, and to the pro-Western

¹ In 2015, the semi-presidential system was replaced by a parliamentary-cabinet system. Sargsyan wanted to take up the post of prime minister, contrary to his earlier statements, which was a major cause of the protests.

opposition or those whose stance on Armenia's position within the Eurasian geostrategic order is ambiguous. Thus, for many Armenians, Pashinyan and the Civil Contract represent a choice dictated by the paucity of alternatives or by a distinctly negative attitude towards the opposition. The negative electorate and low public trust in Kocharyan, but also in Tsarukyan and his Prosperous Armenia party or the Dashnaktsutyun party, stem largely from the still-vivid memory (particularly among older and middle-aged voters) of the corrupt system of government that operated in Armenia prior to 2018. A reluctance to see a return to nepotism and clientelism as well as oligarchic arrangements may have prompted a significant proportion of undecided voters – estimated in pre-election analyses to be as many as 40% – to opt for continuity. Another key factor is the deep-seated weariness of Armenian society with war or conflict, and a general state of limbo, which has formed the basis of Armenian existence since the independent state was founded. The prospect of peace and stability offered by the ruling party – albeit vague yet backed by concrete successes (the Washington Declaration of August 2025) – proved to be a sufficiently strong argument. This is also linked to a widespread sense of disappointment with Russia's stance as Armenia's formal ally, first during the Second Karabakh War and then during the humanitarian crisis and exodus of the Armenian population from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023. This sentiment was also evident in Moscow, which is why Karapetyan's campaign frequently employed fear-mongering tactics, whilst the Russian Federation used economic blackmail (a ban on the export of foodstuffs, brandy, and wine) as a means of exerting pressure. It is also important to highlight the specific successes of the ruling party, including economic diversification, the shaping of a multi-vector foreign policy, and the redefinition of security and defence policy, which has resulted in the diversification of arms procurement sources.

The stakes of the election and the (unwanted) geopolitical context. At stake in the elections was not only the maintenance of a stable majority, which would have enabled the continuation of internal reforms; the change in the international situation linked to Russian aggression in Ukraine and the Armenian authorities' consistent response to these developments meant that the ruling team's objective was to secure a constitutional majority. This would make it easier for Pashinyan to amend the constitution, which is a precondition set by the Azerbaijani side for the continuation of the peace process. The normalisation of relations with Turkey, in turn, depends on the success of this, and consequently – potentially a complete shift in the country's geostrategic course, which is to be based on further independence from Russia. Nevertheless, the significance of the elections in Armenia did not relate solely to decisions regarding the country's geostrategic position, contrary to how they have been framed in the international narrative. It was also a matter of choosing a style of governance and cultural identity, as well as addressing a wide range of domestic issues. However, given the involvement of both the Russian Federation and the West, it was precisely these geopolitical issues that led the Armenians to make a crucial choice for their future. The opposition groups set to enter the new parliament – Strong Armenia and the Armenia Alliance – position themselves in international politics as pro-Russian forces, advocating close economic cooperation – both bilaterally and within the Eurasian Economic Union – as well as a defence and military alliance and cooperation within the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (Armenia regards its membership as frozen). Crucially, however, Pashinyan's pro-Western course is not unambiguous, nor does it stem from ideological convictions. The Prime Minister has announced a deepening of relations with the West whilst simultaneously stabilising relations with Russia. This pro-Western shift is largely driven by frustration over the Russian Federation's failure to respond to Azerbaijani attacks on Armenian territory in 2022 and the exodus of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh following the Azerbaijani operation in September 2023. In Pashinyan's view, Russia failed at that time to fulfil its obligations arising from Armenia's membership of the CSTO. This is, therefore, largely a reactive shift. At the same time, Armenia remains deeply tied to the Russian Federation both economically and politically, meaning that a complete geostrategic reorientation will be a major challenge, particularly in the absence of a constitutional majority.