



**ARF-DASHNAKTSUTYUN**  
INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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# BRIEFING NOTE

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Armenia: Political Pluralism,  
Democratic Governance, and  
the Challenges of the Post-  
Election Period

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22 June 2026



## About this Briefing Note

This briefing note is intended as a fact-based resource for policymakers and the public.

It provides an overview and analysis of legal, political, and security-related developments in Armenia following the parliamentary elections of 7 June 2026.

The document reflects concerns arising from publicly available information, official statements, legal proceedings, observer reports, and media coverage available as of 22 June 2026.



## About the Issuing Organization

This publication was prepared by the International Secretariat of the ARF-Dashnaksutyun Bureau.

ARF-Dashnaksutyun is one of the two parties comprising the Armenia Alliance parliamentary faction in the National Assembly of Armenia.

Founded in 1890, the ARF-Dashnaksutyun operates in approximately 30 countries and maintains an extensive international network of political, community, educational, youth, cultural, and advocacy organizations.



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## Executive Summary

The period surrounding Armenia's June 7, 2026, parliamentary elections has been marked by an unprecedented escalation in official rhetoric targeting opposition leaders, opposition voters, civil society critics, and political opponents. At the same time, a series of law-enforcement actions, criminal proceedings, travel restrictions, and controversial administrative decisions have raised serious concerns regarding equality before the law, the presumption of innocence, political pluralism, and the independence of state institutions.

While Armenian authorities have justified many of these measures as part of efforts to combat electoral corruption and protect national security, critics argue that the cumulative pattern demonstrates the selective application of legal mechanisms against opposition actors while allegations involving ruling-party representatives receive limited scrutiny or enforcement.

Concern has arisen from the increasing securitization of political discourse following the elections. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan publicly argued that the more than 500,000 votes cast for the leading three opposition parties did not reflect genuine support for their political positions and warned that creating such an impression could endanger the peace process. Critics argue that this approach increasingly portrays certain forms of political dissent—including opposition parties, Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh)-related activism, criticism of the government's Azerbaijan policy, and other influential public voices—as potential threats to national security and regional stability.

International election observers assessed election day positively overall and stated that voters were presented with a genuine choice among political alternatives. At the same time, ODIHR and OSCE observers reported a highly polarized political environment, allegations of pressure on public employees, concerns regarding the use of administrative advantages by incumbent authorities, arrests of opposition supporters during the campaign, and rhetoric portraying political opponents as threats to peace and security. These observations provide important context for understanding the legal disputes, political tensions, and allegations of selective

enforcement that continued after the elections.

The authorities' extensive election-crime enforcement campaign became one of the most controversial features of the 2026 parliamentary elections. Official figures indicate that at least 125 criminal proceedings were initiated and 248 individuals prosecuted in election-related cases, with more than 220 detentions and over 100 custodial or house-arrest measures imposed. While presented as an anti-corruption effort, the overwhelming concentration of investigations against opposition actors, combined with repeated public assertions by senior government officials that opposition support was largely the product of vote-buying, led critics to argue that criminal law was being used not only as a law-enforcement tool but also as a means of shaping the political environment and delegitimizing opposition participation. Critics have also pointed to tax audits, regulatory actions, proposed state interventions affecting opposition-linked enterprises, employment-related pressure, and other administrative measures as evidence that economic and administrative instruments are increasingly being employed alongside criminal proceedings.

These developments have unfolded against the backdrop of ongoing negotiations with Azerbaijan, including disputes over constitutional reform, the status of forcefully displaced Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), regional connectivity arrangements, and other unresolved issues related to the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process. Particular controversy arose after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan linked the electoral performance of opposition forces to heightened security risks and publicly stated that a June 2026 meeting between senior Armenian and Azerbaijani officials was necessary to "manage" threats allegedly created by the election results. Critics interpreted these statements as evidence that domestic political developments are increasingly being viewed through the prism of Azerbaijani expectations and demands, and that pressure on opposition figures, veterans, and advocates of the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) cause is being justified on national-security grounds. Similar concerns have been raised regarding the increasingly confrontational relationship between the government and the Armenian Apostolic Church, which critics view as part of a broader effort to marginalize influential institutions and public voices opposing aspects of the government's policy toward Azerbaijan and the future of Artsakh.

The post-election crisis has also acquired significant legal and geopolitical dimensions. Seven political forces have challenged the official election results before the Constitutional Court, alleging irregularities that may have affected the composition of the National Assembly and contesting decisions of the Central Electoral Commission, including the invalidation of results in three polling stations and the refusal to conduct repeat voting. The Constitutional Court has accepted all seven applications, consolidated them into a single proceeding, and scheduled oral hearings for 26 June 2026. At the same time, Armenia has become the focus of increasing geopolitical competition, with the European Union and the United States reinforcing support for Armenia's current political trajectory while relations with Russia continue to deteriorate amid expanding trade restrictions and growing political tensions. Critics argue that these external dynamics have become increasingly intertwined with domestic political

developments, debates regarding Armenia's future security orientation, and the government's approach to negotiations with Azerbaijan.

The developments described below do not concern isolated incidents. Rather, they reveal an increasingly consistent pattern in which political disagreement is framed as criminality, opposition support is portrayed as illegitimate, and domestic dissent is increasingly treated as a potential threat to Armenia's security and peace agenda. Critics argue that state institutions are being used not only to advance partisan political objectives but also to marginalize political, religious, social, and intellectual actors whose views are perceived as complicating the government's approach to relations with Azerbaijan, the peace process, and the future of the Artsakh issue.

## I. Prime Ministerial Rhetoric and the Delegitimization of Political Opposition

### Opposition Portrayed as Criminal Enemies

Throughout the election campaign and in the post-election period, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan repeatedly characterized the principal opposition forces as criminal entities rather than legitimate political competitors.

The Prime Minister referred to the three main opposition forces as a “three-headed war party” and repeatedly alleged that their electoral support was obtained through vote-buying rather than genuine political backing.

Following the elections, despite more than half a million citizens voting for the three leading opposition parties and alliances, Pashinyan asserted that there are not genuinely 500,000 citizens who support those political positions and instead claimed that the opposition's electoral results were largely the product of bribery.

Senior officials of the ruling Civil Contract subsequently echoed this narrative, suggesting that opposition parties should never have been allowed to participate in the elections and that their votes lack democratic legitimacy.

### Threatening Language Directed at Opposition Leaders

During the campaign, Pashinyan made a series of statements directed at former President Robert Kocharyan, businessman Samvel Karapetyan, and Prosperous Armenia leader Gagik Tsarukyan.

Among the statements widely reported were pledges to:

- “Bring them to their knees,”
- “Crush them,”
- Imprison them,

- Confiscate their assets,
- and statements using language that critics characterized as physical threats.

Following the elections, the Prime Minister publicly declared:

“As long as I am prime minister, I will crush them in a targeted manner.”

He subsequently renewed calls for the imprisonment of leading opposition figures.

National Assembly Speaker Alen Simonyan publicly endorsed the Prime Minister’s rhetoric, stating that he joined Pashinyan's position and would likewise “bring them to their knees.”

### Criminalization of Political Opposition

A particularly concerning development has been the increasingly frequent conflation of political opposition with criminal conduct.

Rather than distinguishing between individual criminal allegations and legitimate political activity, senior government officials have repeatedly described opposition leaders as criminal actors before court verdicts have been issued.

This approach risks transforming political competition into a law-enforcement matter and undermining the principle that guilt must be determined by independent courts rather than political authorities.

## II. Undermining the Presumption of Innocence

### Public Declarations of Guilt

Prime Minister Pashinyan has repeatedly declared that opposition parties received their votes through electoral bribery despite the absence of final judicial determinations establishing such allegations.

At one point, he asserted that:

“Civil Contract received 100 percent organic votes. The other forces received 100 percent vote-buying votes.”

Such statements were made while criminal investigations remain ongoing and before courts have reached verdicts.

### Direct Pressure on Judicial Proceedings

Legal professionals have argued that these statements constitute direct interference in pending criminal proceedings.

Attorney Tigran Hayrapetyan publicly characterized the Prime Minister’s comments as:

- interference in judicial processes,
- violations of the presumption of innocence,

- pressure on prosecutors and judges,
- and conduct incompatible with fair trial guarantees.

Critics note that when the head of government publicly declares defendants guilty before trial, the ability of courts to appear impartial becomes significantly compromised.

### III. Legal Challenges to the Election Results

The post-election period has been characterized not only by political confrontation but also by extensive legal challenges initiated by opposition parties and candidates.

On 19 June 2026, seven political forces challenged the official election results before the Constitutional Court. The applicants include the Strong Armenia Alliance, the Armenia Alliance, Prosperous Armenia Party, Wings of Unity Party, Democracy Law Discipline Party, the For the Protection of Democracy Alliance, and the New Force Reformist Party. The Constitutional Court subsequently accepted the applications, consolidated them into a single proceeding, and scheduled oral hearings for 26 June 2026. The case will be reported by Constitutional Court Judge Edgar Shatiryan.

The applicants allege serious violations affecting the election outcome, including inaccuracies in vote counting, pressure on public-sector employees and security personnel, mass arrests of opposition supporters, and controversial decisions adopted by the Central Electoral Commission. Particular attention has focused on the CEC's invalidation of voting results in three polling stations and its refusal to order repeat voting despite concerns that the invalidations may have affected parliamentary mandate allocation.

The Prosperous Armenia Party has argued that the invalidation of the three polling stations artificially prevented it from crossing the four-percent threshold required for parliamentary representation. According to legal arguments advanced by the party and supported by independent calculations published by the Fact Investigation Platform, retaining the disputed polling-station results would have resulted in Prosperous Armenia entering parliament with five mandates, thereby altering the composition of the National Assembly.

In parallel with the Constitutional Court proceedings, opposition leaders have initiated a series of other legal actions. Former President Robert Kocharyan has challenged the Central Electoral Commission's decision consenting to criminal prosecution against him. Prosperous Armenia leader Gagik Tsarukyan has filed defamation lawsuits against Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and the Public Television of Armenia, while Strong Armenia leader Narek Karapetyan has sued the Investigative Committee seeking retraction of statements made during the election campaign.

The outcome of these proceedings is likely to play an important role in shaping both the legal and political legitimacy of Armenia's post-election environment.

## IV. Selective Law Enforcement and Unequal Application of the Law

### Violence Allegedly Involving Civil Contract Representatives

Several incidents involving alleged violence by ruling-party representatives received extensive public attention during the campaign and on election day.

These included:

- the beating of Strong Armenia representative Levon Hokhikyan in Lichk,
- an attack against a Strong Armenia representative in Avshar,
- and video-recorded incidents involving Civil Contract-affiliated figures.

Despite public evidence and significant media coverage, critics note that no comparable punitive measures were imposed against ruling-party figures involved in these incidents. Human rights defender Zaruhi Hovhannisyan described the situation as evidence of discriminatory enforcement and unequal application of the law.

### Contrasting Treatment of Government Critics

Observers have contrasted this limited enforcement with the aggressive use of criminal measures against opposition supporters and critics.

Examples repeatedly cited include:

- the detention of citizens for relatively minor political acts,
- the imprisonment of government critics,
- criminal investigations initiated against opposition candidates,
- and repeated public threats by senior officials directed at political opponents.

The resulting perception is that legal consequences vary depending upon political affiliation rather than the nature of the conduct involved.

### Searches Targeting Opposition Campaign Structures

Concerns regarding selective law-enforcement were also raised during the election campaign when the Anti-Corruption Committee conducted searches at campaign offices of the Armenia Alliance in Ashtarak and at the residence of ARF-Dashnaktsutyun parliamentarian Ashot Simonyan. Opposition representatives characterized the searches as an attempt to disrupt campaign activities and intimidate supporters of opposition forces. Ishkhan Saghatelyan, a senior ARF-Dashnaktsutyun official and Armenia Alliance candidate, argued that the actions formed part of a broader effort to weaken opposition electoral structures and influence voter behavior during the campaign.

### Economic and Administrative Pressure on Opposition-Linked Businesses

The post-election period has also been marked by growing controversy regarding actions

affecting businesses associated with opposition leaders.

Following the elections, reports emerged that numerous companies belonging to the Multi Group concern, owned by Prosperous Armenia leader Gagik Tsarukyan, had become subject to tax audits and inspections. These developments occurred shortly after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan renewed public pledges to imprison and "dispossess" major opposition leaders and reiterated earlier promises to return Tsarukyan's assets to "the people." Tsarukyan's representatives argued that the audits formed part of a broader campaign of political pressure directed against opposition figures.

Additional controversy arose after reports that Yerevan municipal authorities had decided to rescind a long-term lease agreement concerning land occupied by the Multi Wellness fitness complex, a business associated with Tsarukyan's conglomerate. Representatives of the opposition leader described the measure as unlawful and announced plans to challenge it through the courts.

The pressure allegations were further amplified when prosecutors formally charged Prosperous Armenia leader Gagik Tsarukyan with large-scale tax evasion and imposed a travel restriction preventing him from leaving the country. The timing of the charges attracted particular attention because they were announced while Prosperous Armenia was actively contesting the election results and pursuing recounts and legal remedies aimed at reversing its exclusion from parliament. Additional controversy arose after questions were raised regarding whether the prosecution of an election candidate required prior consent from the Central Electoral Commission. Opposition representatives characterized the proceedings as politically motivated, while authorities maintained that the case concerned alleged criminal conduct unrelated to political activity.

These developments have attracted particular attention because they occurred in close temporal proximity to the criminal prosecution of Tsarukyan, travel restrictions imposed upon him, disputes regarding Prosperous Armenia's exclusion from parliament following the invalidation of results in three polling stations, and repeated public statements by senior government officials targeting the opposition leader. Critics argue that the cumulative effect of criminal, administrative, tax, and regulatory measures contributes to the perception that economic instruments are being employed alongside legal mechanisms to increase pressure on political opponents.

## V. Criminal Proceedings Against Opposition Figures

### Robert Kocharyan

Following the elections, prosecutors sought authorization to bring new criminal charges against former President Robert Kocharyan.

According to his attorneys:

- the case concerns a government decision adopted in 2004, when Kocharyan was

President, not Prime Minister,

- Kocharyan allegedly has no direct connection to the disputed transaction,
- and the applicable statute of limitations expired years ago.

His lawyers have characterized the case as politically motivated and directly connected to ongoing political developments.

## Gagik Tsarukyan

Prosperous Armenia leader Gagik Tsarukyan was charged with large-scale tax evasion and prohibited from leaving the country shortly after the elections and while his party was actively contesting the election results and seeking recounts aimed at reversing its exclusion from parliament.

The Prosecutor General's Office initiated criminal proceedings under Article 290 of the Criminal Code, ENAalleging large-scale tax evasion related to diesel-fuel imports. According to statements by the Chairman of the State Revenue Committee, the allegations concern activities dating back several years and form part of an ongoing investigation.

The timing of the prosecution nevertheless generated significant controversy. Prosperous Armenia argued that the charges were politically motivated and pointed to the fact that they coincided with the party's efforts to challenge the election results and secure parliamentary representation. Additional legal questions emerged regarding whether the prosecution of an election candidate required prior authorization from the Central Electoral Commission. Public statements by representatives of the CEC suggested that no such request had been received, while the Prosecutor General's Office indicated that the matter would be clarified.

Critics further noted that the proceedings occurred against the backdrop of repeated public statements by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan targeting Tsarukyan and other leading opposition figures. During the election campaign and immediately afterward, Pashinyan repeatedly asserted that opposition leaders Robert Kocharyan, Samvel Karapetyan, and Gagik Tsarukyan should face long-term imprisonment and publicly linked them to corruption, vote-buying, or broader threats to the country's future. Opposition representatives argued that such statements undermined the presumption of innocence and contributed to perceptions that law-enforcement actions against opposition leaders were politically directed. Government representatives rejected these allegations and maintained that criminal proceedings were based on evidence gathered through independent investigations.

## Opposition Candidates and Parliamentary Immunity

Authorities have sought the lifting of immunity and criminal prosecution of numerous opposition candidates from:

- Armenia Alliance,
- Strong Armenia,

- and Prosperous Armenia.

Critics argue that the timing of these proceedings, particularly immediately before and after the elections, creates the appearance that criminal law is being deployed as a political instrument.

### Arrests and Detentions

Several opposition figures have already been detained or arrested following the elections, including:

- former MP Ruben Hakobyan,
- Strong Armenia candidate Ashot Yeghiazaryan,
- Armenia Alliance candidate Rustam Barseghyan,
- and Strong Armenia candidate Davit Ghazinyan.

Whether these proceedings ultimately result in convictions remains uncertain. However, the concentration of enforcement activity against opposition forces has intensified concerns regarding politically selective prosecution.

## VI. Travel Restrictions and Restrictions on Freedom of Movement

### Robert Kocharyan

Authorities prevented Robert Kocharyan from leaving Armenia despite the absence of any publicly disclosed legal basis at the time.

According to opposition representatives:

- no valid travel restriction had been communicated,
- no corresponding authorization from the Central Electoral Commission had been obtained,
- and neither Kocharyan nor his legal team received a formal explanation.

### Narek Karapetyan

Strong Armenia leader Narek Karapetyan was similarly prevented from crossing the Armenia-Georgia border.

Again, authorities declined to clarify the legal basis for the restriction.

The repeated use of unexplained travel restrictions against opposition figures has generated concerns regarding arbitrary interference with freedom of movement and due process guarantees.

## VII. Use of Security Structures and Information Leaks

### Leakage of NSS Footage

Video footage from an NSS border checkpoint showing Robert Kocharyan at Zvartnots Airport was leaked to pro-government media outlets.

The footage appeared publicly before authorities had provided any explanation regarding the restriction imposed on Kocharyan.

Human rights advocates described the leak as potentially unlawful and argued that sensitive state-controlled information was apparently disseminated for political purposes.

### Prime Minister's Response

Rather than expressing concern regarding the apparent disclosure of confidential state information, Prime Minister Pashinyan publicly suggested that NSS personnel could choose whether to leak information under their control.

This response drew criticism from legal experts and human rights advocates, who argued that state institutions are bound by law rather than personal discretion.

## VIII. Electoral Administration and the Exclusion of Prosperous Armenia

One of the most consequential post-election developments concerned the Central Electoral Commission's decision to invalidate results from several polling stations while simultaneously refusing to order repeat voting.

As a result:

- Prosperous Armenia fell below the parliamentary threshold by 156 votes, whereas in the three invalidated polling stations it had received 222 votes;
- Civil Contract secured a three-fifths parliamentary majority, allowing it to solely adopt changes to constitutional laws and elect high-ranking officials, including the President of the Republic and the Prosecutor General;
- and opposition parties lost potential parliamentary representation.

Numerous legal experts, election observers, and opposition parties argued that the refusal to conduct repeat voting contradicted the spirit and purpose of Armenia's electoral legislation.

The opposition maintains that the decision directly altered parliamentary representation and effectively disenfranchised affected voters. The dispute has since become one of the central issues before the Constitutional Court and lies at the heart of broader opposition claims that the final composition of the National Assembly does not accurately reflect the votes cast on 7 June.

## IX. Securitization of Political Competition

Perhaps the most significant post-election development has been the government's increasing tendency to frame political opposition through the lens of national security and the peace process with Azerbaijan.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan repeatedly linked the electoral performance of the leading opposition forces to risks of renewed conflict, threats to regional stability, and the need for consultations with Azerbaijani officials regarding Armenia's security environment. Rather than treating opposition support as a normal manifestation of political pluralism, government rhetoric increasingly suggested that political positions associated with the Artsakh issue, opposition to constitutional changes sought by Azerbaijan, or criticism of the government's negotiating approach could have direct implications for peace and security.

Critics argue that this framing blurs the distinction between legitimate political disagreement and national-security threats. In their view, it creates a foundation for portraying opposition activity not merely as an alternative political choice but as a potential obstacle to peace, thereby increasing the risk that political dissent will be treated as a security concern rather than as a normal feature of democratic governance.

This broader trend became more visible following the elections and is examined in greater detail in the sections that follow.

## X. From Electoral Opposition to a Security Threat

The broader process of securitizing political competition has been accompanied by the increasing tendency of senior government officials to portray specific political actors and social groups as potential threats to Armenia's security environment and peace agenda.

This trend became particularly visible following Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's comments regarding the approximately 500,000 votes cast for the three major opposition parties. Rejecting the notion that these votes reflected genuine support for opposition political programs, Pashinyan argued that they were largely the product of vote-buying and insisted that there are not 500,000 citizens who genuinely support the positions advanced by the opposition.

The Prime Minister linked this argument directly to the Karabakh (Artsakh) issue, stating:

"Are 500,000 people saying that we should continue the Karabakh movement? No, they are not. And we must not allow such an impression to be created, because if such an impression is created, then yes, peace will collapse, and it will collapse very quickly."

The statement was significant because it suggested that the mere perception of substantial public support for opposition positions could have negative consequences for Armenia's negotiations with Azerbaijan and the broader peace process.

These remarks followed the June 14 meeting in Dilijan between Armenian Security Council

Secretary Armen Grigoryan and Azerbaijani presidential aide Hikmet Hajiyev. Pashinyan subsequently indicated that the meeting had been necessary to “manage” risks arising from domestic political developments and international public perceptions regarding support for opposition forces.

Critics argue that these statements represent a further step in the securitization of political disagreement. In their view, opposition support is increasingly portrayed not simply as an alternative political choice but as a potential obstacle to peace, regional stability, and the government's negotiations with Azerbaijan.

This concern has been reinforced by a series of post-election developments affecting individuals and groups associated with criticism of the government's approach to Azerbaijan and the Artsakh (Karabakh) issue. Opposition politicians, veterans, public figures, and local officials have increasingly claimed that dissenting views are being marginalized through a combination of public stigmatization, criminal proceedings, administrative pressure, and restrictions on political activity.

One example frequently cited by critics is the case of Gohar Vartanyan, a local government employee in the village of Kirants bordering Azerbaijan. After publicly disputing official claims that the election results in her community demonstrated support for the government's policy toward Azerbaijan (in a social media post arguing that the outcome had been significantly influenced by votes cast by military personnel and border guards stationed in the area), she alleged that she was pressured to resign after refusing to remove her social media post. Although the authorities have not publicly addressed the substance of her allegations, critics have pointed to the incident as evidence of growing pressure on individuals who challenge official narratives, particularly on issues related to border concessions, relations with Azerbaijan, and the government's peace agenda.

Concerns regarding political pressure have also extended beyond politicians and public officials. Following the elections, media reports alleged that several employees of Electric Networks of Armenia in the Vardenis region were compelled to resign because of their support for the Strong Armenia Alliance. According to these reports, the employees attended a campaign event outside working hours and were subsequently instructed by company officials to cease supporting the opposition. After refusing to do so, they allegedly came under pressure to submit resignation letters.

The allegations attracted particular attention because Electric Networks of Armenia is owned by Strong Armenia leader Samvel Karapetyan while being administered under state-appointed management. Critics have cited the reported dismissals as evidence that political pressure is increasingly extending beyond opposition leaders to ordinary employees and supporters of opposition forces. Although the allegations have not been independently verified, opposition representatives argue that the case contributes to a broader pattern in which political affiliation increasingly affects employment security and participation in public life.

The allegations emerged against the backdrop of a broader confrontation between the

government and Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA), the country's electricity distribution monopoly, and its owner, businessman and Strong Armenia leader Samvel Karapetyan. Following public disputes between Karapetyan and the authorities, including disagreements related to the Armenian Apostolic Church and broader political developments, the government initiated legislative and administrative measures that could result in the transfer of ENA into state ownership. Critics characterized the proposed nationalization as politically motivated and warned that it could undermine investor confidence, property-rights protections, and Armenia's investment climate. Government representatives, by contrast, argued that the measures were necessary to protect the public interest and ensure the proper functioning of critical infrastructure.

Concerns regarding the narrowing space for dissent have also been raised in connection with criminal proceedings initiated against political analysts and commentators. On 12 June 2026, political analysts Alen Ghevondyan and Tigran Vardanyan were charged under Article 422 of the Criminal Code with publicly calling for the violent overthrow of the constitutional order through information and communication technologies. Ghevondyan was detained and subsequently placed under administrative supervision, including restrictions on the use of social media, participation in political assemblies, and travel outside Armenia, while Vardanyan was declared wanted. Supporters of the analysts argued that the proceedings reflected an increasingly expansive interpretation of political speech and warned that criminal sanctions were being used to discourage critical commentary regarding the post-election situation. Government authorities, by contrast, maintained that the charges were based on public statements that allegedly crossed the threshold from political opinion into unlawful incitement.

Critics have also pointed to the increasingly confrontational relationship between the government and the Armenian Apostolic Church. The removal of Catholicos Karekin II became an explicit objective of the ruling Civil Contract party's electoral platform, while government officials have repeatedly portrayed Church leaders as political actors interfering in state affairs. Opponents of the government argue that the Church has increasingly come under pressure because of its criticism of territorial concessions, its advocacy on behalf of displaced Artsakh Armenians, and its opposition to aspects of the government's policy toward Azerbaijan. In this context, they view attacks on Church leadership as part of a broader pattern directed against influential institutions and public voices perceived as complicating the government's peace agenda.

Critics further note that the government's increasingly confrontational rhetoric has not been limited to individual opposition leaders. Senior representatives of the ruling Civil Contract party have repeatedly questioned the legitimacy of the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun, with some advocating legal restrictions on the party and others portraying it as an obstacle to Armenia's foreign-policy course. Opposition figures argue that the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun has become a particular target because of its consistent opposition to concessions regarding Artsakh, constitutional changes demanded by Azerbaijan, and aspects of the government's normalization agenda with Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Opposition figures and government critics increasingly argue that these developments cannot be understood solely as anti-corruption measures or ordinary political disputes. Rather, they contend that the authorities are attempting to demonstrate to Azerbaijan that they can contain domestic resistance to their negotiating agenda, constitutional reform proposals, and efforts to permanently close the Artsakh issue as a matter of Armenian state policy.

Critics point to cases involving opposition politicians, clergy, analysts, public employees, business figures, and ordinary citizens as evidence that the range of actors exposed to legal, administrative, or political pressure has broadened considerably beyond traditional party-political opponents.

Whether this interpretation is accepted or disputed, the growing tendency to frame domestic political disagreement as a potential threat to peace and security has become one of the defining features of Armenia's post-election political environment.

## **XI. The Regional Dimension: Government Actions, Azerbaijani Demands, and Allegations of Internal Repression**

A notable feature of the post-election period has been the increasingly explicit linkage made by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan between domestic political opposition and Armenia's relations with Azerbaijan.

Following the June 14 meeting in Dilijan between Armenian Security Council Secretary Armen Grigoryan and Azerbaijani presidential aide Hikmet Hajiyev, Pashinyan publicly argued that the meeting was necessary to "manage" security risks allegedly created by the electoral performance of opposition forces. According to the Prime Minister, the votes received by the three leading opposition parties could create an external perception that hundreds of thousands of Armenians support policies associated with the Karabakh movement, territorial claims, or the revision of the peace process. He suggested that such perceptions could aggravate Armenia's security environment and increase the risk of war. In subsequent remarks, Pashinyan argued that creating the impression that hundreds of thousands of Armenians support the continuation of the Karabakh (Artsakh) movement could itself undermine prospects for peace and stability.

These remarks generated significant controversy because they appeared to portray domestic political opposition not merely as political competitors but as a factor requiring active management in Armenia's security dialogue with Azerbaijan.

### **Allegations of Azerbaijani Influence Over Armenian Domestic Developments**

Opposition politicians and government critics have interpreted the Prime Minister's statements as evidence that Azerbaijani concerns are influencing Armenia's internal political processes.

Opposition MP Tigran Abrahamyan argued that Pashinyan's comments reinforce longstanding concerns that Azerbaijan is exerting influence over Armenia's domestic agenda. According to Abrahamyan, the government is not only adapting negotiations and constitutional reforms to

Azerbaijani demands but is also employing domestic law-enforcement and administrative mechanisms to neutralize political forces viewed by Baku as obstacles to the peace process.

In this interpretation, the growing pressure on opposition figures, former officials, veterans, and individuals associated with the Artsakh issue forms part of a broader effort to reassure Azerbaijan regarding Armenia's future political trajectory.

### Constitutional Change and the "Elimination of Revanchism"

Azerbaijan has repeatedly maintained that a final peace agreement requires amendments to Armenia's Constitution, particularly the removal of references that Baku interprets as containing territorial claims.

Prime Minister Pashinyan has publicly argued that constitutional reform serves Armenia's own interests and has supported replacing the current Constitution. However, the ruling party's failure to secure a constitutional majority in the June 2026 elections significantly complicated that objective.

Against this backdrop, Armenian media reports have claimed that the government may be seeking alternative ways to satisfy Azerbaijani concerns if constitutional amendments prove politically unattainable. According to these reports, the authorities may attempt to demonstrate the irreversible defeat of what they characterize as "revanchist" political currents through intensified pressure on political actors associated with:

- the Artsakh issue;
- former Armenian administrations;
- veterans and military figures;
- opposition leaders;
- and advocates of a more assertive negotiating position toward Azerbaijan.

These reports remain unverified. However, they have gained visibility because they coincide with a broader pattern of criminal proceedings, investigations, travel restrictions, and increasingly hostile rhetoric directed against many of the same political figures.

The debate regarding "revanchism" has acquired additional significance considering the text of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace agreement initialed in August 2025. Article VIII commits both states to condemn and combat separatism, violent extremism, and related phenomena within their respective jurisdictions, while other provisions commit the parties to refrain from actions inconsistent with the agreement and to avoid hostile conduct against one another.

Government supporters argue that these commitments require the marginalization of narratives that could undermine peace and normalization. Critics, however, have expressed concern that broad or politically motivated interpretations of such provisions could be used to stigmatize or suppress legitimate political viewpoints, including advocacy related to Artsakh, criticism of government policy, opposition to constitutional changes demanded by Azerbaijan,

or other forms of political dissent. These concerns have contributed to the broader debate regarding the boundary between protecting peace and preserving democratic pluralism.

These concerns were reinforced by developments in Azerbaijan itself. On 19 June 2026, participants at the Third "Return to Western Azerbaijan" Festival-Congress held in Ordubad, Nakhichevan, including members of parliament, government officials, academics, and representatives of the "Western Azerbaijan Community," reiterated demands related to the return of Azerbaijanis to territories within present-day Armenia. Azerbaijani National Assembly Vice Speaker Ziyafet Asgarov described the issue as one of the key directions of Azerbaijan's national agenda and again linked progress in bilateral relations to constitutional changes in Armenia. Other participants publicly suggested that if such objectives were not achieved peacefully, alternative means of securing their realization could become unavoidable.

The Ordubad conference attracted particular attention in Armenia because it appeared to contradict arguments frequently advanced by Armenian officials that the abandonment of issues perceived as territorial claims, the closure of the Artsakh issue, and progress toward a peace agreement would remove the principal sources of tension between the two states. Critics argued that the continued promotion of the "Western Azerbaijan" agenda, together with repeated Azerbaijani demands regarding Armenia's Constitution, demonstrates that Azerbaijani expectations continue to evolve independently of Armenia's internal debate regarding "revanchism." In their view, these developments raise questions regarding the assumption that marginalizing domestic critics of the peace process or suppressing so-called "revanchist" viewpoints will necessarily satisfy Azerbaijani demands or eliminate future sources of bilateral tension.

Critics further note that, notwithstanding repeated concessions and statements by Armenian officials emphasizing the closure of the Artsakh issue, Azerbaijani officials continue to actively promote the so-called "Western Azerbaijan" agenda, demand constitutional changes in Armenia, and publicly link the prospects for peace to further political and constitutional developments inside Armenia. This has reinforced skepticism among government critics regarding the assumption that suppressing so-called "revanchist" voices or marginalizing opposition forces will satisfy Azerbaijani demands or permanently stabilize the peace process.

## Emerging Concerns

The convergence of several developments has generated growing concern among opposition groups and civil society observers:

- the government's repeated characterization of opposition forces as a threat to peace;
- assertions that opposition electoral support was illegitimate;
- criminal proceedings against major opposition leaders;
- travel restrictions imposed on opposition figures;
- pressure directed at individuals associated with the Artsakh (Karabakh) cause;

- and public statements linking domestic political developments to Azerbaijani security concerns.

Taken together, these developments have led critics to argue that the government is increasingly treating political pluralism, particularly views associated with Artsakh (Karabakh), national security, and relations with Azerbaijan, as a matter of state security rather than democratic debate.

Whether this reflects a deliberate policy aimed at satisfying Azerbaijani expectations or merely the government's own assessment of Armenia's security interests remains a matter of intense political dispute. Nevertheless, the perception that domestic political opposition, public criticism of concessions to Azerbaijan, and advocacy related to Artsakh are increasingly being constrained in order to facilitate a particular settlement framework has become one of the defining controversies of Armenia's post-election political environment.

## XII. Electoral Bribery Investigations and Concerns Regarding Due Process

### Scale of Enforcement Activity

The fight against electoral bribery became the central law-enforcement theme of the 2026 parliamentary election campaign.

According to official figures released by the Anti-Corruption Committee on 16 June 2026:

- 125 criminal proceedings were initiated concerning election-related offenses;
- criminal prosecution was initiated against 248 individuals;
- 227 persons were detained in connection with 66 criminal cases;
- 108 defendants were subjected to deprivation-of-liberty measures, including 55 detained in custody and 53 placed under house arrest;
- 15 suspects were declared wanted;
- more than 300 individuals were questioned;
- searches were conducted at numerous offices and private premises;
- 21 criminal proceedings involving 90 defendants were completed and transmitted to court with indictments.

The investigated offenses included alleged vote-buying, vote-buying mediation, violations of restrictions on charitable activities during elections, and related offenses.

The overwhelming majority of publicly announced investigations concerned alleged members, candidates, supporters, or local structures associated with the principal opposition forces, particularly the Strong Armenia Alliance and Prosperous Armenia Party.

## Official Narrative

Throughout the campaign and post-election period, government officials repeatedly asserted that vote-buying had fundamentally distorted the electoral outcome.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan publicly declared that Civil Contract received "100 percent organic votes" while opposition parties received "100 percent vote-buying votes."

Senior Civil Contract representatives similarly argued that opposition parties should have been removed from the electoral process altogether because of alleged vote-buying activities.

Government representatives further questioned the legitimacy of the more than 500,000 votes received by the three opposition forces that entered or nearly entered parliament.

## Concerns Raised by Human Rights Advocates

Human rights advocates and opposition representatives have questioned whether the scale of enforcement activity corresponds to the number of cases that have ultimately been proven in court.

Human rights defender Zhanna Aleksanyan noted that authorities repeatedly publicized arrests, detentions, house arrests, searches, and criminal proceedings throughout the campaign period, contributing to what she described as an atmosphere of fear.

She argued that while hundreds of individuals were detained, investigated, or prosecuted, only a limited number of cases had reached the stage of completed indictments, and none had yet resulted in final convictions at the time senior government officials were publicly characterizing opposition votes as illegitimate.

Critics therefore argue that a distinction must be maintained between:

- allegations under investigation;
- criminal prosecutions;
- indictments filed with courts; and
- final judicial determinations.

They contend that public declarations of guilt prior to judicial rulings undermine both the presumption of innocence and public confidence in the impartiality of ongoing proceedings.

## Selective Enforcement Concerns

Additional concerns have been raised regarding the apparent imbalance between the aggressive pursuit of alleged electoral offenses attributed to opposition actors and the comparatively limited legal consequences for reported incidents involving representatives of the ruling Civil Contract party.

Domestic observers, human rights advocates, and opposition representatives have argued that this disparity contributes to perceptions that criminal law is being applied selectively and for

political purposes.

Whether these concerns are justified remains a matter of political and legal dispute. However, the concentration of investigative activity against opposition forces, combined with repeated public statements by senior officials asserting the illegitimacy of opposition support, has become one of the most contentious aspects of Armenia's post-election political environment.

### XIII. International and Geopolitical Context

The post-election period has unfolded amid intensifying geopolitical competition over Armenia's future orientation and growing involvement by external actors in the country's political environment.

Throughout the election campaign, Armenia's political debate was shaped by competing narratives regarding relations with Russia, the European Union, and the United States. Domestic and international observers noted that the election campaign increasingly came to be viewed through a geopolitical lens, with supporters and opponents of the government frequently presenting the vote as a choice between competing foreign-policy trajectories.

Shortly after the elections, the European Union announced additional financial assistance measures intended to mitigate the impact of Russian trade restrictions on Armenian exports and reaffirmed its support for Armenia's democratic development and sovereignty. The announcement followed a series of high-profile engagements between Armenian authorities and Western partners, including recent EU-Armenia and European Political Community summits hosted in Yerevan.

At the same time, relations between Yerevan and Moscow continued to deteriorate. Russia expanded restrictions affecting Armenian exports, while Armenian officials and political actors continued to accuse external actors of attempting to influence the country's political processes. Competing allegations of Russian and Western involvement became a recurring feature of political discourse during and after the election campaign.

Critics have also argued that the growing alignment between domestic political developments and the preferences of Armenia's Western partners has contributed to perceptions that questions of democracy, security, constitutional reform, and regional settlement are increasingly influenced by external geopolitical considerations. Government supporters reject this interpretation and maintain that closer cooperation with Western institutions reflects Armenia's sovereign policy choices and strategic interests.

The international dimension has become increasingly significant because it intersects directly with domestic debates concerning constitutional reform, relations with Azerbaijan, regional connectivity arrangements, the future of the Artsakh issue, and Armenia's long-term security architecture. As a result, disputes concerning election legitimacy, political pluralism, and the treatment of opposition forces increasingly unfold within a broader geopolitical context involving both Western and Russian interests.

## Conclusion

Taken individually, each of these incidents may be defended by the authorities as a lawful response to specific circumstances. Taken together, however, they reveal a broader pattern characterized by:

- increasingly hostile and threatening rhetoric toward political opponents;
- public declarations of guilt before judicial determinations;
- selective law-enforcement practices;
- criminal proceedings concentrated on opposition actors;
- restrictions on opposition figures' freedom of movement;
- apparent use of legal, administrative, and economic instruments for partisan purposes;
- allegations of economic pressure directed against opposition-linked businesses and employees;
- controversial electoral decisions benefiting the ruling party;
- the portrayal of political opposition as a threat to national security rather than a legitimate component of democratic governance; and
- the increasing portrayal of political dissent, particularly regarding Artsakh and relations with Azerbaijan, as a threat to peace and national security.

The cumulative effect is a growing perception that legal institutions and state structures are being used not merely to enforce the law but to shape the political environment in favor of the incumbent authorities and to marginalize actors perceived as obstructing the government's approach to relations with Azerbaijan and the future of the Artsakh issue. Such developments raise serious concerns regarding political pluralism, equality before the law, due process, judicial independence, freedom of expression, and the long-term health of democratic governance in Armenia.

**ARF-Dashnaktsutyun International Secretariat**

[intsec@arf.am](mailto:intsec@arf.am)

***(ARF-Dashnaktsutyun is one of the two parties comprising the Armenia Alliance parliamentary faction in the National Assembly of Armenia)***

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