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# “Extraordinary” ordinary elections in Armenia

On June 7, Armenia holds parliamentary elections following a competitive and aggressive campaign. The central battleground is twofold: the fragile peace deal with Azerbaijan, and Armenia's geopolitical dilemma – alignment with Russia or movement towards Europe. Parties have raised the stakes to an existential level, warning that voting for the wrong side risks the country's very survival – leaving little room for more conventional policy debates. While polls are favorable for the incumbent, nearly a third of voters remain undecided or silent, and their choice will determine everything.

## Electoral scene

On June 7, 2026, Armenia will elect its 9th parliament. Voters will be choosing from a list of 19 parties or alliances (blocks), among which the incumbent party and a fragmented opposition represented by a few relatively large players.

Elections are primarily dominated by issues related to national security, the peace process with Azerbaijan, and the country's geopolitical orientation between Europe and Russia (Broers, 2026).

Observers and experts report a high degree of polarization and aggressive rhetoric used during the campaign (Hovhannisyan & Meister, 2026).

If one would like to characterize the elections with one word, that would be "Threat". The main message the parties are trying to convey to voters is that the cost of making the wrong choice (essentially, not choosing them) is catastrophic, bordering on the country's existence. As a consequence, there is very little discussion on policy platforms.

The main intrigue of the elections is a relatively high share of undecided voters and those who do not reveal their preferences during the polls. Will they participate and who would they vote for - this is the main question of these elections.

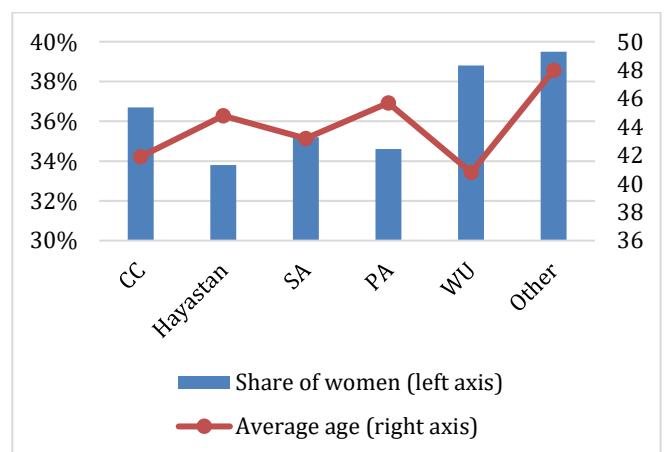
## Electoral system

Armenia is a parliamentary democracy in which the National Assembly is elected by proportional representation, with seats allocated among parties and alliances that pass the legal threshold (4% for parties and 8% for blocks/alliances of parties). Since the constitutional changes of 2015 shifted executive power toward the Parliament, the prime minister is elected by the National Assembly, while the President is chosen indirectly and has a

largely ceremonial role. Seats allocated to a party are distributed by calculating the proportion of the votes given to that party with respect to all votes of the parties that overcome the threshold. If no party reaches 50+ percent of the seats, coalition talks are opened. First, the party with the relative majority of votes gets the opportunity to form a coalition that would ensure 50+ votes, and in case this does not work out, other parties above the threshold are allowed to form a coalition. If this fails, the second round of elections will be held.

The electoral law requires each third position in the electoral list of the party to be allocated to a woman. According to the analysis of party lists, 38 percent of all candidates across 19 parties are women, and the average age of candidates is 46. Overall, the lists include more than 2,100 candidates, and reserved seats for ethnic minorities are allocated through a separate list of 22 candidates. Specifically, four seats in the Parliament are reserved for ethnic minorities - Russians, Assyrians, Yazidis, and Kurds.

Figure 1. Age and gender in the forthcoming 2026 Parliamentary elections' candidate lists



Source: Central Electoral Commission, authors calculations.  
Note: CC - Civil Contract (ruling party), Hayastan - Hayastan Alliance, SA - Strong Armenia, PA - Prosperous Armenia, WU - Wings of Unity. See Section Main Players for details.



## Main players

While 19 parties are registered for the elections, the real competition, as one would expect, takes place among only a few of them.

**Civil Contract**, in power since 2018 under the leadership of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, is the favorite of the race. The party positions itself as reformist, anti-corruption, and pro-democracy. Its main propositions are continuing institutional reforms, pursuing peace negotiations with Azerbaijan, and gradually deepening cooperation with the EU and Western partners.

**Strong Armenia** is a newly established opposition force led by major entrepreneur and investor Samvel Karapetyan. The party prioritizes business-oriented governance, national security, and closer strategic ties with Russia. It emphasizes traditional national institutions, such as the Armenian Apostolic Church.

**Hayastan Alliance** is led by former president Robert Kocharyan. Its core proposition is that Armenia requires more experienced and security-focused leadership, closer strategic coordination with Russia, and a tougher negotiating posture in regional affairs.

**Prosperous Armenia** is a business-oriented political party that emphasizes economic growth, social support programs, and improvements in living standards. Its main propositions include job creation, infrastructure development, support for small and medium-sized enterprises, and maintaining a pragmatic and balanced foreign policy approach.

**Wings of Unity**, led by former Ombudsman Armen Tatoyan, positions itself around national security, rule of law, protection of national interests, and institutional resilience. The movement emphasizes strengthening Armenia's

security architecture, defending human rights and state sovereignty, and restoring public trust in governance and national institutions.

While not among the main players, there is an interesting "experiment" embedded in these elections. Among the parties competing, there is a party called "Against all". A ballot option that existed years ago is now featured as a party with essentially only one program point: change the electoral law, unwind the Parliament, and call for new elections.

## Core issues

It is difficult to judge who sets the main agenda, but the central debated issues are quite clear.

One of the central topics of the elections is "peace building" with Azerbaijan. In its program, Prime Minister Pashinyan states: "On June 7, go vote and stand for peace by supporting the Civil Contract party". While the incumbent views its actions as protecting a fragile peace through international legitimacy, the contestants view the same actions as eroding national sovereignty and traditional foundations.

A consequential discussion is what the role of external actors is and the extent to which they influence the country's policy agenda. The closer the election date, the harsher the rhetoric. "Electing Tsarukyan (the leader of Prosperous Armenia party) is equivalent to electing Aleksandr Lukashenko (the President of Belarus)," announced Prime Minister Pashinyan during the meeting with his supporters (May 13, 2026). "Electing Pashinyan is the same as electing Aliyev (the President of Azerbaijan)," announced the former President and one of the opposition leaders, Robert Kocharyan, during a similar event (May 19, 2026).



During his visit to Armenia within the framework of the 8th Summit of the European Political Community (EPC) on May 4th, French President Macron said: "Armenia has indeed made the choice... to break free from this constraint and turn towards Europe" (Brezar, 2026). On May 9th, after the traditional parade in Moscow, Vladimir Putin, during a press conference, highlighted that Armenia needs to make up its mind about European Integration as soon as possible to avoid consequences observed in Ukraine (Civilnet, May 11, 2026).

And this leads to the second core issue: Armenia's alignment in the confrontation between Russia and Europe. Essentially, both the EU and Russia implicitly or explicitly push Armenia to make a choice, and irrespective of their intentions, this becomes one of the central issues around which the electoral competition is constructed.

For the first time, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is not among the important ones in Armenia. As an important background, these are the first elections since the exodus of Armenians from the region in September of 2023. Roughly 35 thousand out of a total of more than 100 thousand refugees will be eligible to vote as a consequence of applying and getting Armenian citizenship (News.am, March 20, 2026 ). With 2.5 million eligible voters, the refugees will hardly have any effect on these elections.

### What do programs contain?

Heated mutual allegations and strong language regarding the core issues make the headlines of these elections. But the parties also compete on more specific promises. The cornerstone of the opposition party Strong Armenia's program is the creation of 300 thousand jobs within 6 years from now (Party programs are available at <https://www.elections.am/Elections/Parliament>

ary). The incumbent party's promise is somewhat less ambitious - 25 thousand jobs annually. These elections are not lacking in creative ideas either. To mention a few: Wings of Unity proposes abandoning VAT and moving to sales tax, Prosperous Armenia promises to double the minimum wage and triple GDP in five years. In different framings, free education, free housing for families with more than 3 children, subsidized agriculture, and lower taxes for small businesses are included in the programs of various parties.

Interestingly, none of the major parties (maybe with the exception of Hayastan Alliance) advocates for a certain choice between deeper integration with the West (be that the EU or the US) or Russia. At least on paper, the parties find it possible to continue maintaining balance and developing relations with all stakeholders in the region.

### The external squeeze

Major regional and international commitments of the Republic provide a rich playfield for both the current government and the opposition. On August 8, 2025, Pashinyan and Azerbaijan's President Aliyev joined the US President Donald Trump in Washington to pre-sign the peace treaty. A major element of the summit was the announcement of a proposed regional transit and infrastructure initiative called the **TRIPP** project ("Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity"). On the margins of the same meeting in Washington, Armenia and the US also agreed to cooperate on nuclear energy production in Armenia. All these steps, coupled with an ongoing visa liberalization process and deeper engagement with EU partners, resulted in voiced concerns by Russia. In fact, Russia went beyond voicing concerns. On May 22nd, Rospotrebnadzor (Russia's federal agency responsible for consumer



protection and enforcement of food and product safety regulations) temporarily suspended the import and turnover of all batches of Jermuk mineral water in Russia (ARKA (a), May 22, 2026). Two days earlier, Rosselkhoznadzor (Russia's federal agency responsible for phytosanitary control and oversight of animal and plant imports) announced that starting from May 22, the import of Armenian flowers to Russia will be temporarily restricted. Both are important export items for Armenia (ARKA (b), May 22, 2026).

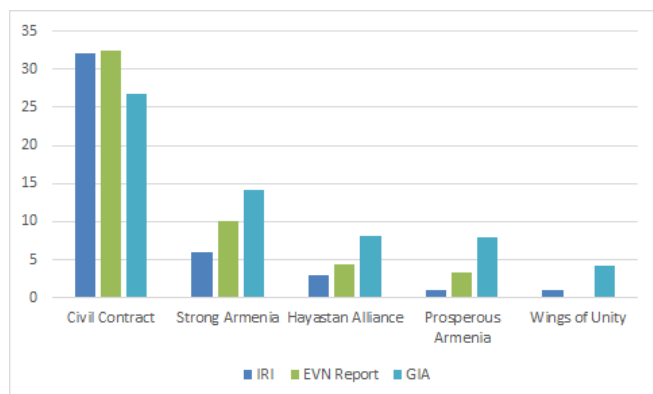
The Kremlin's approach is rational - make sure that in the process of possible future EU integration, the costs of leaving the Eurasian Economic Union kick in much earlier than the benefits from deeper cooperation with the EU. Whether this is a signal to any winner of the elections or an indirect way to influence outcomes is an open question.

The fact that the leader of the new opposition party, Samvel Karapetyan, has made his fortune in Russia complicates the landscape even more.

### What do polls say?

The results of the most recent polls at the time of this brief's writing are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2. April-May poll results of the main competing parties



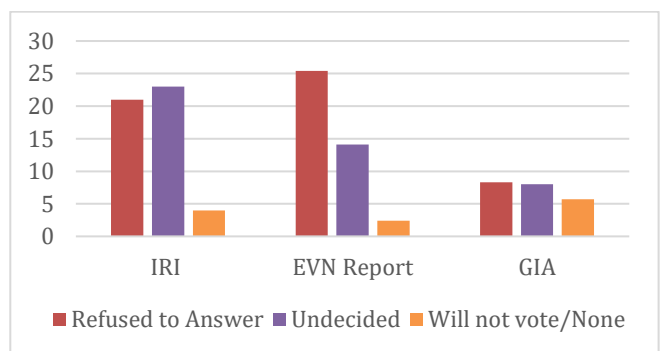
Source: IRI - International Republican Institute (May, 2026); EVN Report (April, 2026); GIA (May, 2026), Gallup International Association. (not to be confused with Gallup).



While all these polls claim to be nationally representative and to provide results within conventional error margins, the differences among them are significant. Also, in the 2021 elections, the winning party received more than 50% of the total votes, while pre-election polls had put it at roughly half that share (IRI, May 2021). One likely source contributing to this difference was the involvement of originally undecided voters. In 2021, according to the same source, 17% of poll respondents planned to abstain with certainty or with a high likelihood. If many of them eventually decided to come and vote for the incumbent, that could have tilted the scales.

In the current elections, the situation repeats. The share of undecided voters according to various polls is quite large as well (Figure 3). What if the undecided voters make up their minds and participate?

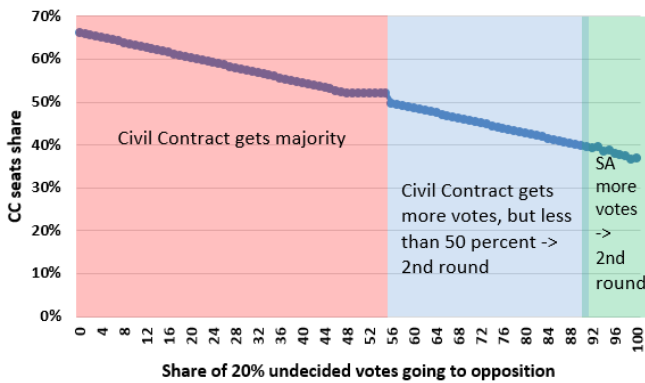
Figure 3. Undecided voters and possible abstainers



Source: IRI - International Republican Institute (May, 2026); EVN Report (April, 2026); GIA (May, 2026), Gallup International Association. (not to be confused with Gallup). "Will not vote" refers to those who are certain about that choice.

We have implemented a simple simulation to understand the role undecided voters can play. To do that, we have assumed a scenario in which the incumbent's support is taken from the least optimistic poll, and the opposition's support is slightly boosted (see note below Figure 4).

Figure 4. Simulation of the effect of undecided votes on outcomes, assuming they vote.



Source: Author's calculations. Scenario assumptions: Share of undecided votes - 20%. Support in population assumption: Civil Contract (CC - incumbent) - 25%, Strong Armenia (SA) - 15%, Hayastan Block - 8%, Prosperous Armenia - slightly less than 4%. Shares going to the opposition are split between the two parties in respective proportions. The votes of respondents refusing to answer (around 20%) were split among all parties in proportion to their existing (stated) support. It is assumed that no other parties pass the threshold.

Essentially, the results indicate that even if all undecided votes are mobilized, the opposition must capture more than half of them to bring the elections to the 2nd round.

## Conclusion

An objective that the parties seem to have accomplished quite well was to convince the devoted voters that their defeat would result in an apocalyptic outcome. As a result, we witness aggressive campaigns, high polarization, and a lack of policy discussion. Whether this will encourage or discourage voters to participate, we will learn on June 7th.

At the moment, neither the EU nor Armenia has expressed readiness to consider granting Armenia candidate-country status, nor has Armenia announced the intention to exit the Eurasian Economic Union. Past experience suggests that these are long processes, taking years if not decades to unravel, and multiple pivots can occur

in these directions over the coming years, irrespective of the election outcome.

Yet even if the vote does not ultimately determine where the country is heading, it remains decisive for who will steer it – and that hinges on a single unknown: a bloc of voters who refuse to be counted. The ruling party leads in the polls, but its margin may depend on them. For the opposition merely to reach a second round, it would need not just to mobilize undecided voters but to win more than half of them - yet, the evidence points to most of them not voting at all, as in 2021. Armenia has never gone to a second round, and the numbers make a first-round result the most probable outcome. What June 7th will really reveal, then, is whether a campaign fought almost entirely on fear pulled anyone off the sidelines, or pushed them further away.

*Disclaimer: The views expressed in this brief are the author's personal views and in no way reflect the views of the American University of Armenia*

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