ARMENIA'S EXISTENTIAL CHOICE IN JUNE 2026

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As June 7, 2026, approaches, the Republic of Armenia finds itself at a historical precipice. While the international community often views elections through the lens of routine democratic transitions, the upcoming parliamentary vote in Armenia is anything but routine. It represents a fundamental struggle over the very definition of Armenian statehood—a choice between the "Real Armenia" of sovereign borders and the "Historical Armenia" of national memory. With a deeply disillusioned electorate, a unique "stable majority" electoral law, and the emergence of a "Third Way," the upcoming elections are poised to be the most consequential in the nation's post-Soviet history.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Civil Contract party, once the herald of a new era, has seen its support dwindle to approximately 13–18%. While still the frontrunner, it is a shadow of its former self. Conversely, the "legacy" opposition, represented by the "Armenia Alliance" (Robert Kocharyan) and the "I Have Honor Alliance" (Serzh Sargsyan), struggles to break out of a 4–10% bracket.

The most striking feature of the political landscape today is not the relative strength of the ruling party or the fury of the opposition, but a massive trust vacuum. Recent polling indicates that a staggering 61% of the electorate remains undecided or refuses to support any existing political force. This "No Man's Land" reflects a profound disillusionment with the promises of the 2018 Velvet Revolution and a deep-seated fear of the "legacy" leaders who preceded it.

Compounding the prevailing disillusionment is a unique and controversial feature of the Armenian Constitution: the "stable majority" clause (Article 89). This law ensures that the government maintains a majority in parliament even when it does not receive a majority of the popular vote. If no single party or coalition wins 52% of seats in the first round, a second round is held between the top two finishers. The winner of this run-off is granted bonus seats to reach the 52% threshold.

The law creates a dangerous paradox. It is theoretically possible for a party to secure only 30% of the popular vote yet hold an absolute 52% majority in the National Assembly. While the logic behind the law was to prevent hung parliaments and ensure stability in a fragile security environment, its effect in 2026 may be to further alienate the majority of voters who feel their ballots are mathematically diluted by a bonus system they did not authorize. If the election results are perceived as mathematically manufactured rather than popularly earned, there could be mayhem and upheaval in late 2026 simply because, when a significant portion of the population feels their voice in parliament has been silenced, they move to the streets.

"Real Armenia" vs. "Historical Armenia"

The ideological battleground of June 2026 is framed by Prime Minister Pashinyan's "Real Armenia" doctrine. This doctrine posits that for Armenia to survive, it must abandon the pursuit of "Historical Armenia"—the territorial and emotional aspirations of the past—and embrace a pragmatic, Western-oriented future.

The economic pillars of this vision are bold:

1. EU Integration: On October 29, 2025, the government officially set 2026 as the year to intensify EU membership efforts, viewing it as the ultimate strategic path for democratic and economic development. Government supporters see this as a necessary strategic diversification after Russia's limited support in critical moments. But critics, especially pro-Moscow commentators, argue that Pashinyan's Westward moves amount to selling Armenia to Western interests for short-term gain. There is no formal mutual defense obligation comparable to past CSTO expectations, and Armenia's Western integration process (especially EU accession) is long and complex.
2. The TRIPP Project: Pashinyan's "Crossroads of Peace" relies on the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), aiming to turn Armenia into a regional transit hub connecting Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Without a broad social contract, a government-only decision on the "Crossroads of Peace" is fragile. Any treaty could collapse with a change in administration, leading to renewed conflict. Without a responsible opposition to force the government to defend its logic with data rather than rhetoric, the state risks making irreversible mistakes in negotiations with Turkey and Azerbaijan. A responsible, parliamentary-based opposition is the only safety valve against political violence.

The Rise of the "Third Way"

For the average Armenian voter, the choice feels like a zero-sum game between a government perceived as erratic and an opposition perceived as "revanchist." Into this polarized gap has stepped the "Third Way," led most prominently by former Yerevan Mayor Hayk Marutyan and his "New Power" party. Marutyan represents the "Missing Middle"—voters who still believe in the democratic ideals of 2018 but are frustrated by the current government's perceived incompetence and lack of transparency. Marutyan's platform is technocratic and managerial. He highlights the $7 million embezzlement scandal in the electrical energy sector as a symptom of a government that has lost its way. His "Third Way" advocates for stricter Armenian sovereignty over transit corridors and rejecting "geopolitical leaps" in favor of "managerial competence." Currently polling at 5–8% and rising, Marutyan's challenge is to prove that he is not a secret ally of either the current administration or the old regime.

The emergence of a responsible opposition and the potential for a "Third Way" offer a path toward a more stable, accountable government. If "Third Way" forces capture 15–20% of the vote and fail to form a government, they could still effectively block the "stable majority" bonus. This would force the first true coalition government in modern Armenian history. Such a coalition would require a level of political maturity and compromise previously unseen in the Republic, moving Armenia from a "one-man show" to a collaborative democracy.

The "Fourth Republic" vision—moving beyond trauma and polarization toward competent

governance—is aspirational and rhetorically powerful. But politically, it still needs a vehicle that voters widely recognize as genuinely independent and capable of delivering both stability and accountability. At Keghart, we hope that, as a minimum, June 2026 yields a strong, responsible opposition plus credible centrist voices like New Power, to reshuffle Armenian politics. That remains a possibility, not a certainty. Marutyan and New Power need to grow their support to institutionalize the third way. For that, they need to articulate clear, distinct policies on governance, sovereignty, and democratic accountability, to help Armenia break the high-polarization dynamic that has dominated since 2018.

If Armenians choose the path of polarization, Armenia may find itself more divided and vulnerable than ever. The 2026 election will determine if Armenia can successfully transition to a multi-polar political system.

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Comments

Setrag – 2026-01-27 14:20:55
I agree with Aha. We are boxed in, no matter who becomes the next Prime Minister of Armenia. Marginal changes may be introduced in the fields of education, industry and the army, but the evolving geopolitics will dictate security and sovereignty issues. The loss of Artsakh limited our breathing space for a long time. Historians, decades from now, will reveal the true reasons that led us into this situation; the one constant, though, that I think won't be whitewashed is Pashinyan's negative role, especially by providing the excuse to Azerbaijan to put words into action.

Aha – 2026-01-27 10:26:39
I commend Keghart's effort to encourage democratic processes in Armenia but I disagree that the 2026 elections are existential. Armenia's course is pretty clear for anyone who follows the geopolitics of the region, even a little. Armenia is now facing a 'fait-accompli' (a situation that it cannot change) in the necessity of completely normalizing its relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan even at conditions that it deems unfair/unjust. Losing the 2020 war, the emptying of Artsakh, and the weakening of its ally Russia, have essentially taken any suspense out of the elections, just like with Japanese or German elections would have been in the late 1940s or early 1950s. Even if an opposition party wins, it will have to more or less continue the policy of this government. The 4th republic and Real Armenia slogans represent the varnished and well packaged submission of Armenia to its eastern and western neighbors, and I'm not necessarily critical of it as it has no choice. This is the best we can get (if we're lucky) at this point in history - 'kiss the hand that you cannot cut' as the saying goes. The real game was played during the period 2018-2020 when Armenia made historical choices, the consequences of which it can now only suffer.

Vahe H Apelian – 2026-01-23 01:47:31
Parliamentary majority in National Assembly does not parallel parliamentary election majority. Case in point, in the June 20, 2021 election, Civil Contract had 54% of the votes, it ended up with 67% - 2/3 - of the National Assembly seats; the opposition that had 25% of the votes at the election, ended up with 33% or - 1/3 - of the National Assembly seats. During December 2018 general election, My Step Alliance had 70% of the votes and ended with 67% - 2/3 – of the National Assembly seats, while the opposition had 15% of the vote but ended up with 33% or -1/3 – of the seats. These seats are not assigned at will, there is a calculation to it, I do not want to go over it here.

Vahe H Apelian – 2026-01-23 01:46:24

There is a common thread in the editorial and in the comments. Things are looked upon from diaspora perspective. The average Armenian citizen cares less what diaspora thinks. As far as I can foresee, the party that will assure more of the people that they will be the government that will provide more of them, more bread will carry the day. Yes, «այստեղպետութիւն, այստեղ հաց. Այստեղ Հայրենիք, այստեղ կաց The election results will tell.

Varouj Pogharian – 2026-01-21 10:29:15

Vahe: You're right that coalition government is technically permissible under the 52% rule. The law does not explicitly ban coalitions. But in practice, the stable majority mechanism strongly discourages them. Politics isn't shaped only by what's legally allowed; it's shaped by what's rewarded. Once a party or alliance that wins a plurality knows it will be automatically topped up to 52%, the incentive to negotiate a genuine coalition disappears. Why share power, ministries, or responsibility if the system hands you a governing majority anyway? Saying "coalitions are still possible" under these conditions is a bit like saying someone can be "a little bit pregnant". A real coalition (as we've periodically experienced in the Canadian parliament) requires mutual dependence. It only works when no single actor can govern alone and therefore must listen, compromise, and govern collaboratively. The 52% rule short-circuits that learning process. It replaces political negotiation with a legal shortcut. On the concern about avoiding a hung parliament: I understand that fear, especially given Armenia's recent experience. But hung parliaments are not a democratic failure — they are often a "democratic teacher." Countries that now run stable coalitions didn't start out knowing how to do it. They learned through trial, error, and political maturation. Armenia will never develop a coalition culture if the system is designed to prevent the conditions under which coalitions become necessary. If Armenian politicians never have to govern together without a built-in majority, they will never learn to value coalition governance — or even trust it. The result is not stability, but a permanent preference for single-party rule, reinforced by law. So while I agree that paralysis should be avoided, I don't think the 52% rule strikes the right balance. It solves one short-term problem while creating a long-term democratic deficit by insulating governing parties from compromise and accountability.

Harut Sassounian – 2026-01-21 01:50:52
Thank you for your clarifying answers. I cannot predict the future, but my sense is that Marutyan has very few followers in the country. He has not been heard from in several months. I will be surprised if he crosses the minimum threshold of 5%. Samvel Karapetyan cannot be a candidate because you have to be solely an Armenian citizen and have lived in Armenia for six years. His party just announced that they will announce the name of their candidate for PM. Who that person is will have a great bearing on the party's chances. Unless the opposition unites, they have zero chance of beating Pashinyan, even though his political rating has collapsed down to low teens from 82% eight years ago.

Vahe Balabanian – 2026-01-21 00:11:57
My question is related to the juxtaposition of the 52% to the absence of coalition. giving the impression that coalition is not permissible. Based on what we saw in the performance of the parliament over the last few years I think it is important to avoid a hung parliament. I do not see however this impeding for parties to form coalition at least to the point that they represent the largest electoral vote and from there on obtain the 52% of the seats in the parliament. So, in summary I do not see the rule of the 52% being an impediment for parties to form a governing coalition.

Keghart – 2026-01-20 14:10:23

Sireli Harut, Thanks for your thoughtful questions. Here's a breakdown of Keghart's perspective on these points: 1. Electoral Law and the Stable Majority Armenia's 2021 reform of the Electoral Code lowered the "stable majority" threshold from 54% to 52% of parliamentary seats. The logic is straightforward: the law ensures that the party or alliance that wins a plurality of votes can govern without being crippled by a razor-thin margin. The law awards additional seats to bring the winner up to the 52% threshold. The 52% figure is now the legal baseline — replacing the earlier 54% target. Side note: There is an unhealthy aspect to this mechanism. Some voters may feel alienated if they see a party granted a "majority" they didn't explicitly vote for. In practice, coalition governments, by and large, are often the most representative and productive form of government, because they force compromise, broaden policy input, and more accurately reflect the electorate's diverse preferences. 2. Optimistic Projection for Marutyan's "Third Way" The projection of 15–20% for Marutyan's party is optimistic but grounded in a few factors: • Name recognition: Marutyan is well known in Yerevan from his time as mayor, which provides a substantial baseline of support. • Political space: Many voters are dissatisfied with both Civil Contract and the traditional opposition, leaving room for a credible "third force" to grow. • Urban appeal: Yerevan voters are generally more open to new parties and personality-driven politics, and Marutyan already has visibility in this demographic. The 15–20% range represents a ceiling in an optimistic scenario where undecided voters break disproportionately toward his party and voter mobilization is effective. Current polls don't yet reflect this, which is why it's framed as a hopeful upper bound rather than a guarantee. 3. Why "Our Way" (Samvel Karapetyan) is Less Likely to Compete at the Same Level Karapetyan's movement faces several structural and practical hurdles: • Leadership constraints: Karapetyan is currently in custody, which limits his ability to campaign or build direct voter trust. • Regional presence: While he has name recognition in business and conservative circles, "Our Way" has a very limited grassroots network outside Yerevan. • Voter profile: His base is narrower — wealthier, more conservative, and closely tied to Church and business networks — while Marutyan appeals to a broader urban electorate. • Competition for the same urban voters: Any overlap in urban support is likely to be limited, and Marutyan's momentum in Yerevan gives him an edge in visibility and narrative. For these reasons, "Our Way" may influence the election or act as a minor spoiler, but it's unlikely to reach the same level of national support that Marutyan's "Third Way" could achieve in an optimistic scenario. The news of "Our Way" movement registering as a party named "Strong Armenia" coincided with the date the Keghart.org Editorial was distributed. The editorial was composed prior to the news, and hence Karapetyan was not referenced. We hope this clarifies Kehart's reasoning. Of course, Armenia's electorate is unpredictable, and a lot will depend on campaign dynamics, voter mobilization, and how undecided voters eventually cast their ballots. Keghart's readers would be very interested to hear your thoughts on these matters.

Harut Sassounian – 2026-01-19 22:29:14
Very good analysis. I have a couple of questions. You refer to 52% for stable majority. I reviewed the electoral law and saw a reference only to 54%, not 52%. Can you refer me to the article in the electoral law that mentions 52%. You also mention Maoutyan's "Third Way," as possibly getting 15-20%. What is the basis for your optimistic prediction. I was surprised that you did not mention Samvel Karapetyan's "our way" which was registered as a party today on Monday. I believe their chances are better than the third way to get a respectable percentage of the votes.

David Boyajian – 2026-01-19 22:19:08
I agree on the need for a united Armenian opposition with trustworthy leaders, and a program for the future. But consider that PM Pashinyan and his party have: Denigrated the Armenian Genocide, Diaspora, Church, symbols, and history. Only Turks and Azeris do that. What does that make Pashinyan? That's not meant as an insult. It's simply a fact. Pashinyan is an anti-nationalist and mentally, morally, spiritually, and intellectually sick. Any layperson can reasonably make that diagnosis. Pashinyan represents an existential threat to Armenia. When will Armenians get off their lazy rear-ends and act?

David – 2026-01-19 22:04:46
Good article. The "Missing Middle"-voters ought to determine if Armenia can successfully transition to a multi-polar political system . Pashinian's quasi-autocratic rule should be curbed and the claaic forces of the worn out opposition should be hit hard to "embrace" oblivion.