POST-ELECTION ASSESSMENT

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Category: Opinions

By Karen Mkrtchyan, Yerevan, Republic of Armenia, 10 June 2026

The election results in Armenia were surprising. Not because Nikol Pashinyan won, as that was always a realistic possibility, but because of the margin of his victory. It was the scale of the win that caught many observers off guard.

The failure of the collective opposition is particularly telling. After eight years in power, with anti-incumbency sentiment seemingly growing across the country, it would have required an exceptionally weak opposition not merely to fail to defeat Pashinyan, but to allow him to consolidate his position even further.

This election was clearly dominated by geopolitical considerations. Public frustration with Russia, amplified by the emergence of Samvel Karapetyan as one of the main opposition figures, alongside Robert Kocharyan, ultimately benefited Pashinyan. At the same time, constant reminders of the war and the thousands of Armenian casualties reinforced the government's "peace agenda" with Azerbaijan.

The narrative that an opposition victory would inevitably lead to another war appears to have had a significant impact, particularly in border communities. Ironically, even those villages that have experienced Azerbaijani incursions or live under direct enemy surveillance often voted for the government. The ruling party will undoubtedly portray this as an endorsement of its policies, including in areas where it has been criticized for making communities more vulnerable. In reality, many residents likely voted not because they support Pashinyan, but because they fear becoming the first victims if another war erupts.

People do not want to die, even if they dislike the government. And when Pashinyan repeatedly warned that his defeat could lead to war, many took those warnings seriously. Whether one agrees with his policies or not, many Armenians believe that developments on the ground are closely coordinated with Baku, Ankara, and Western actors, making such warnings politically effective.

Russia's apparent attempts to influence the election, along with measures such as restrictions on Armenian exports, further alienated candidates perceived as pro-Russian. The idea that Pashinyan seeks to free Armenia from excessive dependence on Russia is attractive to many voters. However, many of those applauding this course are neither exporters nor producers.

For villagers and small-scale greenhouse operators, Russia remains the principal market. Accessing European markets will require months or years of adaptation and investments worth thousands of dollars—resources that many simply do not possess. Although the European Union moved to facilitate market access for Armenian products, it remains to be seen whether this was merely a timely political gesture before the elections or the beginning of a sustainable long-term policy. More importantly, it is unclear how many Armenian producers will realistically be able to benefit.

Another point worth noting is that, despite eight years in power and everything that has happened

since 2021, Civil Contract appears to have received more votes in absolute numbers than it did in the previous parliamentary election, even though its percentage of the vote is lower because turnout was higher. This suggests that the result cannot simply be explained by opposition fragmentation or voter apathy. A significant number of Armenians consciously chose to vote for the ruling party again, making it all the more important to understand the factors that influenced their decision rather than simply dismissing the outcome.

The opposition must also reflect on its own strategy. Calls for a broad united front, even among parties that were not politically aligned, were repeatedly made throughout the campaign. Those calls never materialized into a meaningful coalition. Whether because the leading opposition figures were confident, they could win on their own and therefore did not wish to share power, or because each naturally saw himself as the next prime minister and was unwilling to make concessions, the election was fought on multiple fronts rather than one. The emergence of new political movements alongside the traditional smaller parties further fragmented the landscape. In the end, voters were presented with eighteen electoral tickets. Although even the combined votes of opposition forces that failed to enter Parliament currently remain below those secured by Civil Contract and its smaller allies, the crowded field undoubtedly created confusion and divided attention at a time when unity was being presented as essential.

The voting procedure itself also deserves discussion. Under Armenia's current system, voters receive multiple ballot slips corresponding to all participating parties, select one, place it inside an envelope and discard the others. While the procedure may have its legal rationale, it can be confusing, particularly for elderly voters or those unfamiliar with the process. The thousands of invalid ballots recorded in this election suggest that many citizens still struggle to navigate the system correctly. Whether this affected the final outcome is impossible to determine, but simplifying the procedure would likely improve both voter confidence and participation.

As for the new Parliament, Pashinyan does not possess the two-thirds majority necessary for constitutional amendments or initiating constitutional changes on his own. However, he currently has sufficient numbers to make several important appointments without requiring outside support.

Prosperous Armenia has requested a recount, which is currently underway. By the end of the week, we will know whether the party succeeds in crossing the electoral threshold. According to the party, it initially fell short by approximately 60 votes. The recount has already recovered around 120 votes in its favor; adjustments are simultaneously occurring for other parties as well, meaning the final outcome remains uncertain.

Even if the overall political outcome is unlikely to change, the election has not escaped controversy. Several parties have pointed to discrepancies between figures appearing in official precinct protocols and corresponding vote tallies, prompting recount requests and raising questions regarding the accuracy of certain recorded entries. Some recounts have already resulted in

corrections. Whether these discrepancies stem from clerical mistakes or something more serious will ultimately have to be established through the legal process. However, their existence alone inevitably casts a shadow over public confidence in the transparency of the election.

Allegations regarding the use of administrative resources have also resurfaced. Reports describing the mobilization of employees of state institutions and publicly funded organizations inevitably remind many Armenians of practices that previous governments were repeatedly criticized for. Regardless of the legal outcome of these complaints, their persistence suggests that one of the democratic reforms many expected after 2018 remains incomplete.

If Prosperous Armenia ultimately enters Parliament with five seats, Pashinyan will lose the ability to make certain important appointments independently. He would either need support from other opposition forces, which would inevitably come at the price of political concessions, or seek to persuade opposition MPs to defect. Such a scenario is not impossible. Armenian politics has repeatedly demonstrated how former critics can become loyal supporters, as illustrated by Gegham Nazaryan, who went from one of Pashinyan's fiercest critics after losing his son in the war to consistently supporting the government in Parliament.

Ironically, if Prosperous Armenia does enter Parliament, the opposition will almost certainly argue that taking up their mandates is necessary because they can persuade enough ruling party MPs to switch sides and deprive Pashinyan of his majority. It would provide a convenient justification for participating rather than boycotting Parliament.

Such a scenario, of course, appears highly unlikely. In reality, the opposite is probably more plausible: if the government requires votes on sensitive appointments or legislation, it may seek support from individual opposition MPs. Armenian politics has repeatedly demonstrated that parliamentary loyalties can be remarkably fluid.

Many are now calling on the opposition to boycott Parliament altogether and refuse their mandates. The factions associated with Robert Kocharyan and Samvel Karapetyan appear to be waiting to see whether Prosperous Armenia enters Parliament before making a final decision. If Tsarukyan's party secures seats, all opposition factions might ultimately take their mandates while arguing that they are needed to constrain the government from within.

In reality, this is unlikely to change much. Parliament will probably continue to resemble the same arena of political shouting matches, with little meaningful oversight of the executive.

Samvel Karapetyan's newly formed political force also includes numerous figures associated with the former Republican establishment. This provides Pashinyan with an easy target for political attacks, allowing him to revive old narratives about the previous regime and dismiss the opposition as a return to the past. The political history surrounding Karen Karapetyan's family further complicates efforts to present a genuinely new alternative.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this election is the failure of smaller political parties. Instead of developing into a pluralistic political system, Armenia continues to revolve around a confrontation between the ruling party and opposition forces largely perceived as pro-Kremlin. This leaves the country vulnerable to continued geopolitical polarization rather than fostering genuine ideological competition.

Among the newer political actors, Gurgen Simonyan's party is perhaps the only pro-Western force to surpass the 2% threshold, alongside Arman Tatoyan's movement, although many critics argue that Tatoyan himself maintains a relatively favorable attitude toward Russia. These parties will now receive more than AMD 30 million annually in state funding to continue their activities, while parliamentary parties will receive substantially larger allocations.

The international reaction has also been telling. Western leaders moved quickly to congratulate Pashinyan and welcomed the continuation of Armenia's current trajectory, while India also extended its congratulations. Russia, however, has so far refrained from officially congratulating Pashinyan, explaining that it is waiting for the final certified results. At the same time, several Russian media outlets and commentators have openly criticized the election and questioned its legitimacy. Whether those criticisms are justified is something evidence must determine, but politically the contrast reinforces the perception that this election was viewed internationally as much more than a domestic political contest.

Geographically, Pashinyan performed relatively weakly in Yerevan while drawing much of his support from rural areas and voters over the age of forty. Pension increases and the gradual introduction of health insurance undoubtedly played a role, but perhaps even more important was the simple reality that most adults have children or grandchildren serving in the military. The fear of renewed conflict naturally made the government's promise of peace appealing.

Election night itself also became a source of controversy. While only around ten percent of precinct results had been officially announced by the Central Election Commission, Pashinyan appeared before supporters at Civil Contract headquarters in what resembled an American-style victory event and confidently declared that his party would form the next government alone, without requiring support from any other force. The ruling party argues that it possessed parallel vote tabulations and internal figures showing a clear trend and that the Election Commission was simply slower in publishing official data. The opposition interpreted the episode very differently, arguing that such an early declaration created the impression that the outcome had already been decided and risked placing psychological pressure on the election authorities. Whether one accepts either explanation, the incident undoubtedly contributed to the atmosphere of distrust that followed.

Armenia remains far from having a mature political system. Every election cycle seems to produce a new charismatic strongman who forms a political bloc and quickly attracts dissatisfied voters, absorbing smaller parties in the process. Meanwhile, moderate forces are squeezed out because

they are either perceived as supporting the government or because they fail to project sufficiently aggressive opposition.

For now, we can only wait and see how events unfold. However, the government is likely to argue that these election results constitute a public mandate for major concessions, including transferring exclaves to Azerbaijan and pursuing constitutional changes. Whether that interpretation reflects the actual intentions of voters is another question altogether.

Ultimately, Armenia needs a stronger opposition and a more politically informed electorate. The country should educate the voters on the parliamentary system of government, or we should reconsider returning to a presidential system. In practice, our elections are never contests between parties, ideas or ideologies. They are contests between personalities: Nikol versus Samvel versus Robert versus Tsarukyan, or whoever emerges next. Parliament itself has become little more than the institutional framework through which these personal rivalries are played out.

Finally, after considering all the geopolitical and psychological factors that shaped this election, one should not ignore a simple reality: many Armenians genuinely voted for Pashinyan because they believed he was the better option. At the same time, the election once again exposed the deep polarization of Armenian politics. Despite everything the country has endured in recent years, much of the electorate continues to view the choice primarily as one between Pashinyan and the former regime. This binary leaves little political space for other forces, including long-established parties, to present themselves as credible alternatives, keeping Armenia trapped in the same cycle.

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Comments

Dalita – 2026-06-11 10:06:15
French citizens who live abroad can vote in French presidential elections (for local elections they have candidates correspinding to their residence area, they have des députés des Français de l'étranger). Armenian citizens who live abroad, and who are proportionately a lot more numerous than French exparriates are, were not allowed to participate in the June 7th election. A tiny number took a short trip to Armenia to vote, the vast majority were deprived of this right although they are citizens, although they have relatives - sometimes a spouse and children among them - and likely still a home in the RoA. This too should be noted...

heratch – 2026-06-11 02:10:33
Gli oppositori armeni non riescono a capire un semplice motivo delle loro sconfitte. Non capiscono che fino a quando l'opposizione sarà condotta dalle vecchie forze precedenti il 2018 " Kocharyan Sarkissian " ben noti alla gente che ha già vissuto ed sperimentato i loro malgoverni /corruzioni /soprusi etc. Pashinyan uscirà sempre vittorioso.Il risanamento e la maturazione politica di Armenia è possibile solo dopo il ritiro dalla politica dei personaggi degli anni del passato che darà una vera possibilità ai diversi partiti democratici di formare una fronte di opposizione seria e far progredire l'Armenia. E' veramente ridicolo sentire gli oppositori di oggi insieme a Cremlino appellarsi con lamenti di autoritarismo e trucchi elettorali proprio da coloro che hanno tali metodi nel loro sistema, ogni commento è fuori luogo. Mi domando cosa farà l'opposizione nei prossimi 5 anni oltre a gridare ogni giorno "Pashimyan deve dimettersi", che oramai sembra una barzelletta !

Ditord – 2020-06-10 12:57:01

Dear Lucine, You make good points. The upshot is that Armenians need to take back their nation before it disappears forever.... forever.... One problem is the pitiful psychology of Armenians, who have become meek, frightened little kittens. It's understandable given the history of genocide. But enough is enough. You all need very tough love. Time to awaken from your deep slumber. This shameless begging for protection from foreign governments is disheartening, disgusting, and insane. I'm not sure when it started, but that "wonderful" first president Ter Petrosyan didn't help any with his "our strength lies in our weakness. If we are weak, our enemies won't feel the need to attack us." Pure insanity... or intentional manipulation of the people by corrupt leaders (that one whose wife is a Jew). If Armenia is to survive at all, Armenia must be free and independent of all foreign powers... ALL FOREIGN POWERS. I wrote this about 5 years ago and was attacked from all sides. Perhaps a good place to start would be for all the women to talk to their husbands, brothers, brothers-in-law, fathers... and tell them to sacrifice the pittance their paid (in bribery) to hold their jobs as puppets of Pashinyan -- all the security services, policemen, soldiers... who are all complicit in the crimes of the government. Or, just start an open revolution and reanimate "the night of long knives" (look it up if you don't get the reference). Revolution is destructive, and it would make Armenia more vulnerable to foreign invasion. So perhaps a different strategy and action plan is needed. But first... Hayastan (meaning all of you) need to decide what you really want. I hear everyone saying (speaking what they want), but their actions (or lack thereof) belie their words.

Lucine Karjian – 2026-06-10 05:10:37

This assessment is incomplete simply because it does not include Western support that Pashinyan received during elections. Macron, Trump, Rubio and Vance openly endorsed Pashinyan. The Armenian electorate continues to believe that TRIPP will save Armenia from Azeri and Turkish aggression. The opposition tried to explain the dangers of TRIPP but Armenians rejected the notion that TRIPP will result in losing Armenia's southern border wirh Iran. As a voter in Armenia, I can attest that Pashinyan and his party succeeded in influencing voters that voting for him was voting for EU and US 'benefits.' The electorate is oblivious or openly accepting of the Turkish influence. And this point can't be denied. The opposition failed because most believe in national values, which is more and more not so important for Armenian citizens. Finally, voting was rigged to some extent. Numbers were fudged or totally falsified, as has been shown in Tsarukyan's case. A large number of soldiers voted after polls were closed. They were brought in to vote, and it's possible they were influenced or threatened to vote for Pashinyan. We will never know, but voter trust and confidence in the system is further diminished because of these irregularities. Counting of votes was suddenly interrupted at midnight and resumed in the morning with no explanation from the central election committee, adding to rumors and possible falsifications. In the end Armenians rejected nationalistic forces and voted for globalist lifestyle, disregard for Artsakh refugees and their human rights, not to mention any demands for Turkish recognition of the Armenian Genocide.