

# Overview of Armenian Parliamentary Elections on June 20, 2021

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## Abstract

On June 20, 2021, Armenia will hold its third parliamentary elections in four years and it will be the second consecutive snap election. The party of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan decided to organize snap parliamentary elections in Armenia after the mass protests following the defeat in Nagorno-Karabakh war with Azerbaijan in 2020, while it still retained significant popularity. With elections taking place on June 20, by May 26, 2021, the Electoral Commission had registered 23 parties and 4 blocks for participating in the early parliamentary elections. Although Pashinyan's Civil Contract party's popularity has declined significantly since 2018 elections, it remains the main contender in those elections. The main opposition force is Armenia Alliance led by former President Robert Kocharyan. It is expected that one of those political forces will form the governing coalition after the elections.

## Electoral system and political parties

According to the Armenian Constitution, the elections of the National Assembly shall be held on the basis of universal, equal, free and direct suffrage, by secret ballot. The National Assembly will be elected for a term of five years, if there are no extraordinary elections.<sup>1</sup> The Armenian National Assembly consists of minimum of 101 seats. But due to additional seats given either to the winning political force/party or to other parties the total number of seats in National Assembly can grow above the minimal count and even exceed 200 in rare circumstances. Four mandates are reserved for national minorities (Assyrians, Kurds, Russians and Yazidis), provided they are included in corresponding section of party lists. A gender quota requires at least 30% of a list to be female.<sup>2</sup>

After electoral system amendments introduced in April 2021, the members of parliament

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1 – Constitution of the Republic of Armenia . 2015. <https://www.president.am/en/constitution-2015/>

2 – Elections in Armenia. – Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections\\_in\\_Armenia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections_in_Armenia)

are elected only through closed party lists by proportional representation method. Voters cast a ballot for the party of their choice and parliamentary seats are distributed according to the percentage of votes received by each party – provided a party crosses the minimum threshold needed to enter parliament. Seats are allocated using the d'Hondt method. The electoral threshold for political parties will remain 5% for this election, and 7% for electoral alliances of two or more parties. Parties that receive less votes do not receive any seats in Parliament. (After electoral system amendments introduced in May 2021 that will come in force on January 1, 2022 the electoral threshold for parties will be lowered from 5% to 4%. Threshold for party/blocs or alliances, however, will be raised from the previous to 8% for three-party blocks and to 10% for blocs of four and more parties).<sup>34</sup>

According to Armenian law, there exists complicated balancing mechanism to ensure that after elections there will be a working majority and sufficient opposition representation in parliament. If no party wins over 50% of mandates in the first round of elections and no coalition with sufficient mandates is established within 6 days after the election results announcement, a second round of elections will be carried out on the 28th day after the first round of voting. Two best-performing political parties/blocs will participate in the second round. All mandates received as per first round will be preserved. The party (or a newly formed coalition) which wins the second round of elections will be given additional number of mandates to reach 54% of all seats (provided the newly formed coalition does not already have over 54% of mandates from the results of the first round). If any party or bloc wins over 2/3 of mandates sufficient additional mandates are distributed among all other political forces represented in the parliament to ensure that at least 1/3 of all seats are held by forces other than the winning one.<sup>5</sup>

In January 2021 Armenia also adopted a new law on political parties. A political party needs now to have 300 members present at its founding congress, after which there are no further membership requirements for registration. The law attempted to increase internal democracy within the political parties. There is now requirement that a party congress must be held at least every three years and at least 100 delegates should participate. The party's executive body, elected by the congress, should consist of more than one individual, with details to be specified by each party's own by-laws. The party's multi-member executive body must be held by secret ballot, so that individual members cannot be intimidated if they vote to replace the party's leadership.

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3 – Armenian Parliament OKs amendments to Electoral Code. – Panarmenian Net. 08.05.2021. <https://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/292721/>

4 – Harout Manougian. Election Finally Officially Triggered: Here Are the Possible Outcomes. – EVN Report. 10.05.2021. <https://www.evnreport.com/opinion/election-finally-officially-triggered-here-are-the-possible-outcomes>

5 – Elections in Armenia. – Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections\\_in\\_Armenia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections_in_Armenia)

An annual cap has been placed on a party's overall income from donations and membership fees at 500,000,000 AMD (€787,400). The maximum annual donation from any one individual is capped at 2,500,000 AMD (€3937), down from 10,000,000 AMD (€15,748). These amounts do not include donations directly to an election campaign fund when an election is called, but they do include in-kind donations toward a party's regular operations. All corporate donations to parties were also prohibited and political parties may not conduct commercial business. The function of oversight over parties' finances was transferred from the Central Electoral Commission to the Corruption Prevention Commission, which is legally empowered to subpoena documents to carry out its work.<sup>6</sup>

## Political situation in Armenia

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's My Step alliance gained power with 70 percent of the vote in 2018 snap elections, after Pashinyan led mass protests against the previously ruling Republican Party of Armenia led government. It was enough for My Step to take a commanding 88 of the 132 seats in Armenia's single-chamber parliament. Since then, My Step has continued to be the most popular political force in Armenia, but its lead has significantly diminished due to Pashinyan signed a Russian-brokered cease-fire in November 2020 to end the war with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Treaty, which led to Armenian forces losing control of large swaths of its territory, created a tumultuous post-war crisis, that has eroded public confidence in political establishment. Five lawmakers have quit My Step's parliamentary faction since the end of the war to become nonaligned deputies -- leaving My Step with 83 parliament seats. The approval rating of Pashinyan's government has fallen from about 60 % in September 2020 to around in 27% in May 2021.<sup>7</sup>

Pashinyan remained in office despite pressure from Armenia's army, president, three parliamentary opposition parties and church leaders to step down over the defeat in Nagorno-Karabakh. At one point he accused the army of mounting a coup attempt after top officers issued an open letter calling on him to step down. At that point his supporters stepped up their Yerevan street rallies to counter those being held by their opponents.<sup>8</sup> Criticism growing outside of parliament, where 17 anti-Pashinyan groups with differing political orientations formed a post-war tactical coalition called the Homeland Salvation Movement, which organized demonstrations that brought thousands of protesters to the

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6 – Armenia – New law on political parties introduces stricter regulation on party financing. – European Platform for Democratic Elections. 01.03.2021.

<https://www.epde.org/en/news/details/new-law-on-political-parties-introduces-stricter-regulation-on-party-financing.html>

7 – Ron Synovitz. Can New Election Laws Pull Armenia Out Of Its Political Crisis? – RFE/RL. 11.04.2021.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-election-reforms-end-political-crisis/31197997.html>

8 – Armenia's embattled PM announces he's agreed to June snap election. – bne IntelliNews. 19.03.2021. <https://www.intelinews.com/armenia-s-embattled-pm-announces-he-s-agreed-to-june-snap-election-205892/?source=armenia>

streets throughout the winter to demand Pashinyan's resignation.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, it became expedient for Pashinyan's bloc to organise snap elections, while it still retained significant popularity. Pashinyan announced on March 18, 2021, that the country would hold a snap election on June 20 in an effort to end the political crisis.<sup>10</sup> On 25 April 2021, Pashinyan resigned to run in an early election and when Armenia's parliament deliberately failed to elect a new prime minister for the second time on May 10, 2021, it triggered its own dissolution in a final move toward early elections. This course of events was part of a political deal made earlier between the parliament majority represented by Pashinyan's My Step Alliance and two main opposition factions – Prosperous Armenia and Bright Armenia.<sup>11</sup>

According to IRI poll this decision was supported by majority of Armenians, 55% of respondents said they were in favour of a snap elections.<sup>12</sup> Armenian Central Electoral Commission decided that campaigning for elections will officially start on June 7 and last for only 12 days.<sup>13</sup> This will be the third parliamentary election in Armenia in four years and it will be the second consecutive snap election.

This early election is about Pashinyan's attempt to re-establish his legitimacy and the main issue in those elections will not be the differing political programme goals of parties, but the national security issues. The opposition is making promises that it will be able better to stand up for Armenia's interests against Azerbaijan, while Pashinyan and his ruling party are on the defensive and forced to make excuses for the defeat in the war last year.<sup>14</sup> Although the elections campaign will start officially only on 7 of June 2021, Pashinyan has during spring been touring Armenia in what his critics see as de facto campaign events making campaign-style promises as he travels around the country: to raise salaries, to invest in roads and regional economic projects, etc.<sup>15</sup>

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9 – Ron Synovitz. Can New Election Laws Pull Armenia Out Of Its Political Crisis? – RFE/RL. 11.04.2021. <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-election-reforms-end-political-crisis/31197997.html>

10 – Armenia's embattled PM announces he's agreed to June snap election. – bne IntelliNews. 19.03.2021. <https://www.intelinews.com/armenia-s-embattled-pm-announces-he-s-agreed-to-june-snap-election-205892/?source=armenia>

11 – Armenia's Parliament Dissolves in Final Step Toward Early Elections. – RFE/RL. 10.05.2021. <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-parliament-dissolves-early-elections-pashinian/31248239.html>

12 – PM Pashinian's bloc only political force that attracts significant support in Armenia poll. – bne IntelliNews. 17.03.2021. <https://intelinews.com/pm-pashinian-s-bloc-only-political-force-that-attracts-significant-support-in-armenia-poll-205629/?source=armenia>

13 – Armenian Central Election Commission Sets Timetable for Snap Parliamentary Elections <https://massispost.com/2021/05/armenian-central-election-commission-sets-timetable-for-snap-parliamentary-elections/>

14 – Ani Mejlumyan. In Armenian elections, Karabakh is on the ballot. – Eurasianet. 19.05.2021. <https://eurasianet.org/in-armenian-elections-karabakh-is-on-the-ballot>

15 – Ani Mejlumyan. Armenian election campaign begins to take shape. – Eurasianet. 29.04.2021. <https://eurasianet.org/armenian-election-campaign-begins-to-take-shape>

## Political parties and blocs participating in elections

By 26 May 2021 The Central Electoral Commission had registered 23 parties and 4 blocs for participating in the early parliamentary elections.<sup>16</sup>

Pashinyan's **Civil Contract** and the two main opposition parties, **Prosperous Armenia** and **Bright Armenia**, that were represented in the current legislature, have made clear that they will participate in the elections on their own. Other opposition forces and leaders have set up electoral blocs/alliances. One of them, **Armenia Alliance**, consists of two opposition parties, the Reviving Armenia party and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation – Dashnaksutyun and is led by former President Robert Kocharyan, while another, **I have Honour Alliance**, comprises another former President Serzh Sarkisyan's Republican Party and Homeland Party of Armenia.<sup>17</sup>

The ruling **Civil Contract** party formally submitted its electoral list for the June 20 election to the Central Electoral Commission on May 26. Caretaker Prime Minister **Nikol Pashinyan** is leading the list, followed by Speaker of Parliament **Ararat Mirzoyan** and head of the ruling My Step parliamentary faction **Lilit Makunts**.<sup>18</sup> Observers expect Armenian ex-President **Robert Kocharyan** led **Armenia Alliance** – to become Pashinyan's main challenger in the elections.<sup>19</sup>

**Civil Contract** party has no clearly defined ideology, but its leader Nikol Pashinyan has described his party's position as a radically centrist, a reformist and a liberal. Civil Contract advocates for maintaining strong connections between Armenia and Russia while promoting Eurasian integration with other CIS and Eurasian Union member states. At the same time, Civil Contract does continue to support Armenia's European integration through developing closer ties with the European Union and to eliminate visa requirements for Armenian citizens traveling to the EU's Schengen Area and sees a lot of potential growth in both economic and political ties with the EU.<sup>20</sup>

**Robert Kocharyan's Armenia Alliance** seeks to develop national-state interests, pursue

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16 – 23 parties and 4 blocs to participate in early parliamentary elections. – Armenpress. 26.05.2021. <https://armenpress.am/eng/amp/1053556>

17 – Armenian Central Election Commission Sets Timetable for Snap Parliamentary Elections <https://massispost.com/2021/05/armenian-central-election-commission-sets-timetable-for-snap-parliamentary-elections/>

18 – Ruling party releases electoral list's top 30. – Armenpress. 26.05.2021. <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1053489.html>

19 – Armenia's Parliament Dissolves In Final Step Toward Early Elections. – RFE/RL. 10.05.2021. <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-parliament-dissolves-early-elections-pashinian/31248239.html>; Siranush Ghazanchyan. Robert Kocharyan to lead the alliance of Reviving Armenia Party and ARF Dashnaksutyun. – Public Radio of Armenia. 06.05.2021. <https://en.armradio.am/2021/05/06/robert-kocharyan-to-lead-the-alliance-of-reviving-armenia-party-and-arf-dashnaksutyun/>

20 – Civil Contract (Armenia). – Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil\\_Contract\\_\(Armenia\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_Contract_(Armenia))

a foreign policy aimed at Armenia's protection and security, and stopping socio-economic decline. The alliance supports pursuing high levels of development, preventing a new wave of mass emigration, and creating the necessary foundations for lasting peace in the South Caucasus region. The alliance also supports maintaining the territorial integrity and self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh, protecting Armenia's borders, fighting corruption, improving the quality of public life, and supporting the activities of the Armenian Apostolic Church.<sup>21</sup>

**I Have Honour Alliance** led by **Artur Vanetsyan** (formerly head of Armenian Security Service under Pashinyan and now his critic) and **Serzh Sargsyan** identifies itself as national conservative and supports the strengthening of the military of Armenia, developing the economy, supporting the activities of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and ensuring the self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>22</sup>

**Edmon Marukyan's** (lawyer and politician) **Bright Armenia** is a liberal, pro-European political party, which has called for raising relations with the European Union to a strategic partnership level. Party also advocates for visa-free travel of Armenian citizens to the EU's Schengen Area. The party opposes Armenia's current membership in the Eurasian Union and believes that Armenia should withdraw its membership and begin to negotiate an Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the European Union. Bright Armenia supports Armenia's full membership in the EU and wishes to begin the first steps of accession negotiations without delay.<sup>23</sup>

**Gagik Tsarukyan's** (businessman and politician) **Prosperous Armenia** party maintains a conservative and a Pro-Russian ideology and is the only outspokenly Eurosceptic party in Armenia. The party advocates for the preservation of national and traditional values, families, and church and state relations as the most important priorities. The party also claims to support building stronger democratic and neighbourly relations within the Caucasus region and with Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine and Central Asia. Despite being a Pro-Russian party, Prosperous Armenia does believe in maintaining strong relations and economic partnership with the European Union.<sup>24</sup>

**Republic Party** led by **Aram Sargsyan** has both liberal and conservative views but tends to take a centrist approach on most issues. The party is strongly pro-European and supports the European integration of Armenia.<sup>25</sup>

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21 – Armenia Alliance. – Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenia\\_Alliance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenia_Alliance)

22 – I Have Honor Alliance. – Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I\\_Have\\_Honor\\_Alliance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Have_Honor_Alliance)

23 – Bright Armenia. – Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bright\\_Armenia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bright_Armenia)

24 – Prosperous Armenia. – Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosperous\\_Armenia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosperous_Armenia)

25 – Hanrapetutyun Party. – Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanrapetutyun\\_Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanrapetutyun_Party)

According to the latest public opinion polls from the end of May Civil Contract party is supported by 23–25% of voters, Armenia Alliance by 14–17,5% of voters, Prosperous Armenia party by 3,8–4,1% of voters and have perspective to be represented in parliament. The other parties enjoy lower public support, I Have Honour Alliance is supported by 2,7–3% of voters, Bright Armenia party by 2,3% of voters and Republic party by 2,8% of voters.<sup>26</sup> But if to analyze only the results of decided voters, the result for a Civil Contract Party will be 42.1%, Armenia Alliance 24.3%, Prosperous Armenia Party 7.0%, I have Honour Alliance 5.3%, Republic Party 4.3% and Bright Armenia Party 3.4%.<sup>27</sup>

## Possible outcomes of election

In 2021, Civil Contract's results are expected to be much lower than in 2018 elections. But if they can secure at least 50% of the votes cast, even if turnout goes down from the 1.26 million voters that showed up in 2018, he would have secured his position for the next five years.<sup>28</sup>

If Civil Contract Party takes less than 50% of the vote, it is still possible for them to receive a majority of the seats in Parliament, as the parties that receive less than 5% of the vote are ignored in the calculation for distributing MP seats, as if those voters never showed up at all. Under such a circumstance, Pashinyan would be in a difficult position. He had resisted earlier calls to resign by saying that only "the people" can remove him from power. If the majority of voters vote against him, however, and his party stays in power only due to the distortions from an Electoral Code, protesters calling for his ouster could point to the election results as justification that he needs to leave office.<sup>29</sup>

If no party receives a majority of the seats after the June 20 election results, there is a brief period of time for the political parties to come to a coalition agreement.<sup>30</sup>

However, according to public opinion poll information, only Pashinyan's Civil Contract Party, Kocharyan's Armenia Alliance and Gagik Tsarukyan's Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP) seem

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26 – 2021 Armenian parliamentary election. – Wikipedia  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021\\_Armenian\\_parliamentary\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Armenian_parliamentary_election)

27– Harout Manougian. Latest Poll Numbers Imply a False Majority Election Outcome. – EVN Report. 24.05.2021.  
<https://www.evnreport.com/magazine-issues/latest-poll-numbers-imply-a-false-majority-election-outcome>

28– Harout Manougian. Election Finally Officially Triggered: Here Are the Possible Outcomes. – EVN Report. 10.05.2021.  
<https://www.evnreport.com/opinion/election-finally-officially-triggered-here-are-the-possible-outcomes>

29 – Harout Manougian. Election Finally Officially Triggered: Here Are the Possible Outcomes. – EVN Report. 10.05.2021.  
<https://www.evnreport.com/opinion/election-finally-officially-triggered-here-are-the-possible-outcomes>

30 – Harout Manougian. Election Finally Officially Triggered: Here Are the Possible Outcomes. – EVN Report. 10.05.2021.  
<https://www.evnreport.com/opinion/election-finally-officially-triggered-here-are-the-possible-outcomes>

to be able to reach over the threshold, and that limits the possible number of coalitions. Their support numbers will translate to parliamentary seats followingly: Civil Contract Party: 61 seats (58 + 3 ethnic minority seats), Armenia Alliance: 34 seats (33 + 1 ethnic minority seat) and Prosperous Armenia Party: 10 seats.<sup>31</sup> Of course, support for parties can change, when actual election day comes closer.

If no party will have a majority of the seats in the first round and no governing coalition can be formed within six days, a second round of the election is declared for 28 days after the first round (July 18, 2021). In the second round, the top two parties/alliances face off against each other. They may form new alliances with the smaller parties but do not need to. Whichever side wins the second round, receives as many bonus seats that will bring them up to a stable majority (currently defined as 54%). Other parties retain the seats they won from the first round of results. If a new alliance is formed for the second round, the bonus seats are awarded proportionally according to the alliance members' first round results.<sup>32</sup>

One should also not discount the possibility that Kocharyan's Armenia Alliance wins the June 20 election, or a potential second round on July 18. If that happens, it's up to Pashinyan to recognize the election result as fair and leave power and up to Armenia Alliance to form new governing coalition.<sup>33</sup>

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31 – Harout Manougian. Latest Poll Numbers Imply a False Majority Election Outcome. – EVN Report. 24.05.2021. <https://www.evnreport.com/magazine-issues/latest-poll-numbers-imply-a-false-majority-election-outcome>

32 – Harout Manougian. Election Finally Officially Triggered: Here Are the Possible Outcomes. – EVN Report. 10.05.2021. <https://www.evnreport.com/opinion/election-finally-officially-triggered-here-are-the-possible-outcomes>

33 – Harout Manougian. Election Finally Officially Triggered: Here Are the Possible Outcomes. – EVN Report. 10.05.2021. <https://www.evnreport.com/opinion/election-finally-officially-triggered-here-are-the-possible-outcomes>