

The Anatomy of the Ballot Box: What Lies Ahead After Armenia's 2026 Polls?

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(Özge Elif Kızıl - Anadolu Agency)

Democratic elections represent far more than domestic political processes that dictate a nation's internal leadership; they are critical junctures that reshape foreign policy trajectories, regional power dynamics, and the future of international partnerships. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the case of Armenia—a state traditionally embedded within the Russian Federation's sphere of security and economic influence, yet one that has taken striking strides towards diversifying its foreign policy architecture in recent years.

Introduction

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The parliamentary elections held on 7 June 2026 resulted in the ruling Civil Contract Party, led by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, securing its parliamentary majority and retaining governance. This outcome does not merely signal a continuation of the Armenian electorate's mandates regarding the incumbent administration; it also delivers profound implications for the country's geopolitical orientation. Indeed, the electoral results have engendered both novel opportunities and renewed debates across a broad diplomatic spectrum, ranging from Armenia's ongoing normalisation processes with Azerbaijan and Türkiye to its fluid relations with Moscow and expanding cooperation with the European Union.

Against this backdrop, this policy outlook analyses the prospective impacts of Pashinyan's electoral triumph on Armenia's foreign policy trajectory. It evaluates these dynamics through three interconnected geopolitical axes: the future of bilateral relations with the Russian Federation, the fragile normalisation dialogues with Türkiye and Azerbaijan, and the burgeoning strategic alignment with the European Union.

At the same time, some caution is warranted when interpreting the election as a straightforward referendum on foreign policy. While Pashinyan's victory undoubtedly strengthens his diplomatic mandate, electoral behaviour is rarely driven solely by geopolitical considerations. Economic management, opposition fragmentation, and leadership credibility likely also shaped voter preferences. In any case, the results grant Pashinyan continued authority to pursue his current strategic course.

The Yerevan-Moscow Axis

While Western capitals were swift to congratulate Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on his electoral triumph, Yerevan's decades-long strategic ally, Moscow, maintained a profound and telling silence. Far from a mere diplomatic oversight or a delayed protocolary reflex, this reticence was a clear demonstration of the Kremlin's deep-seated dissatisfaction with the electoral outcome.

This adversarial stance was not confined to the post-election period; rather, it defined the entire pre-electoral land-

scape. Throughout the campaign, Moscow abandoned the role of a passive observer, positioning itself as an active antagonist to the Pashinyan administration. The Kremlin sought to engineer the political arena through an array of domestic pressures, economic brinkmanship, and overt support for opposition elements—most notably the *Strong Armenia* alliance, bankrolled by the pro-Russian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan. Official sources and political analysts in Yerevan levelled severe accusations against Moscow, alleging the orchestration of sophisticated disinformation campaigns and the logistical mobilisation of the Armenian diaspora in Russia to cast anti-incumbent votes.

The leverage Moscow exerted extended beyond political rhetoric. On the eve of the 7 June polls, the Kremlin weaponised its economic dominance by imposing a sweeping import ban on a substantial share of Armenian agricultural and manufactured exports. Concurrently, as a matter of psychological warfare, prominent echelons of the Russian political elite moved swiftly to delegitimise the results, alleging widespread electoral fraud.

Furthermore, the Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, invoked a highly charged historical parallel, likening Pashinyan's Western orientation to the "dangerous path" of Leon Trotsky, who fell afoul of Stalin and was subsequently assassinated by a Soviet operative. Likewise, an earlier warning from President Vladimir Putin, who cautioned that Armenia—despite not having yet submitted a formal application for European Union membership—was treading "the exact same path as Ukraine". Within Yerevan's policy circles, such rhetoric was unequivocally interpreted as a direct security threat.

The Erosion of a "Marriage of Convenience"

To comprehend the contemporary nadir in Yerevan-Moscow relations, one must dissect the structural grievances that have historically underpinned what has functioned as a geopolitical "marriage of convenience." For decades, both during the Soviet era and after regaining its independence, Armenia served as Moscow's primary strategic outpost in the South Caucasus. The state's security architecture was fundamentally dependent on Russia: it hosted a permanent Russian military base, stood as a founding member of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), relied entirely on Moscow for its energy security, and was deeply integrated into Russian-led economic frameworks.

The initial fracture in this asymmetrical interdependence emerged during the 2018 "Velvet Revolution," which propelled Pashinyan to power. Although this bloodless, popular uprising against the corruption of the Kremlin-backed old guard deliberately framed itself as an exclusively internal affair—promising not to disrupt the strategic alliance

with Russia—the transition introduced a political elite with distinct Western leanings. In the eyes of the Kremlin, this constituted an unforgivable sin: the displacement of its loyal clientist networks. Consequently, Pashinyan was never viewed as an acceptable partner by Moscow, and from the outset of his tenure, he gradually laid the groundwork for a pro-Western foreign policy shift, both in rhetoric and in policy implementation.

What was initially dismissed by some observers as a transient, superficial recalibration rather than a genuine geopolitical pivot rapidly mutated into a chronic systemic crisis. This divergence culminated in a decisive turning point following the 2023 Azerbaijani military operation, which restored Baku's full control over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The complete passivity of the Russian peacekeeping contingent in the face of the Azerbaijani advance was widely perceived by the Armenian public and state apparatus as a calculated betrayal by Moscow. This collective sense of abandonment fundamentally dismantled the domestic legitimacy of the historic Armenian-Russian alliance. Yet, the deterioration of the relationship cannot be understood solely through the prism of Armenian disillusionment. Russia's own strategic bandwidth has been significantly constrained by the war in Ukraine, reducing its capacity to act as the dominant security guarantor it once aspired to be in the South Caucasus. From this perspective, the Armenian crisis reflects not only a loss of trust in Moscow but also a broader transformation in Russia's regional role, whereby expectations inherited from an earlier era increasingly exceed the resources available to sustain them.

Pragmatically capitalising on the public consensus that held Russia largely accountable for the military debacle, Pashinyan successfully unburdened his administration from the practical and moral liabilities of maintaining the security pact with Moscow. By shifting the blame for the defeat onto the Kremlin, he reinforced his domestic position. Crucially, this geopolitical decoupling was not driven solely by external coercion; it is a conscious, strategic choice by Yerevan, born out of institutionalised mutual distrust.

Pashinyan re-framed the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh as the removal of a geopolitical shackle—arguing that the unresolved conflict had historically served as the primary mechanism through which Russia perpetuated Armenia's structural dependency. Excluding the nationalist and pro-Russian opposition, this narrative successfully generated political consent among an Armenian electorate thoroughly exhausted by decades of perpetual warfare.

Geopolitical Pivot or a Search for Equilibrium?

However, neither Pashinyan's pragmatic manoeuvres to date nor the recent electoral outcomes should be interpreted as an absolute and irreversible rupture between Arme-

nia and the Russian Federation.

By virtue of its volatile geopolitical location, entrenched economic realities, and complex historical legacy, Armenia does not possess the structural luxury of entirely isolating itself from Moscow. The notion of Yerevan transforming into a Western "satellite state" or a forward outpost in the South Caucasus remains structurally untenable. From energy infrastructure and trade routes to the vital remittances sent home by the vast Armenian migrant workforce in Russia, Armenia's economic baseline remains deeply tethered to Moscow.

Cognisant of these structural constraints, Pashinyan explicitly stated in his post-election address that choosing between Russia and the West was "out of the question", pledging instead to pursue a calibrated and balanced foreign policy.

Consequently, over the long term, the most rational course of action for both Moscow and Yerevan lies in establishing a *modus vivendi* rooted in mutual respect for state sovereignty and in a cessation of hostile political agendas targeting one another's core national interests.

For its part, Moscow must reconcile itself to the reality that Armenia is no longer a Soviet constituent but a fully independent sovereign state. The Kremlin needs to abandon its paternalistic approach—treating Armenia as a mere vassal state or a colony—and cease weaponising the threat of "Ukrainisation", thereby acknowledging Yerevan as an autonomous actor on the global stage.

Conversely, Yerevan must meticulously avoid escalatory steps that could compromise Moscow's vital security red lines, ensuring it does not become an instrument for broader Western geopolitical agendas in the region. In this highly fragile conjuncture of the South Caucasus, regional stability can only be preserved if both capitals realistically adjust to this altered geopolitical landscape.

Relations with Azerbaijan and Türkiye: A Renewed Opportunity for Regional Serenity

One of the most consequential foreign policy ramifications of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's electoral victory is the ongoing normalisation process with Azerbaijan and Türkiye. In his post-election address, Pashinyan explicitly noted: *"The people of Armenia have voted for peace, regional prosperity, and regional cooperation; I hope this stance is positively reciprocated by Türkiye and Azerbaijan."* Rather than a mere exercise in diplomatic rhetoric, this statement reflects the substantial societal legitimacy this constructive foreign policy paradigm has achieved at the ballot box.

Indeed, following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, the Pashinyan administration accepted the altered geopolitical realities on the ground, adopting a highly pragmatic approach towards regularising ties with Baku and, by extension, Ankara. This strategy is structurally driven by the imperatives of overcoming Armenia's long-standing regional isolation, securing access to emerging trade and transit corridors, and mitigating the structural impediments hindering the country's economic development. Consequently, the robust electoral endorsement did not merely consolidate Pashinyan's domestic authority; it also demonstrated that this normalisation agenda enjoys considerable public consensus within Armenian society.

Within this framework, concluding a comprehensive and enduring peace treaty with Azerbaijan remains a core political objective for Yerevan. In recent years, the Armenian government has conceptualised this peace process not merely as the signing of a static diplomatic document, but as a multidimensional institutionalisation encompassing border delimitation, the unblocking of regional transport infrastructure, enhanced economic integration, and the mutual recognition of territorial integrity. The election victory equips Pashinyan with a renewed political mandate to advance these objectives, signalling that a significant segment of the electorate views normalisation and regional stability as vital underpinnings for Armenia's long-term security and prosperity.

Nevertheless, formidable obstacles to a definitive peace accord persist. Chief among these is Azerbaijan's precondition that Armenia amend certain clauses in its constitution, which Baku interprets as an implicit, lingering claim over Nagorno-Karabakh. Although Pashinyan's party emerged strong from the polls, it failed to secure the supermajority required to unilaterally initiate a constitutional referendum. This legislative limitation ensures that constitutional readjustment will remain one of the most contentious and critical issues in upcoming negotiations.

Yet, this deadlock is not insurmountable. Pashinyan's renewed and consolidated mandate may enable Yerevan to sustain confidence-building measures (CBMs) with Baku, thereby fostering deeper mutual trust. In such a scenario, Azerbaijan might adopt a more flexible posture on the constitutional issue, potentially deferring legal adjustments to later stages of the comprehensive peace process. As the tangible dividends of economic cooperation and regional connectivity projects accrue for both states, the relative salience of symbolic and legalistic disputes may progressively diminish.

On the other hand, the Turkish dimension forms an inseparable component of this regional matrix. Ankara has long maintained that a definitive peace treaty between Yerevan and Baku is a strict prerequisite for the full normalisation of its own ties with Armenia. Consequently, Pashinyan's victory carries profound implications not only for the bilateral track with Azerbaijan but also for the future trajectory of Türkiye-Armenia relations.

When evaluated alongside recent positive signals regarding the reopening of the land border—closed by Ankara in 1993 in solidarity with Azerbaijan—the intensifying diplomatic and economic contacts point to a potential new phase in what can be described as a geopolitical “bridge-building” process. Furthermore, the cautious dialogue rooted in mutual respect that has developed between President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Pashinyan emerges as a vital element reinforcing the institutionalisation of communication channels between the two capitals.

If tangible progress is secured along the Yerevan-Baku axis, the reopening of the Türkiye-Armenia border will likely accelerate, expanding trade volumes and deeply embedding Armenia within regional economic networks. Such a breakthrough could catalyse not only a political settlement but a wholesale economic restructuring of the South Caucasus.

From a broader perspective, the election results can be read as a historic choice regarding Armenia's strategic orientation. The Armenian electorate has, to a significant degree, eschewed historical revisionist narratives in favour of a pragmatic strategy anchored in regional integration and economic development. While the ultimate success of this strategy hinges on the reciprocal political will of Ankara and Baku, Pashinyan's renewed legitimacy offers one of the most promising opportunities for sustainable peace in the South Caucasus in recent decades.

Moving forward, the fundamental challenge for Armenia lies in viewing its relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan through the lens of mutual benefit and regional stability, rather than a zero-sum geopolitical rivalry.

Equally vital for the sustainability of the normalisation process is that Yerevan refrains from allowing its territory or diplomatic posture to become weaponised by external actors—be they Western powers or Russia—in their respective regional rivalries. Shaping relations with its immediate neighbours independently of third parties' strategic calculations remains critical. Failing this, Armenia risks reverting to an object of great-power competition, effectively subordinating its regional and sovereign interests to the geopolitical agendas of external patrons.

The Evolution of Relations with the EU: A Mandate for Strategic Diversification

One of the most consequential foreign policy ramifications of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's electoral triumph manifests in the future trajectory of relations between Armenia and the European Union.

Although Armenia maintains its formal membership in Russian-led institutional frameworks—namely, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)—the electoral outcome lends Yerevan's recent European rapprochement robust democratic legitimacy. Rather than signalling an abrupt, absolute rupture with the Russian axis, the domestic verdict reflects a broad societal endorsement of Armenia's quest to diversify its foreign policy portfolios and expand its strategic autonomy.

From Brussels' perspective, the significance of the election extends far beyond the mere survival of the incumbent administration; it serves as a critical indicator of public support for deepening political and economic integration with Europe. In this regard, the polls effectively tested and validated the EU's recent engagement strategy toward Yerevan's society. Concurrently, the European Union congratulated the Armenian electorate for demonstrating its democratic will, emphasising that the elections were conducted in a competitive, inclusive manner, in line with the rule of law.

This institutional response demonstrates that the European Union's contemporary Armenia policy is not built solely on normative values and liberal narratives; it is increasingly driven by strategic imperatives amid escalating geopolitical competition in the South Caucasus. Following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War, Brussels has transformed into a more visible and proactive actor in the regional equilibrium by facilitating Armenia-Azerbaijan peace talks, strengthening its on-the-ground presence through the EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA), and expanding fiscal support mechanisms. Within this framework, Pashinyan's renewed tenure provides Brussels with a predictable partner capable of maintaining reform momentum and serving as a stabilising element within the emerging regional security architecture.

Nevertheless, it would be analytically flawed to interpret these results as a precursor to an imminent Armenian accession to the European Union in the short term. Armenia's structural economic dependency on Russia, its vulnerabilities in the energy sector, and the historical reliance of its security architecture on Moscow continue to impose strict boundaries on Yerevan's diplomatic choices. Even so, the EU's recent deployment of enhanced financial aid packages, trade concessions, and deepened political dialogues indicates that Brussels attaches immense strategic value to Yerevan's foreign policy diversification.

Ultimately, the election reinforces an institutional desire to place EU-Armenia ties on a more predictable, institutional, and sustainable footing, rather than executing a unilateral, reckless pivot toward the West. While this offers Brussels an opportunity to expand its diplomatic leverage in the South Caucasus, it equips Yerevan with a critical strategic asset: alternative international partnerships that expand its diplomatic room for manoeuvre vis-à-vis Moscow.

However, for the EU's regional efficacy to yield constructive and permanent outcomes, Brussels must conceptualise its engagement with Armenia through the holistic lens of regional normalisation. If European capitals genuinely seek to foster sustainable peace in the South Caucasus, they must meticulously avoid positioning Armenia as a geopolitical counterweight or a political lever against Türkiye. Similarly, rather than allowing historical grievances to be instrumentalised for contemporary political ends, European actors should adopt a balanced posture that actively reinforces the Türkiye-Armenia normalisation track, prioritises mutual confidence-building, and fosters regional economic integration. Such a calibrated approach will ultimately serve both Europe's long-term strategic interests and the overarching stability of the South Caucasus.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the 2026 Armenian parliamentary elections represent far more than a routine electoral cycle that merely preserves the status quo under Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Instead, the domestic verdict provides clear indicators of the strategic vector of the country's foreign policy trajectory in the near term.

The electoral outcomes demonstrate that a significant cross-section of Armenian society endorses the pursuit of regularised ties with Azerbaijan and Türkiye, the deepening of institutional relations with the European Union, and the adoption of a more calibrated foreign policy paradigm aimed at mitigating structural dependencies on the Russian Federation.

More fundamentally, the election suggests that Armenia is attempting to transition from a model of geopolitical dependence to one of strategic diversification. Rather than replacing Russian influence with Western influence, Yerevan increasingly appears to be seeking a broader network of partnerships through which it can maximise diplomatic flexibility while reducing vulnerability to any single external actor. The success of this approach will depend on Armenia's ability to manage competing relationships without becoming a focal point of great-power rivalry.

Nevertheless, this shifting paradigm does not imply that Armenia can abruptly or entirely unburden itself of its traditional security and economic tethers in the short term. On the contrary, the primary challenge confronting Yerevan moving forward lies in its capacity to navigate a delicate geopolitical tightrope—balancing rigid regional realities with evolving domestic aspirations.