



RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE IN ARMENIA'S 2026 ELECTIONS

A Post-election Examination



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Russian Interference in Armenia's 2026 Election

Executive summary

Armenia's June 2026 parliamentary election was the target of a sustained Russian interference campaign combining economic and diplomatic pressure, covert information manipulation, and reported attempts to influence voters through financial inducements and coercion. The evidence reviewed in this report points to an effort to strengthen political forces favourable to Moscow, weaken the government's authority, and constrain Armenia's ability to pursue closer relations with the European Union. Sustained pressure following election day indicates that the campaign's objectives extended beyond the immediate electoral outcome.

Drawing on investigative reporting, election observation, digital investigations, and official statements, the report examines the methods employed, the actors implicated, the Armenian authorities' response, and the limits of what can be established about the impact and intent of the Russian campaign. Four principal dimensions emerge:

- **Economic and diplomatic coercion:** Russia imposed escalating restrictions on Armenian exports and warned of adverse economic and security consequences if Armenia deepened its relationship with the EU. These actions exploited existing dependencies to place pressure on voters and the government. Their continuation after the election suggests an enduring capacity to disrupt Armenia's economy and constrain policy choices.
- **Sustained information manipulation:** Kremlin-linked operations, including Storm-1516, Matryoshka, and campaigns associated with the Social Design Agency, disseminated fabricated claims, impersonated credible sources, and amplified divisive narratives. These exploited tensions surrounding national security, relations with neighbouring states, religion, and political leadership. Monitoring cited in the report recorded at least 45 million views of false claims across 11 platforms. Preparations began well before the formal campaign period, while efforts involving cloned websites and AI-generated answers illustrate the expanding range of information channels vulnerable to manipulation.
- **Suspected manipulation of electoral participation.** Investigations and intelligence-based reporting described plans to transport up to 100,000 Armenian voters from Russia, allegedly involving inducements or pressure to support preferred candidates. The extent to which this scheme was implemented remains unverified. Separately, Armenian authorities investigated alleged vote-buying disguised as employment or charitable assistance, while civil society organisations reported pressure on employees, though whether all such activities were directed by Russia cannot be established with currently available evidence.
- **Intimidation and challenges to electoral legitimacy:** Threats against election observers raised concerns about attempts to obstruct independent scrutiny, although responsibility remains unresolved. Following the vote, Kremlin-aligned outlets circulated misleading accounts of the results and allegations intended to undermine confidence in the electoral process. These activities indicate a continuing effort to exploit political divisions and contested perceptions of legitimacy.

Evidence links several information operations in Armenia to Russian state structures, contractors, and associated media networks. Investigative reporting also identifies business and political intermediaries through which influence may have been exercised. Attribution nevertheless requires care: evidence of direct state involvement is stronger for some operations than others and political alignment with Russia does not itself establish participation in unlawful interference.

Likewise, the effect of these campaigns on the election result cannot be reliably quantified. Nikol Pashinyan's governing Civil Contract party retained its parliamentary majority, while Strong Armenia performed better than most pre-election polling had suggested. Neither outcome establishes the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of Russian interference. Differences between polls and results cannot demonstrate that a particular scheme succeeded and online viewing figures do not measure changes in political behaviour. The broader risk concerns the cumulative effects of coercion, deception, and declining institutional trust on Armenia's capacity to make sovereign democratic choices.

Armenian institutions, independent observers, journalists, and international partners took steps to expose and counter interference. These responses provided important elements of resilience, but concerns about selective enforcement, restrictions affecting opposition participation and changes to electoral rules underline the need for impartiality and effective oversight. Protecting democratic competition requires safeguards that apply equally to governing and opposition forces.

The findings call for a sustained response across the electoral cycle. Priorities include impartial investigations into voter incentivisation and coercion; stronger transparency in political finance; protection for voters, observers, and journalists; and coordinated action against deceptive information networks. International partners should support independent scrutiny and reduce Armenia's vulnerability to economic pressure. Technology providers should strengthen Armenian-language capacity and address manipulation across social media, hosting services, and emerging "AI" systems. Throughout these efforts, effectiveness should be assessed alongside respect for political participation, freedom of expression, and due process.

Background

While sustained international attention on Russian interference in Armenia may have crystallised only with Armenia's June 2026 parliamentary elections, the mechanisms enabling Russia's malign influence in the country have roots stretching far beyond its most recent electoral cycle. Following its independence from the Soviet Union, Armenia's relationship with Russia could be described as one of strategic dependence, remaining this way partly as a result of Armenia's tense relations with its other neighbours Azerbaijan and Turkey. Though the Armenian government has more recently made efforts to diversify its international partnerships away from Russia, this deep-rooted historical dependency today provides an abundance of opportunities for the Kremlin to interfere in Armenia's domestic politics.

Since independence, Armenia's security policy has been heavily reliant on Russia. In addition to being a member of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO),¹ Armenia hosts the Russian 102nd Military Base in the southern city of Gyumri.² Only in the last few years has Armenia begun to bolster relations with alternative security providers as relations with Russia have soured, particularly

1 Collective Security Treaty Organisation, *Collective Security Treaty Organization*, available at: <https://en.odkb-csto.org/>.

2 Eurasianet, *Russia reinforcing military base in Armenia*, 9 July 2025, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/russia-reinforcing-military-base-in-armenia>.

in the wake of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War and subsequent Azerbaijani incursions into Armenia proper, where Russia failed to intervene in support of Armenia despite its CSTO treaty obligation to do so.³

The Armenian economy is heavily dependent on Russia. Armenia is a member of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU),⁴ with Russia receiving more than 35% of the country's exports.⁵ At the same time, many of Armenia's largest companies and much of its infrastructure are Russian controlled – such as Armenia's rail infrastructure, which is controlled by the Russian state-owned Russian Railways.⁶ The Russian shadow perhaps hangs heaviest over the Armenian energy sector. The Russian state-owned energy giant Gazprom owns the entirety of Armenia's gas distribution infrastructure,⁷ with the vast majority of Armenia's gas imports also coming from Russia.⁸ On several occasions in 2025, Gazprom suspended supplies to Armenia at short notice.⁹ Armenia's electricity distribution infrastructure, likewise, was – until this year¹⁰ – controlled entirely by a business group close to the Kremlin.¹¹ In 2025, Nikol Pashinyan accused the company of almost causing an “energy crisis” in Armenia with the intent of “[stirring] domestic dissatisfaction”.¹² Armenia's Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant, meanwhile, which accounts for around 40% of the country's electricity generation, is heavily reliant on Russia's Rosatom state corporation for maintenance and repairs.¹³

In addition to its substantial economic footprint in Armenia, Russia has cultivated a broad base of proxies embedded in Armenia's political and social elite. Among the most prominent pro-Russian politicians are former presidents Serzh Sargasyan and Robert Kocharyan, supposedly a personal friend of Vladimir Putin.¹⁴ The leader of the Strong Armenia party, oligarch Samvel Karapetyan, is a dual Russian-Armenian

- 3 Atlantic Council / DFRLab, *Information Warfare in the South Caucasus and Moldova*, October 2024, available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Information-warfare-in-the-South-Caucasus-and-Moldova.pdf>.
- 4 Eurasian Economic Union, *EAEU Member-States*, available at: <https://eaeunion.org/?lang=en>.
- 5 The Irish Times, *Armenia looks to Europe for escape route as Russia tightens the screws*, 1 July 2026, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/europe/2026/07/01/armenia-looks-to-europe-for-escape-route-as-russia-tightens-the-screws/>.
- 6 Eurasianet, *Armenia: Tax records tell tale of continuing economic dependency on Russia*, 17 May 2024, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-tax-records-tell-tale-of-continuing-economic-dependency-on-russia>.
- 7 Eurasianet, *Russia's powerful economic levers over Armenia*, 1 November 2023, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/russias-powerful-economic-levers-over-armenia>.
- 8 Eurasianet, *Russia to revamp Armenia's nuclear power plant*, 21 December 2023, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/russia-to-revamp-armenias-nuclear-power-plant>.
- 9 Eurasianet, *Gazprom trying to squeeze Armenia*, 17 September 2025, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/gazprom-trying-to-squeeze-armenia>.
- 10 The Armenian government began a process of nationalising the company which owns the distribution network in 2025. See, for example: Arka News Agency, *Electricity Networks of Armenia (ENA) de facto nationalized; legal registration is being prepared, says Pashinyan*, 9 April 2026, available at: <https://arka.am/en/news/business/electric-networks-of-armenia-ena-de-facto-nationalized-legal-registration-is-being-prepared-says-pas/>.
- 11 OC Media, *Armenia to take over Karapetyan's shares in Electric Networks of Armenia*, 27 May 2026, available at: <https://oc-media.org/armenia-to-take-over-karapetyans-shares-in-electric-networks-of-armenia/>.
- 12 JAMnews, *Armenia's electricity network company owned by arrested Russian oligarch loses licence: what happens next?*, 17 November 2025, available at: <https://jam-news.net/armenias-electricity-network-company-owned-by-arrested-russian-oligarch-loses-licence-what-happens-next/>.
- 13 World Nuclear News, *Metsamor 2 to operate until 2026*, 17 November 2021, available at: <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Metsamor-2-to-operate-until-2026>; Eurasianet, *Russia to revamp Armenia's nuclear power plant*, 21 December 2023, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/russia-to-revamp-armenias-nuclear-power-plant>.
- 14 DFRLab, *Pro-Russian actors target Armenia with anti-Ukraine propaganda*, 24 July 2023, available at: <https://dfrlab.org/2023/07/24/pro-russia-actors-target-armenia-with-anti-ukraine-propaganda/>; European Centre for International Political Economy, *Russia's Influence and Disinformation Campaign in Armenia*, June 2024, available at: <https://ecipe.org/publications/russias-influence-disinformation-campaign-in-armenia/>; Atlantic Council / DFRLab, *Information Warfare in the South Caucasus and Moldova*, October 2024, available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Information-warfare-in-the-South-Caucasus-and-Moldova.pdf>.

citizen who has likewise been described as a personal friend of Vladimir Putin.¹⁵ Other prominent pro-Russian oligarchs in Armenia include Prosperous Armenia leader Gagik Tsarukyan. In 2019, Tsarukyan's party signed a cooperation agreement with Putin's United Russia party, while leaks from within Russia's now disbanded Directorate for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries suggest that his 2017 election campaign may have been funded by the Russian presidential administration.¹⁶

Armenia's media ecosystem is likewise dominated by Russian and Russian-aligned outlets. For instance, *TV Channel 5* is an opposition-aligned TV channel connected to Robert Kocharyan. It regularly features as a guest Karen Kocharyan, a known spreader of disinformation about Russia's war in Ukraine.¹⁷ Even channels explicitly run by the Russian state play an important role. DFRLab and INFO OPS Polska have assessed that the Russian state-run *RT* and its editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan have a strong influence on Armenian public opinion.¹⁸ *Sputnik Armenia*, meanwhile, is the local branch of another Russian state-run media outlet which promotes Kremlin-backed narratives.¹⁹ Russian state-owned *Gazprom Media* and *RIA Novosti* also run outlets in Armenia in the form of *Armenia TV* and *Novosti Armenii*, respectively.²⁰ Among other influential distribution channels for pro-Russian propaganda are *168 Zham*, *Antifake.am*, *EDnews.net*, *Hrapak.am*, *Iravunk* (an openly pro-Russian outlet which amplifies content from Russian "Z-blogger"²¹ channels), and *Tert.am*.²² In short, Russian influence faces no shortage of convenient entry points into the Armenian media space.

Following Armenia's 2018 velvet revolution and the coming to power of the relatively russosceptic Nikol Pashinyan, the Armenian government has gradually sought to reduce the country's dependence on Russia. This process has been compounded by the deterioration in relations between the two countries following Russia's repeated failures to honour its obligations to Armenia under the CSTO, which Russia likely hoped would contribute to the collapse of Pashinyan's administration. This strategy having failed, the Kremlin has in turn implemented a variety of operations aimed at further destabilising the Armenian government. Most notably, in 2024, Armenia alleged that the Russian government was behind a thwarted coup attempt supposedly led by vocal government critic Serob Gasparyan (the leader of the radical Sev Hovaz group). Armenia alleges that Russian agents recruited and trained Armenian nationals at a Russian defence ministry facility in Rostov-on-Don dubbed "ArBat".²³ Meanwhile, both the Armenian government and Armenian financial institutions have fallen prey to various Russian and Russian-aligned hacking groups over recent years. These include Anonymous Russia, Anonymous Sudan, APT28 (also

15 OC Media, *Explainer | Who is Samvel Karapetyan, the Russian-Armenian billionaire whose empire is under siege*, 25 August 2025, available at: <https://oc-media.org/explainer-who-is-samvel-karapetyan-the-russian-armenian-billionaire-whose-empire-is-under-siege/>.

16 The Insider, *Grabbing him by the "Beard": The Insider identifies the FSB, GRU, and SVR agents Russia sent to Armenia to take on PM Nikol Pashinyan*, 19 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/292740>.

17 DFRLab, *Pro-Russian actors target Armenia with anti-Ukraine propaganda*, 24 July 2023, available at: <https://dfrlab.org/2023/07/24/pro-russia-actors-target-armenia-with-anti-ukraine-propaganda/>.

18 Disinfo Digest, Արդյունքի գործողություններ (FIMI) Հայաստանի անվտանգության վրա, available at: <https://bit.ly/4hVR6P2>.

19 DFRLab, *Pro-Russian actors target Armenia with anti-Ukraine propaganda*, 24 July 2023, available at: <https://dfrlab.org/2023/07/24/pro-russia-actors-target-armenia-with-anti-ukraine-propaganda/>.

20 Disinfo Digest, Արդյունքի գործողություններ (FIMI) Հայաստանի անվտանգության վրա, available at: <https://bit.ly/4hVR6P2>.

21 The term "Z-blogger" refers to online influencers promoting narratives supportive of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

22 European Centre for International Political Economy, *Russia's Influence and Disinformation Campaign in Armenia*, June 2024, available at: <https://ecipe.org/publications/russias-influence-disinformation-campaign-in-armenia/>.

23 Eurasianet, *Who's faking who? Armenia asserts Russia was behind coup attempt; Moscow cries "fake" news*, 1 October 2024, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/whos-faking-who-armenia-asserts-russia-was-behind-coup-attempt-moscow-cries-fake-news>.

known as “Fancy Bear”),²⁴ Cyber Volk,²⁵ and the People’s Cyber Army of Russia. In the latter case, the People’s Cyber Army of Russia explicitly sought to damage Pashinyan politically, publicly condemning the Armenian government and expressing their support for the anti-government Tavush for the Motherland movement,²⁶ led by the openly pro-Russian Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan,²⁷ who was later arrested in connection to the alleged “Sacred Struggle” coup plot, which itself has been linked to Russia.²⁸

With such a pre-election context, it is of little wonder that Russia would seek to unduly influence the outcome of the June 2026 election. On the one hand, Russia’s deep-seated position throughout Armenian society provides the Kremlin with broad scope to leverage its economic and security dominance, to exploit its outsized presence in the media space, and to mobilise its broad base of proxies among the Armenian political elite. On the other hand, in Armenia, Russia is faced with a similar scenario as has played out most recently in Moldova: a pro-EU government seeking to pull its country out of the Russian orbit. In Moldova, despite waging an interference campaign described as “unprecedented” in its scale,²⁹ Russia failed to tip two successive elections in favour of its preferred candidates.³⁰ On the back of such stinging defeats, it appears that, in Armenia, Russia sought to leave nothing to chance.

Russia’s Influence Campaign in Armenia

As highlighted by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Russia’s influence strategy in the run-up to Armenia’s June 2026 election followed a similar pattern to that used in countries like Moldova, amounting to a complex, multifaceted approach which combined “diplomatic, economic and informational pressure” aimed at promoting pro-Russian forces and damaging the governing Civil Contract party.³¹

DIPLOMATIC AND ECONOMIC COERCION

As it has done frequently with neighbouring countries, the Kremlin has sought to weaponise its economic and political leverage over Armenia both in the run-up to the election and in its aftermath – a form of blackmail intended to dissuade voters from re-electing Nikol Pashinyan’s administration. That this pressure continued to escalate beyond election day may suggest that the Kremlin is seeking to contrive an economic situation in Armenia which could provoke instability that a politically weakened

24 CyberHub, *Russian Hacking Group Targets Armenia as Relations Sour Between Former Allies*, 20 June 2024, available at: <https://cyberhub.am/en/blog/2024/06/20/russian-hacking-group-targets-armenia-as-relations-sour-between-former-allies/>.

25 OC Media, *Russian hackers reportedly attack Armenian government database*, 19 September 2024, available at: <https://oc-media.org/russian-hackers-reportedly-attack-armenian-government-database/>; Media.am, *Cyber Attacks Targeting Armenia: 2024 Overview*, 10 December 2024, available at: <https://media.am/en/critique/2024/12/10/41249/>.

26 OC Media, *Russian hackers reportedly attack Armenian government database*, 19 September 2024, available at: <https://oc-media.org/russian-hackers-reportedly-attack-armenian-government-database/>; CyberHub, *Russian Hacking Group Targets Armenia as Relations Sour Between Former Allies*, 20 June 2024, available at: <https://cyberhub.am/en/blog/2024/06/20/russian-hacking-group-targets-armenia-as-relations-sour-between-former-allies/>.

27 Disinfo Digest, *Արդյունքի գործողություններ (FIMI) Հայաստանի անվտանգության վրա*, available at: <https://bit.ly/4hVR6P2>.

28 Al Jazeera, *Armenia arrests prominent archbishop over alleged coup plot*, 25 June 2025, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/6/25/armenia-arrests-prominent-archbishop-over-alleged-coup-plot>; Centre for European Policy Analysis, *The Archbishops’ ‘Coup’ – Armenia Hints at Russian Plot*, 8 July 2025, available at: <https://cepa.org/article/the-archbishops-coup-armenia-hints-at-russian-plot/>.

29 Politico, *Moldova’s president warns of ‘unprecedented’ Russian election meddling*, 30 July 2025, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/moldova-warns-russian-election-interference-mai-sandu-cyberattack-disinformation/>.

30 BBC, *Moldova’s pro-EU party wins vote mired in claims of Russian interference*, 29 September 2025, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2rdlj8ejgo>; BBC, *Pro-EU leader wins Moldova election despite alleged Russian meddling*, 4 November 2024, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cz7w9dglzlo>.

31 RUSI, *Armenia’s Election: A Win for Pashinyan, Yet the Kremlin Long Game Persists*, 12 June 2026, available at: <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/armenias-election-win-pashinyan-yet-kremlin-long-game-persists>.

Civil Contract administration would be ill-equipped to manage. This strategy was highlighted by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights' (OSCE/ODIHR's) preliminary report, which complained of "[d]irect pressure from abroad in the form of escalating trade restrictions and security threats during the campaign, aimed at unduly influencing voters in favour of opposition forces".³²

As election day drew closer, Russia gradually ratcheted up its economic pressure on Armenia, exploiting the fact that Russia receives more than 35% of Armenia's exports.³³ On 20 May, the Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance (Rosselkhoz nadzor) began imposing restrictions on the import of various products from Armenia, beginning by prohibiting the import of Armenian flowers as of 22 May. By election day, import bans had been extended to a host of Armenia's most popular products in the Russian market, namely: mineral water, brandy, wine, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, greens, strawberries, cherries, apricots, plums, peaches, nectarines, and grapes.³⁴ Following the election, Russia ratcheted restrictions on Armenia's from Armenia even further.³⁵

On 25 May, Putin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, sought to assert further pressure by threatening that Russia would demand higher prices for its fossil fuel exports to Armenia in the event that the country left the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in favour of the EU,³⁶ again implying that Armenians should vote against the governing Civil Contract party, which intends to launch a bid to join the EU.³⁷

The EAEU summit on 29 May was also used as an opportunity to apply pressure to the Armenian government, with the presidents of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan all urging Nikol Pashinyan to hold a referendum on the issue of leaving the EAEU in favour of the EU.³⁸

Pressure exerted at the diplomatic level went beyond economic coercion to encompass thinly veiled threats of military action, with Putin warning in May that Armenia could face a "Ukrainian scenario" if it continued to deepen its relationship with the EU, a statement clearly implying a threat of Russian invasion should the pro-EU Civil Contract win the election.³⁹

32 International Election Observation Mission, *Armenia – Parliamentary Elections*, 7 June 2026, Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, available at: https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/06/ARM%20Parliamentary%202026_PS_08.06.2026.pdf.

33 The Irish Times, *Armenia looks to Europe for escape route as Russia tightens the screws*, 1 July 2026, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/europe/2026/07/01/armenia-looks-to-europe-for-escape-route-as-russia-tightens-the-screws/>.

34 Meduza, *Russia extends food embargo on Armenia to summer fruit ahead of Yerevan elections*, 1 June 2026, available at: <https://meduza.io/en/news/2026/06/01/russia-extends-food-embargo-on-armenia-to-summer-fruit-ahead-of-yerevan-elections>; Meduza, *Россия готовится к парламентским выборам в Армении — запрещает импорт цветов, минералки и коньяка, овощей и фруктов*, 25 May 2026, available at: <https://meduza.io/short/2026/05/25/rossiya-gotovitsya-k-parlamentskim-vyboram-v-armenii-zapreschaet-eksport-tsvetov-mineralki-i-konyaka>; Meduza, *Армения: готовится к выборам. Россия: вводит против нее торговые ограничения (а точнее, запрещает цветы)*, 20 May 2026, available at: <https://meduza.io/news/2026/05/20/armeniya-gotovitsya-k-vyboram-rossiya-vvodit-protiv-nee-torgovyie-ogranicheniya-a-tochnee-zapreschaet-tsvety>.

35 The Moscow Times, *Russia Issues Sweeping Ban on Armenian Imports After Pashinyan's Victory*, 11 June 2026, available at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/06/11/russia-issues-sweeping-ban-on-armenian-imports-after-pashinyans-victory-a92984>.

36 TASS, *Песков: льготная цена на газ станет рыночной, если Армения покинет ЕАЭС*, 25 May 2026, available at: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/27521131>.

37 CivilNet, *Armenia's parliamentary committee approves EU integration bill*, 24 March 2025, available at: <https://civilnet.am/en/news/823896>.

38 RUSI, *Armenia's Election: A Win for Pashinyan, Yet the Kremlin Long Game Persists*, 12 June 2026, available at: <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/armenias-election-win-pashinyan-yet-kremlin-long-game-persists>.

39 The Guardian, *Armenia heads to polls amid Russian pressure and threat of 'Ukrainian scenario'*, 6 June 2026, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jun/06/russia-putin-armenia-election>.

INFORMATION MANIPULATION

As in numerous cases around Europe, a central plank of Russia's influence strategy in Armenia was the undertaking of a series of prolonged, sophisticated, and interrelated campaigns of information manipulation, which, according to NewsGuard, predominantly centred on four narrative themes: foreign interference; national sovereignty; corruption; and morality. False claims on these key themes generated at least 45 million views across 11 social media platforms.⁴⁰ LetsData analysis also highlighted the significance of EU or Western "interference" as a theme of false claims promoted by Russia, identifying 1,000 posts created by Kremlin-linked malign online accounts which attracted close to five million views.⁴¹

A key innovation in the Armenian case compared to previous Russian operations appears to have been to begin this campaign much earlier in the electoral cycle (14 months before election day, rather than 3-5 months),⁴² while some sources suggest that preparations may have begun years ahead of the election.⁴³ This change might represent a strategic evolution owing to a series of recent failures to sway elections in the Kremlin's favour.⁴⁴ The Armenian campaign also exemplified the Kremlin's efforts to exploit emerging technologies to these ends, with some of the disinformation campaigns targeted against Nikol Pashinyan and others making use of "AI"-generated video and audio to fraudulently simulate street interviews and celebrity endorsements.⁴⁵ Ultimately, Russia sought to distort every level of the Armenian information space, waging a campaign spanning platforms ranging from print media, to digital news media, to social networks, to so-called "AI" chatbots.

In one of the more peculiar incidents in the run-up to the election, a newspaper called the "*Wyoming Star*" began appearing around Yerevan in February. The newspaper appeared to be a collection of articles from an American website translated into Armenian, but an investigation by *Factor TV* found that the editor, Vanik Shukuryan, was a resident of St Petersburg who had had transported the copies from Moscow to Yerevan.⁴⁶ *The Insider* determined that the email address used by one of the newspapers' authors in fact belonged to Aleksandr Ionov, who is wanted in the US for recruiting US citizens to interfere in local elections in Florida. Ionov is a professional informant associated with Russia's FSB.⁴⁷

Russian interference in the Armenian digital space took place on a much larger scale, however. For example, *Media.am* found that, on 18 February 2026, 17 Facebook pages were created in the span of 15 minutes, seemingly for the purpose of promoting disinformation about Nikol Pashinyan and his family. Videos posted to these accounts almost simultaneously were thereafter disseminated across the

40 NewsGuard, *Russia Targets Armenia's Elections – Early and Viciously*, 11 November 2025, available at: <https://www.newsguardtech.com/special-reports/russia-targets-armenias-elections-early-and-viciously/>.

41 RUSI, *Armenia's Election: A Win for Pashinyan, Yet the Kremlin Long Game Persists*, 12 June 2026, available at: <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/armenias-election-win-pashinyan-yet-kremlin-long-game-persists>.

42 NewsGuard, *Russia Targets Armenia's Elections – Early and Viciously*, 11 November 2025, available at: <https://www.newsguardtech.com/special-reports/russia-targets-armenias-elections-early-and-viciously/>.

43 Media.am, *Samvel Karapetyan's Virtual Army Of Supporters*, 6 April 2026, available at: <https://media.am/en/verified/2026/04/06/45568/>.

44 RUSI, *Armenia's Election: A Win for Pashinyan, Yet the Kremlin Long Game Persists*, 12 June 2026, available at: <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/armenias-election-win-pashinyan-yet-kremlin-long-game-persists>.

45 CivilNet, *Fake Interviews with AI citizens: How Facebook Pages Try to Fool Voters*, 20 May 2026, available at: <https://civilnet.am/en/news/1011946>; BBC, *Fake videos of actors target Armenia election*, 5 June 2026, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/videos/cjepepgg2nqo>.

46 Factor, *The "American" Newspaper That Comes from Moscow: Inside the Wyoming Star Operation in Armenia*, 17 March 2026, available at: <https://factor.am/en/8576.html>.

47 The Insider, *"Pashinyan's illness," "looming war with Russia," and "gas chambers on Mount Ararat": Moscow floods Armenia with disinfo ahead of elections*, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/293081>.

social media site by a network of hundreds of accounts with histories of actively promoting pro-Russian opposition leader Samvel Karapetyan and his political movement, with the *Media.am* investigation confirming that at least 60 of these accounts were inauthentic. The same investigation found that the majority of these fake accounts had been created in August and September 2023, again suggesting that preparations for the campaign had begun years ahead of the election, though the precise actors behind the campaign remain unclear.⁴⁸ Similarly, in April 2026, the Union of Informed Citizens (UIC), an Armenian NGO, announced that it had identified more than 100 inauthentic Armenian social media accounts being used to spread disinformation with the aim of discrediting the Armenian electoral process, prompting senior members of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to write to Meta and Google urging them to take steps to address the dissemination of disinformation in the Armenian social media space ahead of the election.⁴⁹

Storm-1516

Other digital influence campaigns which targeted the election bore clearer traces of Kremlin responsibility. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) found that Armenia was the country most frequently targeted by the Russian state-sponsored disinformation operation Storm-1516⁵⁰ between April 2025 and April 2026, with false claims originating from Storm-1516 racking up millions of views on social media sites and prompting public responses from Nikol Pashinyan's spokesperson.⁵¹ Western intelligence officials who spoke to *Reuters* before the election highlighted the role played by Storm-1516 in promoting Russian narratives in Armenia.⁵² Narratives which Storm-1516 sought to weaponise included the conflict between the Armenian government and the Armenian Apostolic Church and an alleged Armenian "sell off" to Turkey and Azerbaijan.⁵³

Matroyshka

Research by the Antibot4Navalny project found that, by late May 2026, 389 fake videos aimed at discrediting Nikol Pashinyan and promoting pro-Russian narratives in Armenia had been published as part of Russia's Matroyshka⁵⁴ operation, with the campaign beginning 243 days ahead of the Armenian election – again, much earlier than had been the case in the comparable 2025 Moldovan election. Meanwhile, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue found that Matryoshka targeted Armenia "more frequently than any country except for Ukraine and France".⁵⁵ According to Antibot4Navalny and the Gnida Project, the botnet which Matryoshka used for the campaign was created in 2023-2024 specifically to target Armenia, though it was only activated on 14 February 2026,⁵⁶ further highlighting an emerging tendency for the Kremlin to implement lengthy preparations for its information operations. NewsGuard found

48 *Media.am, Samvel Karapetyan' Virtual Army of Supporters*, 6 April 2026, available at: <https://media.am/en/verified/2026/04/06/45568/>.

49 UIC, *Statement on Fake Accounts and Information Interference*, 21 April 2026, available at: <https://uic.am/en/36519>.

50 The operation is also known as "Neva Flood".

51 ISD, *All operations on Armenia: Russia's influence machine targets the vote*, 27 May 2026, available at: <https://www.isdglobal.org/digital-dispatch/all-operations-on-armenia-russias-influence-machine-targets-the-vote/>.

52 Reuters, *Imported voters, fake websites: Russia's covert efforts to stop Armenia's pivot West*, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/imported-voters-fake-websites-russias-covert-efforts-stop-armenias-pivot-west-2026-05-29/>.

53 Gnida Project, *Disinformation update: Storm-1516 almost tunnel-focused on Armenia*, 2 June 2026, available at: <https://gnidaproject.substack.com/p/disinformation-update-june-2026>.

54 The operation is also known as "Storm-1679" or "Operation Overload".

55 ISD, *All operations on Armenia: Russia's influence machine targets the vote*, 27 May 2026, available at: <https://www.isdglobal.org/digital-dispatch/all-operations-on-armenia-russias-influence-machine-targets-the-vote/>.

56 RFI, 389 фейковых видео: перед выборами в Армении прокремлевская сеть «Матрешка» побила собственный рекорд по дезинформации, 25 May 2026: [available here](#).

that Matroyshka's Armenian campaign intensified in the final days before the election, with the operation spreading 31 false claims about Pashinyan in just one week in late May. They also found that, by this point in the campaign, the focus of narratives promoted by Kremlin-controlled networks appeared to have shifted, with the largest proportion centred on claims that Pashinyan was losing support at home and abroad, followed by accusations of electoral fraud against Pashinyan, as well as that Pashinyan would drag Armenia into war with Russia.⁵⁷

Social Design Agency Leaks

In May 2026, *Delfi Estonia* obtained a series of leaked documents outlining the internal planning underlying a number of Russian influence operations around Europe orchestrated principally by Russia's Social Design Agency (SDA) and the Russian presidential administration. The leaks include details of a plan to influence the election in Armenia using a series of 12 media outlets owned by a Russian company called SNG Media, with one of these outlets (*Erevan One*) intended as the main vehicle of the operation, with a key focus on the Armenian diaspora in Russia. *The Insider* has described the SDA as the "Kremlin's main contractor for producing fake content".⁵⁸ According to *The Insider's* reporting on the SDA leaks, the SDA conducted trials for disinformation campaigns targeting Nikol Pashinyan in late 2025, before pitching additional ideas to the presidential administration, drawing inspiration from the earlier Doppelgänger campaign⁵⁹ – *Erevan One* was one such idea.⁶⁰

Another proposal which appears to have been implemented in 2026, based on a similar project implemented in Germany, was to create an Armenian-language Wikipedia clone, with articles edited to reflect the Kremlin's own outlook. *Bloomberg* found that three Armenian Wikipedia clones were indeed registered in January 2026 and hosted at the same IP address – though all of them were subsequently taken down by their hosting provider.⁶¹ One of the goals of this scheme would have been to attract crawler bots which could eventually "poison" the large language models underlying "AI" chatbots such as ChatGPT with pro-Russian disinformation.⁶² An expert who spoke to *Bloomberg* cautioned that less widely spoken languages, such as Armenian, present malign actors with a relatively realistic possibility of "poisoning" large language models.⁶³ NewsGuard's reporting suggests that Russia's data-poisoning efforts found some success, with certain "false claims [being] provided as responses by leading AI chatbots". In particular, a false claim about Armenia agreeing to use a national park to store French nuclear waste was repeated as legitimate by Perplexity, Copilot, You.com, and Le Chat.⁶⁴

57 NewsGuard, *Russia Takes Aim at Armenia*, 28 May 2026, available at: <https://www.newsguardtech.com/special-reports/russia-takes-aim-at-armenia/>.

58 The Insider, "Pashinyan's illness," "looming war with Russia," and "gas chambers on Mount Ararat": Moscow floods Armenia with disinfo ahead of elections, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/293081>.

59 Doppelgänger was a campaign operated by the SDA whose strategy centred on mimicking real Western media outlets. See, for example: EU Disinfo Lab, *DOPPELGÄNGER HUB*, available at: <https://www.disinfo.eu/doppelganger-hub/>; DFRLab, *Doppelgänger: How Russia mimicked real news sites and created fake ones to target US audiences*, 18 September 2024, available at: <https://dfrlab.org/2024/09/18/doppelganger-us-election/>.

60 The Insider, "Pashinyan's illness," "looming war with Russia," and "gas chambers on Mount Ararat": Moscow floods Armenia with disinfo ahead of elections, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/293081>.

61 Bloomberg, *Russia's Wiki Warfare Tries to Distort Reality, Documents Show*, 23 June 2026, available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2026-06-23/leaked-files-show-russia-s-plan-to-influence-ai-and-search-results>.

62 The Insider, "Pashinyan's illness," "looming war with Russia," and "gas chambers on Mount Ararat": Moscow floods Armenia with disinfo ahead of elections, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/293081>.

63 Bloomberg, *Russia's Wiki Warfare Tries to Distort Reality, Documents Show*, 23 June 2026, available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2026-06-23/leaked-files-show-russia-s-plan-to-influence-ai-and-search-results>.

64 NewsGuard, *Russia Targets Armenia's Elections – Early and Viciously*, 11 November 2025, available at: <https://www.newsguardtech.com/special-reports/russia-targets-armenias-elections-early-and-viciously/>.

Post-election

Once polls closed on election day, Kremlin-aligned media immediately set about undermining the legitimacy of the results – even before they had been announced. Shortly after polls closed, pro-Russian Telegram channels began circulating unsourced “exit poll” figures which put the governing Civil Contract party only marginally ahead of the main pro-Russian opposition party, Strong Armenia – 32.7% to 29%, respectively, with the combined opposition supposedly receiving 52.9% of the vote.⁶⁵ These unfounded claims starkly contradicted exit polling conducted by Civil Contract which was made public around the same time, as well as the official results which began to be announced later that night.⁶⁶ The apparent aim of this incident appears to have been to preemptively sow doubt in the official results and to add fuel to the narrative that the election had been rigged in favour of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his Civil Contract party.

The day after the election, the independent Russian outlet *Meduza* reported that pro-Kremlin and Russian state media had received explicit instructions from the Russian presidential administration to describe the election result as a “loss” for Pashinyan and to emphasise Civil Contract’s failure to win more than 50% of the vote. Instructions from the administration also reportedly included recommendations to highlight supposed violations committed during the election and to “sow doubts about [Pashinyan’s] legitimacy”.⁶⁷ The same day, Russia’s foreign ministry spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, claimed that the election had taken place amid “unprecedented pressure on the opposition and interference from the West, primarily the EU”.⁶⁸ Despite the head of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Observer Mission assessing the election as having been open, competitive, and conducted in accordance with the requirements of Armenian law,⁶⁹ pro-Kremlin media lent on claims made by Russian officials who joined the observation mission to back up Zakharova’s allegations of “pressure” and “interference”.⁷⁰

VOTE MANIPULATION

Diaspora Transportation

Perhaps the most notable element of Russia’s Armenian campaign was a purported scheme to mobilise up to 100,000 Armenians (equivalent to almost 7% of the final turnout) living in Russia to travel to Armenia to vote for the Kremlin’s preferred candidates in the election.

Reports of such a scheme began circulating in March 2026, when Armenia’s Foreign Intelligence Service issued a statement warning that Russia was seeking to influence the outcome of the election through

65 Twitter, JAMnews (@JAMnewsCaucasus), 7 June 2026, 19:17, available at: <https://x.com/JAMnewsCaucasus/status/2063671788022739018>; Armenian Club, *Exit polls released for the elections in Armenia*, 7 June 2026, available at: <https://www.armenianclub.com/2026/06/07/exit-polls-released-for-the-elections-in-armenia/>.

66 1TV.GE, *Exit Poll shows Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party leading Armenian Parliamentary Elections*, 7 June 2026, available at: <https://1tv.ge/lang/en/news/exit-poll-shows-pashinyans-civil-contract-party-leading-armenian-parliamentary-elections/>; JAMnews, *Final election results in Armenia: Pashinyan’s party wins majority*, 15 June 2026, available at: <https://jam-news.net/final-election-results-in-armenia-pashinyans-party-wins-majority/>.

67 Meduza, *Kremlin tells Russian media to portray Pashinyan’s election win with under 50% as a ‘loss’*, 8 June 2026, available at: <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2026/06/08/kremlin-tells-russian-media-to-frame-pashinyan-s-party-getting-under-50-as-a-loss>.

68 OC Media, *Zakharova: parliamentary elections held amidst ‘unprecedented pressure’ by the West*, 8 June 2026, available at: <https://oc-media.org/zakharova-parliamentary-elections-held-amidst-unprecedented-pressure-by-the-west/>.

69 PanArmenian, *CIS observers call elections open and competitive*, 8 June 2026, available at: <https://www.panarmenian.net/eng/news/334011/>.

70 RT, *Election observers pressured during controversial Armenia vote – official*, 8 June 2026, available at: <https://www.rt.com/russia/641252-armenia-parliament-election-issues/>.

the mass transportation of diaspora voters. Daniel Ioannisyan, the head of the UIC, also claimed to have knowledge of a plan to bring 80,000 voters from Russia, with a 100,000 RUB (~1,220 USD) “electoral bribe” for each voter. He further claimed that “criminal elements” were putting pressure on Armenians living in Georgia to do the same.⁷¹

On 1 June, the International Observatory for Democracy in Armenia (IODA) noted that at least one CSO monitoring the elections had reportedly documented 80 cases of Armenians whose relatives in Russia had been “offered transport, promised assistance getting Russian passports, and subjected to pressure to travel to Armenia” to induce them to vote for Strong Armenia. Though, IODA noted that it had not received any direct evidence of such cases.⁷²

The existence of such a scheme was also supported by *Reuters* reporting, which cited “interviews with five Western intelligence officials and documents” it had obtained, according to which the Kremlin had calculated a cost of 50 million USD to transport 100,000 voters to Armenia, with Russian regions issued with quotas for the number of voters they were to send to Armenia.⁷³

Voter Incentivisation and Coercion

The run-up to the election was also marked by numerous reports of vote-buying schemes operating within Armenia itself, though these cases cannot be so clearly linked to Russian interference.

In March 2026, Armenia’s Anti-Corruption Committee opened an investigation into a vote-buying scheme in Armavir Province, through which Strong Armenia officials allegedly disguised unlawful payments aimed at incentivising voters by listing the recipients as employees of a local branch of Samvel Karapetyan’s Mer Dzevov NGO, supposedly targeting individuals with “large families and wide social networks”.⁷⁴ In May, the Anti-Corruption Committee opened an investigation into a similar scheme operating in Lori Province.⁷⁵

Armenian authorities allege that Strong Armenia politician Alik Aleksanyan, the founder and head of the Mer Dzevov NGO associated with the party, also disguised payments to 1,400 individuals “intended to incentivize participation in demonstrations organised by Strong Armenia”, with funds received by Mer Dzevov from entities linked to Samvel Karapetyan’s business empire being described by the authorities as being “of criminal origin”.⁷⁶

71 JAMnews, ‘Russia trying to send tens of thousands of voters to Armenia’s elections’: debate in Yerevan, 12 March 2026, available at: <https://jam-news.net/russia-trying-to-send-tens-of-thousands-of-voters-to-armenias-elections-debate-in-yerevan/>.

72 Orer Armenian European Magazine, *Armenia: Increased Arrests of Government Critics Ahead of June Parliamentary Elections 2026*, 1 June 2026, available at: <https://orer.eu/2026/06/01/armenia-increased-arrests-of-government-critics-ahead-of-june-parliamentary-elections-2026/>.

73 Reuters, *Imported voters, fake websites: Russia’s covert efforts to stop Armenia’s pivot West*, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/imported-voters-fake-websites-russias-covert-efforts-stop-armenias-pivot-west-2026-05-29/>.

74 JAMnews, *Vote-buying in Armenia: ‘Strong Armenia’ party disguised bribes as salaries and charity*, 31 March 2026, available at: <https://jam-news.net/vote-buying-in-armenia-strong-armenia-party-disguised-bribes-as-salaries-and-charity/>.

75 Armenpress, *Authorities probe alleged vote-buying scheme involving Strong Armenia member*, 19 May 2026, available at: <https://armenpress.am/en/video/1250568>.

76 Panorama.am, *Armenian opposition member arrested*, 2 June 2026, available at: <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2026/06/02/opposition-member-arrest/3160650>.

By 10 June 2026, the Anti-Corruption Committee reported that it had opened around 115 criminal proceedings and brought forward 14 criminal cases involving 54 individuals in relation to alleged vote-buying operations.⁷⁷

In addition, the UIC and Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor (HCAV) have alleged that a Russian Orthodox minister serving at Russia's 102nd Military base in Gyumri, Timofey Ghazaryan, used his sermons at churches close to the base to promote pro-Russian messaging ahead of the election. The UIC highlighted that the churches in question had received donations from a Russian state-funded culture centre in Yerevan named Moscow House. The UIC further alleged that Armenian citizens working at the base had reported that they had been told by their superiors that they, their relatives, and their friends must vote for a specific political party or that they would face dismissal from their posts.⁷⁸

Election Day Violations

Election day itself was marked by numerous reports of electoral violations, though, once again, such reports cannot be clearly attributed to Russian interference. After polls closed, the Armenian interior ministry said that it had recorded dozens of violations and detained 18 individuals. The Office of the Prosecutor General said that it had processed 293 reports of alleged violations since February 2026, resulting in 174 criminal investigations. The Independent Observer mission said that it had recorded 536 violations at 387 polling stations by 14:00 on polling day.⁷⁹ The mission later told *Factor TV* that it had recorded violations at 800 polling stations (44% of those observed), committed by a mix of local electoral commission members, party representatives, and voters themselves, with Strong Armenia representatives responsible for the largest number of violations, ahead of other party representatives. At the same time, the mission stated that it had received numerous reports of electoral fraud which turned out to be false alarms once they were investigated. The mission stated that it had submitted nine complaints related to persistent campaigning at polling stations.⁸⁰

Intimidation

It appears that Russia may also have taken steps aimed at preventing independent third parties from documenting the conduct of the election. On 3 June 2026, HCAV received a series of threatening phone calls and emails of apparent foreign origin, which contained various threats of violence against staff and family members alongside vague demands to make the "right choice" and not to "interfere with the electoral process". The incident occurred around the same time that the Cyber Police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Armenia issued a warning that organisations may be targeted in such a way. Indeed, open sources suggest that this was not an isolated incident, with a number of individuals and organisations in Armenia reportedly being made subject to similar intimidatory and threatening communications.⁸¹

77 Panorama.am, *Armenian anti-corruption chief defends election bribery wiretaps*, 10 June 2026, available at: <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2026/06/10/anti-corruption-chief/3161435>.

78 UIC, *How 102nd Military Base interferes in Armenia's internal affairs*, 11 May 2026, available at: <https://uic.am/en/36945>.

79 The Kyiv Independent, *Russia alleges 'gross violations' in Armenia election after pro-Russian forces' defeat*, 7 June 2026, available at: <https://kyivindependent.com/high-turnout-marks-pivotal-armenian-vote-as-polls-close-on-election-day/>.

80 Factor TV, «Անկախ դիտորդ» դաշինքի ասուլիսը. ՈՒՂԻՂ, 7 June 2026, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALmsCpksZFw>.

81 HCAV, *Anatomy of a Threat: Phone Calls, Emails, and the Same IP Trace*, 4 June 2026, available at: <https://hcav.am/en/anatomy-of-a-threat/>.

Attribution

In the lead-up to the election, a number of journalistic investigations identified an array of key individuals and entities – belonging or linked to the Russian government – as having been specifically tasked with influencing the outcome of the June vote.

RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUALS IN RUSSIA

Supposedly, overall responsibility for the Armenia file within the Russian government is held by deputy prime minister Aleksei Overchuk, while, within the foreign ministry, head of the Fourth Department for CIS Countries, Mikhail Kalugin, was responsible for the Armenian election specifically.⁸²

According to *The Insider*, Kremlin information operations targeting Armenia were overseen by the “Presidential Directorate for Strategic Partnership and Cooperation”, a recently created Russian government body, led by Vadim Titov, which has links to the fugitive pro-Kremlin Moldovan oligarch Ilan Shor.⁸³ The directorate’s role was also highlighted by *Reuters*, citing four Western officials it had interviewed.⁸⁴ Supposedly, those within the Directorate who were directly responsible for the Armenian operation were Valery Chernyshov and his deputy, Dmitry Avanesov, both of whom have reportedly visited Yerevan repeatedly to meet with “local Kremlin allies”.⁸⁵ Back in April 2025, *The Moscow Times*, meanwhile, reported that the Kremlin was increasing its focus on influencing political outcomes in Armenia, citing conversations the Russian business daily *Vedomosti* had had with officials familiar with the strategy. At the time, this influence campaign was supposedly headed by the Kremlin’s “domestic policy chief”, Sergei Kiriyyenko, with a focus on “shaping public opinion and cultivating pro-Russian political figures”. The report indicated that the following departments within the presidential administration were involved: “the Department for Domestic Policy, headed by Andrei Yarin; the Department for Monitoring and Analysis of Social Processes, headed by Aleksandr Kharichev; and the Department for Public Projects, headed by Sergei Novikov”.⁸⁶

The SDA leaks also suggest a strong degree of coordination between Russia’s presidential administration and the SDA, aligning with the 2024 testimony of an FBI agent who claimed that the SDA was under the “direction and control” of the presidential administration.⁸⁷ The Gnida Project has also suggested that the SDA leaks may point to a degree of coordination between the “GRU”⁸⁸ and the presidential administration.⁸⁹ *The Insider* has described the SDA as the “Kremlin’s main contractor for producing fake

82 The Insider, *Grabbing him by the “Beard”: The Insider identifies the FSB, GRU, and SVR agents Russia sent to Armenia to take on PM Nikol Pashinyan*, 19 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/292740>.

83 *Ibid.*

84 Reuters, *Imported voters, fake websites: Russia’s covert efforts to stop Armenia’s pivot West*, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/imported-voters-fake-websites-russias-covert-efforts-stop-armenias-pivot-west-2026-05-29/>.

85 The Insider, *Grabbing him by the “Beard”: The Insider identifies the FSB, GRU, and SVR agents Russia sent to Armenia to take on PM Nikol Pashinyan*, 19 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/292740>.

86 The Moscow Times, *Russia to Ramp Up Influence Efforts in Armenia Ahead of Parliamentary Elections – Vedomosti*, 30 April 2025, available at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/04/30/russia-to-ramp-up-influence-efforts-in-armenia-ahead-of-parliamentary-elections-vedomosti-a88926>.

87 The Insider, *“Pashinyan’s illness,” “looming war with Russia,” and “gas chambers on Mount Ararat”: Moscow floods Armenia with disinfo ahead of elections*, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/293081>.

88 The “GRU” refers to the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, which serves as the principal body responsible for Russian military foreign intelligence.

89 Gnida Project, *Disinformation update: Storm-1516 almost tunnel-focused on Armenia*, 2 June 2026, available at: <https://gnidaproject.substack.com/p/disinformation-update-june-2026>.

content”.⁹⁰ Responsible individuals appearing in the leaks include Sofia Zakharova, a senior official in the presidential administration who was already sanctioned by the EU in 2024 in connection with her work with the SDA and who appears to be responsible for funding-related matters. Sergei Kiriyyenko is also referenced in the documents, which imply that he held decisionmaking power in relation to the SDA’s operations. The heads of the SDA are Ilya Gambashidze and Nikolai Tupikin.⁹¹ The head of the SDA’s media department is Aleksei Ulyanov.⁹²

Interviews conducted by *Reuters* with Western intelligence officials further highlighted the roles played by Storm-1516 and the SDA in promoting disinformation in the context of the election, though the outlet noted that it was unable to independently verify the authenticity of the alleged SDA leaks.⁹³ European officials who spoke to *Bloomberg* also apparently believed that the SDA leaks were genuine, based on the “their content and the style” resembling that of SDA documents released by the US Justice Department in 2024. Bloomberg used historical DNS data to confirm the existence of 42 websites shown in the documents, almost all of which were hosted at a single Russian IP address which also appeared in the leaks.⁹⁴

Erevan One’s editor-in-chief is Pavel Shchetinin.⁹⁵ The only other public writer at the publication is Georg Khachaturyan. However, *The Insider* identified Andrei Perla as the author of much of their content, with content also being published by Vladislav Amagayev. Shchetinin is also the owner and director of SNG Media’s legal entity and the editor-in-chief of other media outlets in its stable.⁹⁶ SNG Media’s editor-in-chief, meanwhile, is Mikhail Ledakov, who came to work with the SDA after working with Yevgeny Prigozhin’s Patriot media group.⁹⁷

The SDA leaks identify Türkiye as a preferred jurisdiction for hosting, with the IP address used for the Wikipedia clone being flagged on VirusTotal for “fraud and phishing”, while the hosting company, Ultrahost, has been flagged for frequently providing services to fraudsters.⁹⁸

The Storm-1516 operation is closely associated with the Foundation to Battle Injustice (R-FBI), which was founded by Yevgeny Prigozhin in 2021, though the R-FBI also ran its own distinct campaign in Armenia, according to the ISD.⁹⁹ Storm-1516’s materials have also been amplified by the Doppelgänger

90 The Insider, “Pashinyan’s illness,” “looming war with Russia,” and “gas chambers on Mount Ararat”: Moscow floods Armenia with disinfo ahead of elections, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/293081>.

91 OCCRP, *Leaked Documents Reveal Russian ‘Cognitive Strikes’ Against the West – Including Islamophobic ‘Pig Head’ Attacks in Paris*, 24 May 2026, available at: <https://www.occrp.org/en/investigation/leaked-documents-reveal-russian-cognitive-strikes-against-the-west-including-islamophobic-pig-head-attacks-in-paris>; The Insider, “Pashinyan’s illness,” “looming war with Russia,” and “gas chambers on Mount Ararat”: Moscow floods Armenia with disinfo ahead of elections, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/293081>.

92 The Insider, “Pashinyan’s illness,” “looming war with Russia,” and “gas chambers on Mount Ararat”: Moscow floods Armenia with disinfo ahead of elections, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/293081>.

93 Reuters, *Imported voters, fake websites: Russia’s covert efforts to stop Armenia’s pivot West*, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/imported-voters-fake-websites-russias-covert-efforts-stop-armenias-pivot-west-2026-05-29/>.

94 Bloomberg, *Russia’s Wiki Warfare Tries to Distort Reality, Documents Show*, 23 June 2026, available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2026-06-23/leaked-files-show-russia-s-plan-to-influence-ai-and-search-results>.

95 The Insider, “Pashinyan’s illness,” “looming war with Russia,” and “gas chambers on Mount Ararat”: Moscow floods Armenia with disinfo ahead of elections, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/293081>.

96 *Ibid.*

97 *Ibid.*

98 *Ibid.*

99 ISD, *All operations on Armenia: Russia’s influence machine targets the vote*, 27 May 2026, available at: <https://www.isdglobal.org/digital-dispatch/all-operations-on-armenia-russias-influence-machine-targets-the-vote/>.

network operated by the SDA, though France's digital foreign interference watchdog, Viginum, believes that this occurred opportunistically rather than on a systemic level. As with the SDA, the R-FBI reportedly now operates under the control of the presidential administration.¹⁰⁰ Storm-1516's Armenian campaign began in June or July 2025, though Armenia was only a secondary focus behind Moldova until September 2025.¹⁰¹ The SDA leaks also indicate that the SDA was actively tracking the success of Storm-1516 campaigns.¹⁰² *Erevan One* is among the outlets to republish disinformation created by Storm-1516.¹⁰³

On 1 June 2026, *The Armenian Report* published screenshots it had obtained which allegedly showed messages sent by Mika Badalyan, an activist connected to the Russian-funded Eurasia Foundation, which is linked to Ilan Shor, known for his interference in elections in Moldova. In the messages, Badalyan allegedly responds to an inquiry about him helping Armenian citizens living in Russia to travel to the country to vote; he asks for the sender's details and states that the flight will leave on 4 June. The messages led to the UIC filing criminal complaints relating to Badalyan.¹⁰⁴ Badalyan has also played a role in promoting pro-Russian disinformation during the election period, including promoting a website which appears to be connected to the Russian pro-war group Rybar.¹⁰⁵

RUSSIAN OFFICIALS IN ARMENIA

The Insider further identified a number of entities inside of Armenia itself responsible for spreading Russian influence. These reportedly include:

"The Gorchakov Fund, which promotes pro-Kremlin narratives; the National Research Institute for the Development of Communications, headed by Vladislav Gasumyanov, a career officer of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service; the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, a think tank linked to foreign intelligence; and a large number of pseudo-political analysts, experts, councils, and organizations that receive funding from the Kremlin."

Yerevan's "Russian House", an outpost of Rossotrudnichestvo (the Russian federal agency responsible for cultural outreach), headed by Vadim Felifov, has also played a role promoting the message that Armenia's future is with Russia. Rossotrudnichestvo is currently headed by Igor Chaika, through whom funding for Moldova's pro-Kremlin opposition was channelled during recent elections. Chaika is currently under US and EU sanctions.¹⁰⁶

100 The Insider, "Pashinyan's illness," "looming war with Russia," and "gas chambers on Mount Ararat": Moscow floods Armenia with disinfo ahead of elections, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/293081>.

101 *Ibid.*

102 Bloomberg, *Russia's Wiki Warfare Tries to Distort Reality, Documents Show*, 23 June 2026, available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2026-06-23/leaked-files-show-russia-s-plan-to-influence-ai-and-search-results>.

103 The Insider, "Pashinyan's illness," "looming war with Russia," and "gas chambers on Mount Ararat": Moscow floods Armenia with disinfo ahead of elections, 29 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/293081>.

104 The Armenian Report, *Alleged Election Travel Scheme Emerges as Voters Are Transported From Russia to Armenia Ahead of June 7 Vote*, 1 June 2026, available at: <https://www.thearmenianreport.com/post/alleged-election-travel-scheme-emerges-as-voters-are-transported-from-russia-to-armenia-ahead-of-jun>.

105 Gnida Project, *Disinformation update: Storm-1516 almost tunnel-focused on Armenia*, 2 June 2026, available at: <https://gnidaproject.substack.com/p/disinformation-update-june-2026>.

106 The Insider, *Grabbing him by the "Beard": The Insider identifies the FSB, GRU, and SVR agents Russia sent to Armenia to take on PM Nikol Pashinyan*, 19 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/292740>.

According to *The Insider*, Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service's (SVR) resident in Armenia is Aleksei Myshlyavkin, who acts under the cover of a trade representative embedded in the Russian Embassy in Yerevan. Myshlyavkin's deputy in Yerevan is Sergei Katin.¹⁰⁷

The Insider further alleges that Rosatom's representative in Armenia, Vyacheslav Proshkin, responsible for overseeing the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant, is in fact a GRU officer tasked with monitoring Armenia's leadership.

Other Russian intelligence personnel stationed in Armenia, according to *The Insider*, include embassy adviser Sergei Kivachuk and first secretary Vitaly Kucheruk. Kivachuk is a general within the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) whose responsibilities include keeping track of Russians living in Armenia. Kucheruk is likewise an FSB operative and was allegedly involved in operations targeting the head of Armenia's Foreign Intelligence Service, Kristinne Grigoryan. Another Russian intelligence operative in Armenia is attaché Aleksandr Gladyschuk, who previously served in the Russian defence ministry's 946th Main Centre for Geospatial Information.¹⁰⁸

RUSSIA'S ARMENIAN PROXIES

Leader of the Strong Armenia party, Samvel Karapetyan, was born in Armenia but obtained Russian citizenship after moving to the Russian city of Kaluga in the 1990s. Since then he has amassed a vast fortune estimated at around 4 billion USD, potentially making him the richest Armenian in the world. Leaked data relating to Karapetyan's 1999 passport application lists the note "IC FSB" in relation to his place of work, a note which is reportedly reserved for "foreigners working under FSB supervision or for confidential informants". A source close to Karapetyan reportedly told *The Insider* that Karapetyan's "business was building bridges with officials and security officers" and that "he was put under serious pressure and was forced to create the Strong Armenia bloc".¹⁰⁹ An *Insider* investigation recently discovered that, in 2016, Karapetyan received unsecured loans to cover debts connected to a French villa where Vladimir Putin's partner has spent time, effectively transferring the villa to Karapetyan at the expense of the Russian taxpayer.¹¹⁰ Karapetyan's "closeness to the Russian regime" was cited as a reason for his inclusion in a list of key Russian oligarchs created by the US Treasury Department in 2018.¹¹¹

Leaked documents obtained by Mikhail Khodorkovsky's Dossier Centre in May 2026 suggested that the Kremlin's strategy for influencing the election was indeed centred around Karapetyan. The leaked documents supposedly pertain to Russian "political scientists" who were "assigned" to certain Armenian opposition candidates ahead of the election – most notably Karapetyan. One such political scientist, Kremlin consultant Gleb Kuznetsov, the "head of the Expert Institute for Social Studies (EISI)" in fact identified Karapetyan's obvious ties to Russia as a potential liability, as a result of which a secondary strategy centred on Arman Tatoyan and his Wings of Unity party was developed. The leaked documents suggest that his campaign was similarly guided by EISI, with Kuznetsov's wife, Karine Sarkisyan, "preparing the launch document". The leaks included financial documents authored by Davit Aranyan,

107 *Ibid.*

108 *Ibid.*

109 *Ibid.*

110 *The Insider*, *Strong Armenia party leader Samvel Karapetyan revealed as nominal owner of villa on French Riviera used by Putin's partner Alina Kabaeva*, 25 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/292969>.

111 OC Media, *Leaked documents show Russian plans to unseat Pashinyan, ties between Karapetyan and Putin*, 26 May 2026, available at: <https://oc-media.org/leaked-documents-show-russian-plans-to-unseat-pashinyan-ties-between-karapetyan-and-putin/>.

which mentioned funding allocated to dedicated staff in Moscow. Following the leaks, the Independent Observer alliance filed an official complaint which accused Tatoyan of illegal campaign financing.¹¹²

Prosperous Armenia leader Gagik Tsarukyan likewise has links to the Kremlin. In 2019, his party signed a cooperation agreement with Putin's United Russia party, while leaks from within Russia's now disbanded Directorate for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries included a financial estimate for Tsarukyan's 2017 election campaign – these funds were allegedly transferred from a special fund operating nearby to the headquarters of the Russian presidential administration.¹¹³

On election day itself, the Independent Observer alliance singled out the "Hayakve initiative, several Russian-language Telegram channels and a CIS election observer" for circulating "misleading election-related information" and "openly campaigning for one political force".¹¹⁴ Hayakve's coordinator, Avetik Chalabyan, was arrested by Armenian authorities on 24 June 2026 on charges of "preparing to obstruct citizens' free exercise of their voting rights, acting as part of a group, and by prior agreement", following an official complaint lodged by the Independent Observer mission. Allegedly, Chalabyan met with Russian officials prior to the election, encouraging them to put pressure on Armenian citizens living abroad to vote for Strong Armenia. A recording circulated online allegedly provides evidence for these claims.¹¹⁵

In its preliminary report on the election, OSCE/ODIHR reported that, at 6% of polling stations observed by the body on election day, party representatives were assessed as overstepping their role as observers and potentially interfering in the election process. According to the report, the party representatives in question predominantly belonged to Samvel Karapetyan's Strong Armenia, as well as to the governing Civil Contract party.¹¹⁶

Official Responses to Interference

For its part, a 50 million EUR package of support provided by the EU appears to have gone some way to blunting the impact of Russia's attempts at economic coercion, with the EU acting relatively rapidly to respond to the situation, with steps taken to facilitate Armenia's access to the EU market.¹¹⁷ Likewise, the EU's sending of a civilian mission to Armenia in April to bolster the country's resilience to Russian interference was a welcome step.¹¹⁸

112 *Ibid.*

113 The Insider, *Grabbing him by the "Beard": The Insider identifies the FSB, GRU, and SVR agents Russia sent to Armenia to take on PM Nikol Pashinyan*, 19 May 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/inv/292740>.

114 EVN Report, *Armenia Votes 2026: Live Updates*, 7 June 2026, available at: <https://evnreport.com/elections/armenia-votes-2026-live-updates/>.

115 CivilNet, *Another opposition figure arrested in Armenia amid post-election crackdown*, 24 June 2026, available at: <https://civilnet.am/en/news/1012705>; Facebook, *Daniel Ioannisyan*, 24 June 2026, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/danioanis/posts/pfbid02zTF6vvLGwbi36Nc5hw8Fj1ZnzMoqVT9pvGh5Lch5gVn1aWnNqCzvjTbTE4jXUJRAI>.

116 International Election Observation Mission, Armenia – Parliamentary Elections, 7 June 2026, *Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions*, available at: https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/06/ARM%20Parliamentary%202026_PS_08.06.2026.pdf.

117 The Irish Times, *Armenia looks to Europe for escape route as Russia tightens the screws*, 1 July 2026, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/europe/2026/07/01/armenia-looks-to-europe-for-escape-route-as-russia-tightens-the-screws/>.

118 Council of the European Union, *Armenia: EU establishes a new civilian mission to contribute strengthening the country's resilience*, 21 April 2026, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/04/21/armenia-eu-establishes-a-new-civilian-mission-to-contribute-strengthening-the-country-s-resilience/>.

At the domestic level, Armenian authorities independently took steps ahead of the election to address certain types of foreseen interference. In particular, the Electoral Code was amended in January 2026 to allow the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) to rescind accreditation to election observation missions which failed to maintain political neutrality. The changes had been proposed explicitly to respond to violations committed by the Hayakve initiative during the 2025 local elections in Gyumri and Vagharshapat. These changes were not without controversy, however, especially as they were adopted in the run-up to the election.¹¹⁹ The McCain Institute, in particular, has highlighted some of the issues raised with the amendments.¹²⁰

Armenia's Anti-Corruption Committee has been praised by the Independent Observer mission for "making the necessary efforts to prevent and detect manifestations of vote buying" for "the first time in the history of the Republic of Armenia".¹²¹ At the same time, however, arrests of numerous high-profile pro-Russian politicians, particularly in the aftermath of the June election, have widely been perceived as a heavy-handed response to Russian interference on the part of the Armenian authorities. Since the election, ex-president and Armenia Alliance leader Robert Kocharyan and Prosperous Armenia leader Gagik Tsarukyan – among a slew of less senior political figures, including Kocharyan's son Sedrak¹²² – have joined Strong Armenia leader Samvel Karapetyan in being placed under arrest.¹²³ Irrespective of the merits of the cases brought by Armenian prosecutors against Samvel Karapetyan, Robert Kocharyan, Gagik Tsarukyan, or any other opposition-aligned political figure and irrespective of their potential illicit direction by the Russian state (as detailed above), this increasing trend of arrests against prominent political figures opposed to the current administration will surely serve to further feed Russian-promoted narratives which seek to portray Nikol Pashinyan's government and its recent election victory as illegitimate.

Overall Impact

Ultimately, the actual impact of the multifaceted and prolonged campaign of malign interference waged by Russia in the run-up to, during, and in the immediate aftermath of the June 2026 election cannot be reliably measured. This uncertainty is compounded by a lack of clear evidence indicating the degree to which Russia's widely reported mass diaspora transportation scheme was actually implemented.

At the same time, it is true that pro-Russian opposition parties, particularly Samvel Karapetyan's Strong Armenia, appeared to significantly overperform in the election compared to polling conducted immediately prior to the vote. Polling conducted by the Armenian Election Study for *EVN Report* in May suggested that 17.6%¹²⁴ of voters intended to cast their vote for Strong Armenia.¹²⁵ In the end, Strong

119 OC Media, *Armenia adopts law banning election monitors who 'fail to maintain political neutrality'*, 26 January 2026, available at: <https://oc-media.org/armenia-adopts-law-banning-election-monitors-who-fail-to-maintain-political-neutrality/>.

120 McCain Institute, *Assessment: Pre-Election Mission to Armenia*, 13 March 2026, available at: <https://www.mccaininstitute.org/resources/reports/assessment-pre-election-mission-to-armenia/>.

121 Independent Observer, *Preliminary Assessment of the Observation of the Elections to the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia*, available at: <https://epde.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/07.08.2026-statement-ENG-1.pdf>.

122 OC Media, *Armenia's former President Robert Kocharyan and son arrested on corruption charges*, 25 August 2026, available at: <https://oc-media.org/armenias-former-president-robert-kocharyan-and-son-arrested-on-corruption-charges/>.

123 U.S. News, *Armenian Ex-President Kocharyan Charged With Corruption in Crackdown on Government Critics*, 25 August 2026, available at: <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2026-08-25/state-prosecutors-in-armenia-detain-ex-president-kocharyan-on-corruption-charges>; Armenpress, *Samvel Karapetyan's house arrest extended by two months*, 9 July 2026, available at: <https://armenpress.am/en/article/1255200>.

124 This figure is obtained once "Don't know", "Refused to answer", "None", and "Missing" have been removed.

125 Massis Post, *EVN Report: New Poll Shows Rising Support for Pashinyan Government Ahead of Armenia's 2026 Parliamentary*

Armenia received 23.3% (340,006) of the 1,476,769 votes which were cast.¹²⁶ It is notable that this apparent discrepancy (~100,000 votes) aligns broadly with the impact that could be expected from a diaspora transportation scheme of the scale purported to have been orchestrated by Russia. Whether such a scheme was the true cause of Strong Armenia's better than expected performance, however, cannot be reliably determined, though, in its preliminary report, the Independent Observer mission concluded that "vote buying was of a mass nature and constituted one of the main mechanisms for collecting votes for certain political forces", noting that the "beneficiaries [...] received a substantially higher number of votes" than polls had suggested they would.¹²⁷

Conversely, some analysts, such as *CivilNet* political commentator Eric Hacopian have attributed the somewhat unexpected result to a backlash against Nikol Pashinyan's frequently divisive rhetoric on the campaign trail.¹²⁸ In a similar vein, Sossi Tatikyan, the director of the Yerevan Centre of Foreign and Security Policy, has questioned the degree to which Russia's information operations are likely to have impacted the results, describing the narratives promoted by pro-Russian actors as being "so explicitly manipulative that [she] would be surprised" if they were effective.¹²⁹ This assessment is supported by polling conducted by the International Republican Institute, which indicates that the Kremlin's information campaign failed to have a significant impact on public opinion. Rather, their data shows public support for Armenian membership of the EU increasing from 72% to 75% between February and May 2026.¹³⁰ Likewise, polling conducted by the Armenian Election Study for *EVN Report* showed Nikol Pashinyan's approval rating increased significantly during the same period, even in the face of intensifying Russian disinformation.¹³¹

Beyond the issue of "impact", a separate but related question concerns the degree to which the Kremlin could consider its Armenian campaign to have been a success. While Civil Contract managed to retain its parliamentary majority in the face of massive Russian interference, the loss of its constitutional majority raises serious questions as to whether it will be able to implement some of the major points of Nikol Pashinyan's agenda following the election, including finalising the peace process with Azerbaijan.¹³² Combined with the successful establishment of a consolidated pro-Russian political opposition, this weakening of Pashinyan's administration represents a major strategic victory for the Russian regime.

Indeed, reporting by *Vedemosti* on the basis of conversations with sources close to Russia's presidential administration suggested that weakening – rather than necessarily replacing – the Pashinyan government was the main goal of Russia's Armenia campaign.¹³³ As political scientist Nerses Kopalyan

Elections, 7 May 2026, available at: <https://massispost.com/2026/05/evn-report-new-poll-shows-rising-support-for-pashinyan-government-ahead-of-armenias-2026-parliamentary-elections/>.

126 CEC, *Election results and the allocation of mandates*, 7 June 2026, available at: <https://elect.am/en/results?tab=votes&view=total>.

127 Independent Observer, *Preliminary Assessment of the Observation of the Elections to the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia*, available at: <https://epde.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/07.08.2026-statement-ENG-1.pdf>.

128 CivilNet, *Armenia Votes 2026: Why Pashinyan's Win Falls Short*, 8 June 2026, available at: <https://civilnet.am/en/video/1012377>.

129 Eurasianet, *Armenian election campaign features rampant Russian disinformation*, 5 June 2026, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/armenian-election-campaign-features-rampant-russian-disinformation>.

130 RFI, 389 фейковых видео: перед выборами в Армении прокремлевская сеть «Матрешка» побила собственный рекорд по дезинформации, 25 May 2026: [available here](#).

131 EVN Report, *Incumbent Improves, Opposition Fragments: Armenia's Parliamentary Elections Take Shape*, 6 May 2026, available at: <https://evnreport.com/elections/incumbent-improves-opposition-fragments-armenias-parliamentary-elections-take-shape/>.

132 The Insider, *Armenia's Pashinyan wins election but fails to secure constitutional majority, faces risk of new escalation with Azerbaijan*, 8 June 2026, available at: <https://theins.press/en/news/293502>.

133 RUSI, *Armenia's Election: A Win for Pashinyan, Yet the Kremlin Long Game Persists*, 12 June 2026, available at: <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/armenias-election-win-pashinyan-yet-kremlin-long-game-persists>.

told NewsGuard, “a politically gridlocked, dysfunctional, and fatigued Armenia” is “precisely” what the Kremlin wants.¹³⁴ Or, as RUSI summarises, “Armenia’s election should be read less as a Russian failure than as the latest iteration of a playbook under revision”.¹³⁵

Moreover, the Kremlin’s strategy appears to extend beyond the framework of the election, as illustrated by its continued efforts to undermine the legitimacy of the results and to exert economic pressure on the country. Ultimately, Russia’s actions, combined with Yerevan’s heavy-handed crackdown on the political opposition in the run-up to and in the aftermath of the election, may have served to generate doubts as to the legitimacy of Pashinyan’s government which could present a source of instability in the coming months and years. With Armenia’s Constitutional Court currently considering a consolidated legal challenge to the election results brought by seven political groups, Russia is well positioned to exploit this vulnerability.¹³⁶ Likewise, as described in *The Irish Times*, while Armenia’s economy has “largely withstood” economic pressure from Russia with help from the EU, the governor of the Armenian central bank has warned of an ongoing risk of inflation and the devaluation of the Armenian Dram as a result of Russia’s escalating trade restrictions.¹³⁷ With the Armenian government already in a weakened position and Russia continuing to ratchet up restrictions on imports from Armenia,¹³⁸ the threat of Russia’s economic leverage to exacerbate any potential instability in Armenia remains a live one.

Conclusions

The evidence reviewed in this report indicates a sustained Russian effort to influence Armenia’s political trajectory before, during, and after the June 2026 parliamentary election. This effort combined overt economic and diplomatic pressure with covert information manipulation and reported attempts to influence electoral participation through financial inducements and coercion. Taken together, the findings point to a strategy intended to constrain Armenia’s sovereign decisionmaking, strengthen political forces favourable to Moscow, and increase the political and economic costs of pursuing closer relations with the European Union.

The Armenian case illustrates the continuing adaptation of Russian interference methods. Preparations for information operations extended well beyond the immediate campaign period, while their distribution combined established media outlets, fabricated accounts, impersonated information sources, and attempts to influence information supplied by “AI” systems. Narratives promoted by Russia exploited existing disputes over national security, relations with neighbouring states, and questions of religion and morality. These findings underline the need to directly address the organisations, financing, and technical infrastructure sustaining influence operations throughout and beyond the electoral cycle.

134 NewsGuard, *Russia Takes Aim at Armenia*, 28 May 2026, available at: <https://www.newsguardtech.com/special-reports/russia-takes-aim-at-armenia/>.

135 RUSI, *Armenia’s Election: A Win for Pashinyan, Yet the Kremlin Long Game Persists*, 12 June 2026, available at: <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/armenias-election-win-pashinyan-yet-kremlin-long-game-persists>.

136 Panorama.am, *Armenia’s Constitutional Court to review classified election documents in closed session*, 30 June 2026, available at: <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2026/06/30/Constitutional-Court/3163032>.

137 The Irish Times, *Armenia looks to Europe for escape route as Russia tightens the screws*, 1 July 2026, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/europe/2026/07/01/armenia-looks-to-europe-for-escape-route-as-russia-tightens-the-screws/>.

138 The Moscow Times, *Russia Issues Sweeping Ban on Armenian Imports After Pashinyan’s Victory*, 11 June 2026, available at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/06/11/russia-issues-sweeping-ban-on-armenian-imports-after-pashinyans-victory-a92984>.

The strength of available evidence varies across the activities examined. Public statements and trade restrictions provide direct evidence of Russian state pressure, while investigations into several information operations identify substantive links to Russian state structures and contractors. Questions remain about the implementation and scale of the reported diaspora transportation scheme, the responsibility for threats against observers, and the relationship between particular domestic electoral violations and foreign direction. These distinctions matter: political affinity with Russia, diaspora participation, and opposition activity do not, by themselves, establish involvement in unlawful interference.

The campaign's effect on electoral behaviour cannot be reliably quantified. Civil Contract retained its parliamentary majority, but this outcome does not establish that Russian interference had no effect. By the same token, discrepancies between opinion polls and election results do not prove that diaspora transportation, vote-buying, or information manipulation caused particular electoral gains. Online viewing figures indicate circulation rather than persuasion. The evidence supports concern about a broader effort to weaken institutional trust and constrain Armenian policy choices, while leaving the extent of its success unresolved.

Armenia's response must strengthen the democratic institutions that interference seeks to undermine. The international election observation mission led by OSCE/ODIHR assessed the election as competitive and generally well administered, while identifying concerns about campaign conditions, financial transparency, and perceptions of selective enforcement. These findings reinforce the importance of impartial investigations and equal treatment of political contestants.

Continued economic pressure and efforts to discredit the electoral process indicate that the threat extends beyond election day. A durable response requires sustained domestic oversight, independent journalism, accountable technology providers, and international assistance that reduces vulnerabilities to coercion. Its success should be measured by citizens' ability to make informed political choices freely and by the credibility of the institutions responsible for protecting that freedom.

Recommendations

TO THE ARMENIAN AUTHORITIES

- 1. Conduct impartial investigations into suspected interference and electoral coercion:** Prioritise the financing, organisation, and implementation of alleged vote-buying, coerced/incentivised travel, disguised payments, and threats against observers. Investigations should establish the responsibilities of organisers, funders, and intermediaries, including any foreign connections. Preserve financial and digital evidence, seek international cooperation where necessary, and publish substantiated findings while protecting witnesses and respecting the presumption of innocence. Investigative authorities must apply the same evidentiary standards to all political actors;
- 2. Strengthen transparency and oversight of political financing:** Address spending through third parties, affiliated charities, businesses, media outlets, and online intermediaries, including expenditure incurred before the formal campaign period. Require timely, accessible disclosure of funding sources, in-kind support, and paid political promotion. Equip oversight bodies to identify concealed funding and investigate suspicious financial relationships, with transparent criteria for selecting cases. Develop reforms through public consultation sufficiently in advance of future elections;

3. **Maintain a permanent mechanism for identifying and responding to foreign interference:** Clarify responsibilities among electoral, investigative, financial oversight, and cybersecurity bodies, with safeguards for their respective independence. Establish secure channels through which journalists, researchers, and civil society organisations can submit evidence without compromising their autonomy or confidential sources. Publish regular assessments that distinguish verified incidents from unresolved allegations and explain the basis for institutional responses;
4. **Protect voters, election observers, and journalists from intimidation:** Ensure confidential reporting channels, prompt threat assessments, and access to legal assistance and protective measures. Investigate the threats directed at HCAV and other organisations, including possible foreign involvement. Ensure that employees can report pressure from public or private employers without retaliation. Provide accessible information on ballot secrecy and voter rights, including to citizens living abroad, while protecting lawful travel and electoral participation; and
5. **Embed democratic safeguards in all counter-interference measures:** Ensure that investigations, restrictions, and sanctions respond to demonstrable conduct and remain subject to effective independent review. Protect peaceful opposition activity, journalism, and legitimate cultural, religious, and diaspora engagement. Apply clear, proportionate rules to observer accreditation, with timely appeal procedures. Allegations of foreign interference should never substitute for evidence or justify restrictions on lawful criticism of the government.

TO THE EUROPEAN UNION AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

6. **Reduce Armenia's exposure to economic coercion:** Develop practical contingency arrangements for politically motivated trade restrictions and disruptions to essential supplies. Priorities should include assistance to affected exporters, access to alternative markets, support for meeting relevant product standards, and gradual diversification of energy and trading relationships. Assistance should reach the households and businesses bearing the immediate costs of coercion, with transparent eligibility criteria and oversight;
7. **Provide sustained support across the electoral cycle:** Build on the EU Partnership Mission in Armenia and other cooperation arrangements to strengthen institutional capacity, evidence preservation, and crisis preparedness. Complement assistance to state institutions with predictable funding for independent election observation, investigative journalism, factchecking, and digital security. Maintain support after elections and protect recipients' operational and editorial independence; and
8. **Pursue coordinated, evidence-based accountability:** Support investigations into the individuals, entities, and financial arrangements responsible for interference, including cooperation across jurisdictions where relevant infrastructure or assets are located. Assess targeted sanctions and other lawful measures where substantiated conduct meets the applicable criteria. Coordinate action against responsible organisers, contractors, and financial enablers, with due process safeguards and periodic review of both effectiveness and unintended consequences.

TO SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS, HOSTING PROVIDERS, AND "AI" DEVELOPERS

9. **Disrupt deceptive networks and improve transparency:** Invest in Armenian-language expertise and reliable reporting channels for independent local researchers and election

observers. Investigate coordinated inauthentic behaviour, impersonation, and concealed political advertising, including connections between accounts, websites, and paid distribution. Preserve relevant evidence before removing material, subject to privacy and legal safeguards. Publish meaningful information about enforcement decisions and provide accessible appeal mechanisms; and

- 10. Address the manipulation of information supplied by “AI” systems:** Test Armenian-language services against documented false claims and strengthen verification of source provenance, including safeguards against cloned websites and fabricated publications. Examine vulnerabilities in both information retrieval and training data. Work with independent Armenian-language experts to correct recurring errors and assess whether remedies remain effective as deceptive sources reappear.

TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, INDEPENDENT MEDIA, AND RESEARCHERS

- 11. Sustain collaborative monitoring and accessible public information:** Maintain cooperation between election observers, investigative journalists, financial researchers, and digital analysts beyond campaign periods. Use shared evidence standards and secure referral procedures while protecting sources and personal data. Explain recurring manipulation methods in accessible Armenian-language reporting, verify claims about electoral procedures promptly, and provide audiences with clear routes to reliable information and assistance.

