

## **Armenia's voters were offered a genuine choice against a backdrop of direct foreign pressure and uneven campaign opportunities**

YEREVAN, 8 June – The 7 June 2026 parliamentary elections offered voters a genuine choice among political alternatives in a well-run process, although direct pressure from abroad, in the form of escalating trade restrictions and security threats were observed during the campaign, aimed at unduly influencing voters in favour of the opposition, international observers said in a preliminary statement released today.

The campaign was highly confrontational, with divisive rhetoric, and was marked by allegations of vote-buying and other electoral violations that led to numerous criminal proceedings against opposition candidates and activists, resulting in many opposition supporters refraining from actively engaging in the campaign. This, along with pressure on public sector employees to attend ruling party events, and recently introduced social and economic measures, raised concerns about the equality of opportunity to campaign, the statement says.

“The concentration of arrests and criminal prosecutions against opposition figures contributed to perceptions of selective justice, while a polarized media landscape, inflammatory rhetoric, misinformation, and persistent foreign pressure and interference challenged Armenia’s democratic resilience and the integrity of public debate,” said Farah Karimi, Special Co-ordinator and leader of the short-term OSCE observer mission. “This underscores the importance of continued efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, safeguard fundamental freedoms, and foster public trust in democratic processes.”

“The Armenian elections took place in a particularly tense geopolitical context, with direct foreign interference,” said Damien Cottier, Head of the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. “In particular, pressure and threats from Russian authorities reached an unprecedented and worrying level.”

The process was governed by revised election-related laws and regulations that provide a sound basis for democratic elections. Changes in recent years were mostly introduced through extensive consultative process and worked to improve the legal framework, but some gaps and ambiguities persist, and a number of previous ODIHR and Council of Europe Venice Commission recommendations remain unaddressed.

“The importance of these elections, combined with polarizing rhetoric throughout the campaign, created a tense atmosphere for both voters and election officials,” said Jevrosima Pejović, Head of the OSCE PA delegation. “Election bodies operated under heightened scrutiny, while voters were exposed to sustained political pressure and intense public debate. Tensions arising from domestic and external factors added to the pressure surrounding these elections and influenced public perception of the quality of electoral administration, highlighting the importance of promoting a constructive political climate and strengthening public confidence in electoral bodies.”

The election administration managed technical preparations professionally and efficiently, and enjoyed stakeholders’ trust. Election day proceedings were assessed overwhelmingly positively in the vast majority of polling stations observed.

“We met devoted polling station members, a large majority of whom were women, who performed their duties with dedication and attention. Some voters were lacking basic information about their polling stations and voting procedures, and the Armenian authorities should consider working on better voter information,” said Nathalie Loiseau, Head of the EP delegation. “The elections were generally peaceful and without incidents. The electoral process was calm and very well organised, procedures seemed meticulously observed, and small inconsistencies before counting were carefully verified.”

Online campaigning was extensive, and its regulation is limited, reducing transparency and oversight. The online campaign was confrontational and divisive. The ODIHR mission noted the use of manipulative, false and AI-generated content disseminated by some candidates, as well as inauthentic and third-party accounts to discredit opponents, the government and the electoral process. Overall, the authorities took steps to address disinformation, but the transparency and effectiveness of these efforts were limited by the lack of publicly available information.

Amendments to campaign finance rules expanded the definition of campaign expenditures, increased donation and expenditure limits, and redistributed oversight responsibilities. Still, a number of gaps remain, limiting transparency, accountability and integrity of party and campaign finance.

Despite gender quotas for the election administration and parliament, as well as financial incentives for parties maintaining gender-balanced governing bodies, women’s participation in public and political life remained low. Women comprised 37.3 per cent of candidates.

The media environment is pluralistic but polarized, and the ODIHR mission media monitoring found that most outlets were instrumentalized by contestants to amplify mutual insults and divisive campaign rhetoric, offering little substantive analysis of contestants’ platforms. Public television displayed clear bias in favour of the ruling party, contrary to its legal obligations and public mandate. At the same time, several private outlets portrayed the government negatively and provided favourable coverage to selected opposition contestants. All combined, this undermined voters’ opportunity to make an informed choice.

“Armenia’s voters were given – and took – the opportunity to make a genuine choice in a professionally managed election process and a vibrant and pluralistic, if often highly polarized campaign,” said Janez Lenarčič, head of the election observation mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. “Unfortunately, they had to make that choice against the backdrop of unprecedented foreign interference and pressure, in the form of punitive trade measures and day-by-day threats of further negative consequences contingent on which choice they made.”