WEAPONIZING THE LAW:



ARMENIA'S POST-ELECTION ESCALATION AGAINST POLITICAL OPPONENTS

2026 | NOVEMBER

IODA
International Observatory for Democracy in Armenia

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From September 28 to October 1, 2026, an IODA delegation assessed Armenia's democratic and human rights environment after the June 2026 parliamentary elections. The delegation was composed of Executive Board members Sarah Leah Whitson, Jose Maria Aranaz and Hrair Balian, accompanied by Yerevan-based research assistant Anna Ivanyan.

The IODA delegation met with:

- parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition parties;
- defense counsel of high-profile detainees;
- domestic human rights organizations; and
- the European Union Delegation.

Notably, state authorities declined to engage with IODA. The Prime Minister's Office, the ruling party and the Ministry of Justice did not respond to IODA requests for meetings. The Investigative Committee, the Anti-Corruption Committee, and the Constitutional Court declined to meet.

Key Findings

IODA's investigation has found that the post-election environment in Armenia has been defined by a sustained, systemic expansion of judicial, administrative, and prosecutorial measures directed against political opposition entities, elected lawmakers, civic leaders, and affiliated corporate bodies. Concentrated **predominantly in the weeks immediately preceding and following the June 2026 parliamentary vote**, these targeted actions have unfolded within an exceptionally hostile and polarized electoral context marked by aggressive political discourse and the institutionalization of punitive state mechanisms. Rather than operating as isolated enforcement operations, the documented arrests, pre-trial detention orders, non-conviction-based asset forfeitures, and regulatory interventions demonstrate a coordinated utilization of the administrative and judicial apparatus, raising significant structural concerns regarding the selective application of the law, the erosion of judicial independence, and the progressive narrowing of the operational environment for political pluralism.

The IODA delegation focused its investigation on the legal and factual bases of the prosecution and detention of the leadership of the country's three main opposition parties, as well as the leadership of the Armenian church. Its investigation found that the ruling party has weaponized its effective control over the judiciary and prosecutorial functions to deliberately and selectively target opposition and clergy, bringing specious charges against them. It has relied extensively on the country's pre-trial detention and asset confiscation laws to imprison its political targets and strip them and their family members of their assets without any verdict or finding of guilt, and with inadequate judicial oversight or due process protections.

1. **Abuse of Pre-trial Detention Laws**: IODA has found that prosecutors have abused pre-trial detention powers as a default enforcement tool to imprison or detain political opponents charged with various crimes for extended periods of time. As of April 2026, 48.1% of Armenia's prisoners have not been convicted, compared with 21.8% in Georgia and 30.1% in Russia. This systemic overreliance on pre-trial custody falls disproportionately on the political opposition: for instance, of the 115 electoral corruption proceedings initiated by the Anti-Corruption Committee since February 7, 2026, 97.4% target major opposition blocs—specifically the Strong Armenia alliance (67%), Prosperous Armenia (20.8%), and the Armenia alliance (9.6%)—resulting in 242 individuals charged, 52 held in pre-trial detention, and another 48 placed under house arrest.

   Armenia's pretrial detention law permits pretrial detention only as a last resort, based on a judicial finding that the defendant risks obstructing the investigation or tampering with evidence, pressuring witnesses or fleeing the country. However, IODA found that courts routinely adopt prosecutors' generic, copy-paste justifications for seeking pretrial detention without any individual assessment and review of the facts in each case.

   Between 2018 and 2022, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled against Armenia in 19 cases for violating Article 5 § 3 of the Convention—which protects criminal suspects from arbitrary detention by guaranteeing prompt judicial review and requiring concrete, individualized reasons to hold someone in custody—finding that domestic authorities instead relied on these exact kinds of generalized, boilerplate allegations.

   IODA also examined cases where the government has detained political opposition members under house arrest, but arbitrarily banned their ability to communicate, isolating them almost as fully as prison. The government has also abused preventive restraint provisions under **Armenia's Criminal Procedure Code** to issue travel bans ("bans on leaving the country") against dozens of political opposition members and at least eight senior clergy of the Armenian Apostolic Church—including Catholicos Garegin II and six bishops—facing politically charged investigations. These bans have cut opposition figures and clergy off from international bodies and the diaspora.

2. **Abuse of Asset Confiscation Laws:** IODA found that state enforcement agencies have systematically deployed non-conviction-based civil forfeiture and "public priority interest" expropriations to dismantle the financial base of political opponents and major independent economic actors. Rather than operating as neutral anti-corruption tools, these mechanisms combine retroactive scrutiny dating back to 1991, reversed burdens of proof, and pre-judgment corporate takeovers to inflict immediate commercial paralysis. In high-profile cases targeting Samvel Karapetyan, Gagik Tsarukyan, and former President Robert Kocharyan, authorities have bypassed international arbitration rulings to seize physical control of major enterprises like Electric Networks of Armenia, installed state-backed interim managers over private commercial holdings prior to final judgment, and used time-barred criminal indictments as legal triggers to pursue parallel civil asset seizures. These abuses are reinforced by structural due-process deficits within the Anti-Corruption Court—including direct executive pressure

and disciplinary threats against judges, as well as prohibitive ad valorem state duty fees (reaching up to 4%–5% on appeal) that lock defendants with frozen bank accounts out of appellate review—violating international standards on property rights, the presumption of innocence, and the prohibition on politically motivated enforcement under Article 18 of the ECHR.

3. **Selective Prosecution of Political Opposition — Party Leadership Targeted:** Following the June 2026 parliamentary elections, the government dramatically expanded its targeted arrests and prosecutions of political opponents, jailing or detaining the leaders of Armenia's three main opposition blocs while moving to seize their assets. IODA found that authorities have weaponized sweeping anti-corruption and criminal statutes—often relying on decades-old allegations—to neutralize opposition leadership and dismantle their financial base through proceedings devoid of due process.

    - **Strong Armenia.** Founder Samvel Karapetyan has been held in pre-trial detention or under house arrest since June 2025, and was re-detained in early November 2026. Concurrently, the executive branch moved to expropriate his company, Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA), citing "overriding public interest." The Anti-Corruption Committee indicted his nephew, Narek Karapetyan—now head of the "Strong Armenia" parliamentary faction—on charges of tax evasion and money laundering, and the Anti-Corruption Court imposed a bail of 1 billion AMD.
    - **Armenia Alliance.** Anti-Corruption Committee investigators arrested former President Robert Kocharyan, leader of the Armenia Alliance, and his son Sedrak within 24 hours of a heated parliamentary exchange between the Prime Minister and Kocharyan's younger son, Armenia Faction MP Levon Kocharyan. Prosecutors charged them with large-scale money laundering and abuse of official authority in connection with property allocations dating back to the 2000s, and froze approximately $310 million in family assets. The Anti-Corruption Court subsequently extended the former president's detention—even while he was hospitalized—and he is currently held in the Yerevan-Kentron Penitentiary Institution (commonly known as the NSS basement prison or former KGB isolation cell).
    - **Prosperous Armenia**. Law enforcement officers arrested party leader Gagik Tsarukyan in a televised operation that his associates and civil society organizations described as deliberate public humiliation. The Prosecutor General's Office and the Anti-Corruption Committee charged him with illegal entrepreneurship, large-scale money laundering, and electoral bribery. The Anti-Corruption Court placed his primary industrial assets under state interim management, while the state is seeking the civil forfeiture of approximately $289 million in holdings.
    - The systematic pressure on opposition candidates is exemplified by three prominent cases involving high-ranking figures actively involved in the electoral cycle. On May 23, 2026, **Andranik Tevanyan**—leader of the *Mother Armenia* alliance and second on the *Prosperous Armenia* electoral list—was arrested following a public insinuation of

unlawful espionage by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Although initially subjected to grave state secrecy accusations involving foreign intelligence and a purported $622,000 transaction, the Prosecutor General's Office abruptly dropped all espionage and foreign recruitment charges just prior to the commencement of closed-door judicial proceedings on September 8, 2026. Similarly, on June 23, 2026, law enforcement targeted **Ishkhan Saghatelyan**, a sitting Member of Parliament from the *Armenia* bloc and representative of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Supreme Body. Authorities conducted intrusive residential searches and secured a sweeping judicial freeze on 258 million AMD worth of assets belonging to Saghatelyan and his spouse under allegations concerning asset declaration compliance and interference with frozen property. Concurrently, **Avetik Chalabyan**—coordinator of the *HayaQve* initiative, which had recently formalized a cooperative pact with the *Strong Armenia* alliance—was arrested on June 24, 2026, and placed in pretrial detention under Article 43-210 (Part 2, Clauses 5 and 6) of the Criminal Code for alleged conspiracy to obstruct electoral rights through the abuse of official influence.

4. **Prosecution of the Armenian Apostolic Church:** The government has launched an unprecedented campaign of criminal prosecution and pre-trial detention against the highest echelons of the Armenian Apostolic Church in apparent retribution for clerical criticism of state policies. IODA's review of these multiple, parallel criminal proceedings—encompassing the case against Catholicos Garegin II and six bishops, the prosecution of Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan alongside 17 lay co-defendants, and the separate cases targeting Archbishops Mikayel Ajapahyan and Arshak Khachatryan and Bishop Mkrtich Proshyan—demonstrates a concerted effort to punish religious leaders critical of the Prime Minister.

   The institutional confrontation escalated significantly in June 2025, when Prime Minister Pashinyan demanded Catholicos Garegin II's resignation following the pontiff's remarks at an international conference in Switzerland accusing Azerbaijan of ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh and border incursions into Armenia. In February 2026, the Investigative Committee indicted the Catholicos and six bishops for defrocking a bishop in defiance of a civil-court injunction—marking the first criminal prosecution of a Catholicos even compared to the Soviet era. Although the underlying civil injunction was later revoked for lack of jurisdiction over internal church matters, the criminal charges remain active. Separately, Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan spent nearly a year in pre-trial detention on terrorism charges before being transferred to house arrest in June 2026 (while all 17 lay co-defendants were released awaiting trial, and publicly alleged assassination plots never appeared in the indictment), and Archbishops Ajapahyan and Khachatryan and Bishop Proshyan have faced separate prosecutions and pre-trial detention. Six UN Special Procedures mandate holders have formally raised alarm over Armenia's misuse of counterterrorism laws and arbitrary detention of clergy and opposition activists.

5. **Erosion of Judicial and Prosecutorial Independence:** IODA found that the Armenian executive branch has systematically undermined the independence of the judiciary, prosecution service, and key oversight institutions, turning them into compliant tools for political enforcement. As documented in IODA's previous report, this institutional capture stems from the ruling Civil Contract party leveraging its parliamentary majority to staff nominally independent bodies with executive loyalists. Following the controversial 2022 dismissal and subsequent prosecution of former Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) Chair Ruben Vardazaryan, authorities installed former Justice Minister Karen Andreasyan to lead the SJC—a post he resigned in November 2024 alongside several cabinet and law enforcement chiefs upon the Prime Minister's request. A similar pattern characterizes the appointments of former Prime Minister's Assistant Anna Vardapetyan as Prosecutor General, former ruling-party MP Vahagn Hovakimyan as Chair of the Central Electoral Commission, and former ruling-party MP Vladimir Vardanyan to the Constitutional Court in March 2026 (where he was subsequently elected Court President in November 2026). This top-down alignment directly compromises day-to-day judicial and prosecutorial decision-making. Facing targeted SJC disciplinary proceedings, salary penalties, and public threats of dismissal from the Prime Minister, judges are heavily pressured to rubber-stamp prosecutorial detention requests and pre-judgment asset freezes. Concurrently, the Prosecutor General's Office and specialized law enforcement agencies routinely launch investigations immediately following executive directives or parliamentary clashes, enforcing the law selectively against political opponents.

Context

The Parliamentary elections held in June 2026 took place amid acute polarization and geopolitical rivalry. Turnout rose to 58.97%, up from 49.4% in 2021. The campaign centered on Prime Minister Pashinyan. He cast the three main opposition forces as a corrupt, pro-Moscow three-headed party of war and openly threatened their leaders with prosecution and loss of their assets. Western and Russian officials signaled support for opposing sides, and Baku warned that a change of government would endanger peace. Together, they framed the vote as a choice between peace and war, crowding out debate on good governance and due process. The elections produced the following party votes for the Prime Minister's ruling party, Civil Contract, and the three leading opposition parties:

Party	Vote share	Seats (of 105)
Civil Contract	49.82%	64
Strong Armenia Alliance	23.28%	29
Armenia Alliance	9.93%	12
Prosperous Armenia	3.95%	0

Prosperous Armenia finished just under the 4% threshold required for parliamentary seats. This was a result of the Central Electoral Commission's decision to annul the results of three polling stations

without ordering a repeat vote. The Constitutional Court upheld that decision, but the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) criticized it. Projections indicate that had the annulled votes been counted, the party would have won five seats.

Civil Contract fell short of the two-thirds constitutional supermajority it hoped to secure, which would have allowed it to unilaterally initiate changes to the Constitution's fundamental provisions and submit core amendments—including proposed revisions to the Constitution's preamble and its reference to Armenia's Declaration of Independence—to a national referendum, a key goal of the Prime Minister and a central condition of Azerbaijan for signing a peace treaty. However, the party's three-fifths majority is still sufficient to appoint and dismiss, without opposition consent, a wide range of judicial and oversight officials, including judges of the Constitutional Court and the Court of Cassation, members of the Supreme Judicial Council, the Prosecutor General, and the Human Rights Defender. It also enables the ruling party to pass ordinary legislation and constitutional laws without opposition support, falling short only where a two-thirds threshold is required to alter core constitutional articles or call a constitutional referendum.

Recommendations

IODA's report offers detailed recommendations to both the Government of the Republic of Armenia and international partners to address these shortcomings. Principal among them are recommendations to the Armenian government to enforce pre-trial detention strictly as a last resort free from boilerplate justifications, overhaul the 2020 civil asset forfeiture law in consultation with the Venice Commission, and safeguard judicial independence by ending executive pressure and the weaponization of the Supreme Judicial Council. To the international community—including the European Union (EU), United Nations (UN), Council of Europe (CoE), and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)—IODA recommends tying financial and political support to strict rule-of-law benchmarks, establishing mandatory quarterly monitoring frameworks with civil society input, deploying urgent UN and EU fact-finding missions, and issuing proactive public condemnations of politically motivated prosecutions.

II. METHODOLOGY

This report presents the findings of the International Observatory for Democracy in Armenia's (IODA) fact-finding mission conducted in Armenia from September 28 to October 1, 2026. The delegation was composed of IODA Executive Board members **Sarah Leah Whitson**, **Jose Maria Aranaz** and **Hrair Balian**, and IODA research assistant in Yerevan **Anna Ivanyan**.

To ensure an exhaustive, balanced, and objective evaluation of Armenia's post-election state of democratic and human rights environment, the delegation sought structured engagement with a broad cross-section of national and international stakeholders. The mission prioritized direct consultations with government officials, parliamentary leaders, judicial and law enforcement authorities, opposition political entities, legal counsel in high-profile proceedings, and independent civil society organizations.

Engagement with State Authorities and Independent Bodies

In accordance with international standards for independent human rights monitoring, the delegation placed primary importance on soliciting official perspectives from state authorities regarding post-election legal proceedings, administrative practices, and due process guarantees. However, government engagement was substantially restricted due to non-response or formal declines from key public bodies:

- **Legislative Leadership:** Official requests for meetings addressed to the Office of the Prime Minister and the leadership of the ruling parliamentary faction received no response. A requested consultation with the Chair of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on State and Legal Affairs—a member of the ruling party—was declined, with the Chair citing travel outside the country during the mission period.
- **Ministries:** The Ministry of Justice did not respond to formal inquiries for scheduling requests submitted by the delegation.
- **Investigative and Judicial Bodies:** Given the report's focus on judicial independence, detention practices, and procedural fair trial guarantees, the delegation requested formal consultations with core investigative and judicial institutions. Meetings requested with the **Investigative Committee**, the **Anti-Corruption Committee**, and the **Constitutional Court** were all formally declined– all pointing to scheduling conflicts.

Consultations with Parliamentary and Non-Parliamentary Political Actors

The delegation held detailed discussions with political parties' leadership to examine parliamentary dynamics, post-election legal challenges, and the state of pluralism:

- **Parliamentary Opposition:** The delegation met with leaders and representatives of the parliamentary opposition factions, specifically the **"Armenia Alliance"** and **"Strong Armenia"**. Within the National Assembly, the delegation met with the Chair of the Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs, an opposition Member of Parliament from the "Armenia Alliance", to review legislative oversight mechanisms and systemic human rights concerns.
- **Non-Parliamentary Opposition:** Consultations were conducted with representatives of the "**Prosperous Armenia Party"**. Discussions focused on the post-election environment, including procedural concerns regarding the annulment of results in three polling stations without repeat elections, which effectively prevented the party from securing parliamentary representation by a margin of a few hundred votes, as well as mounting pressure on the party in the context of the post-election arrests affecting the party's leadership. Consultations were also held with "**Hayaqve Civic Union**".

Case-Based Legal Consultations

To conduct a rigorous, case-specific assessment of ongoing criminal prosecutions, pre-trial detention orders, and asset confiscation proceedings targeting opposition leaders, public figures, and religious institutions, the delegation met with key affected individuals and their defense teams, including:

- The legal counsel representing former President **Robert Kocharyan** and his son **Sedrak Kocharyan**.
- The legal counsel representing the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, **Garegin II**, alongside six senior bishops of the Armenian Apostolic Church.
- **Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan** and his legal defense team.
- **Avetik Chalabyan** and the leadership of **Hayaqve Civic Union**.

Civil Society and International Consultations

- **Domestic Human Rights Organizations:** To evaluate broader systemic trends regarding the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, and judicial integrity, the delegation conducted consultations with prominent civil society organizations, including the **Armenian Center for Political Rights**, **Protection of Rights Without Borders (PRWB)**, and **Committee26**.
- **International Partners:** To contextualize its findings within broader international monitoring frameworks, the delegation met with representatives of the **Delegation of the European Union to Armenia**.

III. POLITICAL CONTEXT & ELECTION AFTERMATH

The parliamentary elections of June 2026 took place within an intensely polarized political environment, characterized by deep societal fractures and acute geopolitical rivalries over Armenia's strategic orientation. Voter turnout reached 58.97%, a notable increase from the 49.4% recorded in 2021. While external observers often characterized the election as a binary geopolitical choice between Western alignment and traditional security ties with the Russian Federation, this framing obscured complex domestic dynamics, including an accelerated consolidation of executive power.[1]

The OSCE/ODIHR observation mission concluded that the election was peaceful and well-run, offering voters a genuine choice. However, the electoral process was adversely affected by significant external pressure from abroad, a highly confrontational campaign climate, polarized media coverage favoring the ruling party, and notable transparency gaps. While observers noted no systematic misuse of administrative resources at the local level, they documented credible allegations of pressure on voters to attend ruling party campaign events.[2] These instances, combined with recently introduced socio-economic initiatives that disproportionately benefited the incumbent, compromised the equality of campaign opportunities and ran counter to OSCE commitments.[3]

External Coercion, Electoral Framing, and Voter Agency

The electoral campaign was marked by an exceptionally individualized tone, centered heavily on the persona and public addresses of "Civic Contract" leader and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Rather than focusing on programmatic policy debates, the three major oppositional parties and main opponents were framed through hostile rhetoric, characterizing rival coalitions as a corrupt, "three-headed party of war" acting as foreign proxies for Moscow. Public speeches frequently featured explicit threats of asset dispossession and criminal prosecution directed at the leadership of the parties. This highly personalized and combative discourse detracted from standard democratic deliberation, fostering an environment defined by political polarization and punitive intent. Concurrently, voter agency was significantly constrained by external pressures. Major global and regional stakeholders treated the election as an arena for geopolitical influence, with

[1]Armenpress. "CEC Announces Final Results of Armenia's Parliamentary Elections," June 14, 2026, https://armenpress.am/en/article/1252978
[2]OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, "Armenia's Voters Were Offered a Genuine Choice Against a Backdrop of Direct Foreign Pressure and Uneven Campaign Opportunities," press release, October 2026, https://www.oscepa.org/en/news-a-media/press-releases/2026/armenias-voters-were-offered-a-genuine-choice-against-a-backdrop-of-direct-foreign-pressure-and-uneven-campaign-opportunities
[3]OSCE. "Armenia, Parliamentary Elections, 7 June 2026: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions," June 8, 2026. https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/664831

public statements from Western officials signaling support for the incumbent administration, while Moscow indicated backing for key opposition figures.

More consequential, however, was the impact of regional security conditions on domestic public discourse. The campaign was increasingly shaped by existential security arguments, wherein the ruling party linked its retention of power directly to the preservation of peace. This messaging coincided with rhetoric from Baku warning that a change in Armenian leadership would endanger the peace process.[4] This alignment of external and domestic narratives effectively framed the vote around the immediate threat of renewed conflict, narrowing the space for substantive policy debate on democratic governance, domestic institutional reform, and due process guarantees.

Electoral Results and Parliamentary Composition

Following the confirmation of results by the Central Electoral Commission and the subsequent review by the Constitutional Court, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's ruling Civil Contract party retained its governing majority, securing 49.82% of the vote. The newly formed Strong Armenia Alliance, led by Samvel Karapetyan, received 23.28%, while former President Robert Kocharyan's Armenia Alliance won 9.93%.

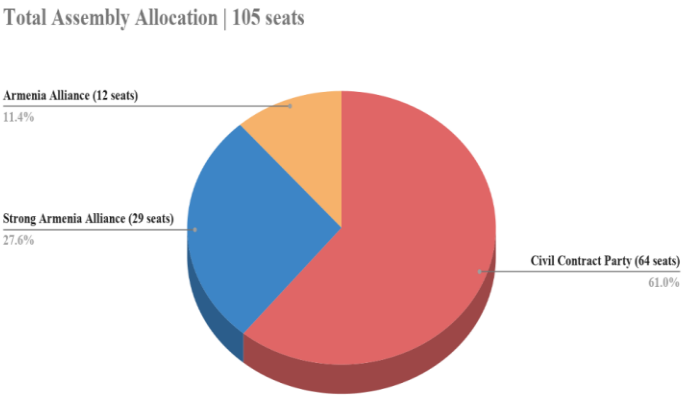
The parliamentary seat allocation was decisively shaped by a contested decision concerning the Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP), which officially recorded 3.95% of the national vote—falling short of the 4.0% threshold by a mere 156 votes. This outcome followed the Central Electoral Commission's (CEC) decision to annul results from three polling stations and exclude those ballots entirely, rather than ordering a repeat vote as provided under Article 101 of the Electoral Code. This exclusion directly altered the election outcome: the 222 votes cast for the PAP at those three precincts were more than enough to push the party past the threshold into parliament. CEC Chair Vahagn Hovakimyan justified omitting a re-vote by alleging voters might engage in "tactical voting" to alter known results.[5] However, preliminary tallies prove that PAP voters in those precincts had already provided the necessary margin before the annulment, rendering the CEC's decision legally dubious and politically decisive.[6] Had repeat voting been conducted or the annulled precincts retained, projections indicated that Prosperous Armenia would have secured five seats, thereby reducing Civil Contract's direct seat count from 64 to 61. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) criticized the Central Election Commission for

[4] Багирова, Фарида. "Гарант Мира И Стабильности: Азербайджан Не Позволит Укрепиться Реваншизму На Южном Кавказе." 1news.az | Новости, May 12, 2026. [Bagirova, Farida. "A guarantor of peace and stability: Azerbaijan will not allow revanchism to take root in the South Caucasus"] https://1news.az/news/20260512163318756-Garant-mira-i-stabilnosti-Azerbaidzhan-ne-pozvolit-ukrepitsya-revanshizmu-na-YUzhnom-Kavkaze

[5] Helsinki Committee of Armenia. "Observation Mission for the 2026 Regular Elections to the National Assembly | Report" https://armhels.com/en/publications/2026-national-assembly-elections/

[6] Armenpress. "CEC Explains Decision Not to Hold Re-votes in Annulled Polling Stations," June 15, 2026. https://armenpress.am/en/article/1252997

annulling the results at the three polling stations and not ordering repeat elections in those precincts, claiming that the excluded results could have affected the election outcome.[7]



Structural Implications of the Three-Fifths Majority

Although Civil Contract fell short of the two-thirds (2/3) supermajority needed to unilaterally initiate constitutional amendments or call a national referendum, its control of 64 seats establishes a stable three-fifths (3/5) majority. Within Armenia's constitutional structure, a 3/5 majority grants the ruling party decisive authority over key statutory appointments and independent regulatory bodies. Specifically, this threshold enables the parliamentary majority to appoint and dismiss:

- Judges of the Constitutional Court and the Court of Cassation
- Members of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC)
- The Prosecutor General
- The Human Rights Defender (Ombudsman)
- Leadership across primary state oversight agencies

This statutory majority allows the executive branch to maintain significant institutional influence over judicial and investigative mechanisms without requiring formal bipartisan consensus or parliamentary negotiation.[8]

A key feature of the post-election context has been the evolution of official narratives used to justify state judicial actions. Prior to the June elections, government communications primarily relied on national security imperatives, portraying political opposition as vector points for foreign interference. Following the election, state discourse transitioned toward a broad "anti-corruption" and institutional integrity narrative. This shift has been accompanied by an expansion of enforcement measures, including non-conviction-based asset forfeiture and extended pre-trial detention, directed against prominent political opponents. By utilizing anti-corruption frameworks as the primary justification for executive action, the government has exercised its expanded administrative authority in a manner that presents growing challenges to judicial independence, procedural fairness, and political pluralism.

[7] Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Observation of the Parliamentary Elections in Armenia (7 June 2026) (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2026), https://pace.coe.int/en/files/36276/html
[8] CIVILNET. “What Pashinyan Can and Cannot Do Without a Supermajority,” June 8, 2026. https://civilnet.am/en/news/1012383.

IV. CASE STUDIES

The post-election environment in Armenia has been defined by a sustained, systemic expansion of judicial, administrative, and prosecutorial measures directed against political opposition entities, elected lawmakers, civic leaders, and affiliated corporate bodies. Concentrated **predominantly in the weeks immediately preceding and following the June 2026 parliamentary vote**, these targeted actions unfolded within an exceptionally hostile and polarized electoral context marked by aggressive political discourse and the institutionalization of punitive state mechanisms. Rather than operating as isolated enforcement operations, the documented arrests, pre-trial detention orders, non-conviction-based asset forfeitures, and regulatory interventions demonstrate a coordinated utilization of the administrative and judicial apparatus, raising significant structural concerns regarding the selective application of the law, the erosion of judicial independence, and the progressive narrowing of the operational environment for political pluralism.

The institutional scale and explicit political distribution of these enforcement operations are reflected in official disclosures from state investigative agencies. On June 9, 2026, the Anti-Corruption Committee of Armenia reported that **between February 7 and June 9, 2026**, it had initiated **115 criminal proceedings** in connection with alleged election-related corruption offenses. Official data confirms that **97.4% of these cases were concentrated exclusively against the three main opposition blocs contesting the election**:

- 77 proceedings (67%) targeted the Strong Armenia Alliance,
- 24 (20.8%) concerned the Prosperous Armenia party, and
- 11 (9.6%) involved the Armenia Alliance.

Throughout these proceedings, public criminal prosecutions were mounted against 242 opposition activists and election campaign workers, leveraging pre-trial detention laws and travel bans to impose severe custodial and statutory restrictions on their liberty. Authorities subjected 100 defendants to a total deprivation of freedom—remanding 52 to pre-trial detention facilities and placing 48 under house arrest—while levying alternative constraints against another 120 individuals, including 100 bound by travel bans and 20 placed under administrative supervision. Furthermore, 19 individuals were formally declared wanted, and 14 criminal cases involving 54 defendants culminated in formal indictments submitted for trial.[9] The disproportionate concentration of specialized anti-corruption enforcement mechanisms on opposition figures and campaign personnel reveals a structural vulnerability of instrumentalization of legitimate oversight frameworks for political expediency, co-opting procedural mechanisms to alter the electoral

[9] Armenpress. “115 Criminal Proceedings Initiated Over Alleged Electoral Corruption Cases,” June 9, 2026. https://armenpress.am/en/article/1252546

playing field, thus systematically disrupting opposition operations and compressing the space for political dissent under the guise of legal enforcement.

A. STRONG ARMENIA ALLIANCE

IODA's investigation found that the post-election legal, administrative, and criminal proceedings initiated against the leadership, commercial entities, candidates, and organizational infrastructure of the Strong Armenia Alliance evidence a coordinated reliance on prosecutorial mechanisms, corporate regulatory enforcement, asset forfeiture frameworks, and pre-trial custodial measures within a politically contested environment.



- June 18, 2025: Arrested and placed in two-month pre-trial detention after publicly defending the Armenian Apostolic Church and criticizing Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. He faced charges of publicly calling for a violent change of government/usurpation of power and money laundering.
- On October 13, 2025, Armenia's Investigative Committee amended Karapetyan's existing charges to add counts under Article 296, Part 3, Clauses 2 and 3 of the Criminal Code: money laundering in especially large amounts using official or professional powers or influence derived from them.
- December 30, 2025: Released from prison under house arrest.
- January 16, 2026: The Anti-Corruption Court of Appeals reversed the house arrest/bail decision and returned him to prison detention after he was treated in the hospital for pneumonia.
- January 19, 2026: A court of first instance moved him back to house arrest after rejecting a further prison extension.
- November 4–5, 2026: Arrested again following massive nationwide searches (covering 65 locations). The Anti-Corruption Court remanded him into pre-trial custody for one month over a new criminal case involving alleged embezzlement, abuse of authority, and money laundering at Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA)—causing estimated damages of ~AMD 64.5 billion (~$180 million)

The Case of Samvel Karapetyan[10]

Samvel Karapetyan—founder of the *In Our Own Way/Our Way* civic movement and ultimate owner of the Tashir Group conglomerate and its subsidiary, **Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA)**— has been subjected to criminal indictments, regulatory sanctions, and asset recovery mechanisms.

IODA's investigation identified a troubling pattern in which criminal prosecution, restrictive judicial measures and regulatory interventions converged around a prominent business figure

[10] Barseghyan, Arshaluys. "Explainer | Who Is Samvel Karapetyan, the Russian–Armenian Billionaire Whose Empire Is Under Siege." OC Media, April 22, 2026. https://oc-media.org/explainer-who-is-samvel-karapetyan-the-russian-armenian-billionaire-whose-empire-is-under-siege/

following his public criticism of the authorities and their political agenda. The timing of Karapetyan's initial arrest, its overlap with the government's declared interest in acquiring ENA, the repeated reversals of judicial decisions on pre-trial restrictions, and the subsequent escalation of criminal charges raise serious concerns about the political motivation, necessity and proportionality of the measures imposed. The parallel targeting of businesses associated with the Tashir Group further suggests that state enforcement powers have been used to exert pressure beyond the individual defendant. These developments point to a risk of selective law enforcement and the instrumentalization of criminal justice and regulatory mechanisms to advance political and economic objectives.

On June 18, 2025, following public remarks by Samvel Karapetyan regarding institutional tensions surrounding the Armenian Apostolic Church, law enforcement personnel searched his Yerevan residence, resulting in his initial arrest. This operation coincided with official statements by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan addressing the operational status of Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA) and signaling state interest in seizing the utility company.

The Investigative Committee formally indicted Samvel Karapetyan under Article 422 of the Criminal Code of Armenia (*public calls for the 'usurpation of power, the violation of territorial integrity, or the violent overthrow of the constitutional order'*). In October 2025, the Prosecutor General's Office amended the charges to incorporate Part 3, Points 2 and 3 of Article 296 of the Criminal Code, alleging money laundering in especially large amounts using official or service-related powers, or influence derived from them.

The procedural application of pre-trial preventive measures in Samvel Karapetyan's case underwent multiple judicial revisions across a sixteen-month period:

- **June 2025 – December 2025:** Remand in pre-trial custodial detention following an initial court order.
- **December 2025:** Alteration of the preventive measure by a court of first instance to house arrest accompanied by financial bail.
- **January 2026:** Reversal of the lower court's decision by the Anti-Corruption Court of Appeal following a prosecutorial motion, resulting in Karapetyan's re-incarceration in a high-security detention facility.
- **April 2026 – October 2026:** Conversion back to house arrest, subsequently extended by the Anti-Corruption Court through successive two-month and three-month judicial orders, remaining in effect through the June 2026 parliamentary election period.
- **November 2026**: Samvel Karapetyan was arrested again on charges of embezzlement, money laundering and abuse of authority linked to ENA. His home and 65 residential and

business properties, including the home of his nephew Narek Karapetyan, member of parliament, were searched.[11]

Simultaneously, administrative and regulatory enforcement actions were initiated against commercial properties and corporate entities associated with the *Tashir Group*. The Public Services Regulatory Commission (PSRC) imposed an administrative fine of 10 million AMD (~$26,000 USD) on ENA, citing commercial and technical service non-compliance. Concurrently, the Food Safety Inspection Body executed unannounced sanitary audits across thirty branch locations of the *Tashir Pizza* commercial chain, issuing administrative suspension orders against multiple outlets for alleged hygiene and structural violations.

On October 19, 2026, **the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure publicly announced a comprehensive state audit into the original privatization terms of ENA**, including all subsequent equity transfer transactions. This administrative inquiry followed an executive decision by the Prime Minister, classifying the acquisition of 100 percent of ENA's corporate shares as a matter of "**overriding public interest.**"[12] According to the rationale accompanying the decision, the principle of "overriding public interest" allows the state to intervene when citizens' right to uninterrupted and safe service is jeopardized. Prime Minister Pashinyan said that, politically, the process involving ENA was an integral part of efforts to recover illicitly acquired assets.

On January 16, 2026, Samvel Karapetyan launched the **Strong Armenia party**, which grew out of the "In Our Own Way" (or Our Way) movement that was formed by supporters of Karapetyan following his arrest. Samvel Karapetyan is a citizen of Russia and Armenia. Due to dual citizenship restrictions preventing him from assuming the position of prime minister, his nephew, Narek Karapetyan, was designated as the party's candidate for the post.

During the pre-electoral period preceding the June 2026 parliamentary vote, state investigative bodies initiated criminal proceedings against regional organizers, affiliated non-governmental organizations, and campaign personnel connected to the Strong Armenia Alliance under statutory provisions governing electoral integrity and financial compliance.

- In March 2026, the Anti-Corruption Committee initiated criminal proceedings against Strong Armenia party members **Gohar Ghumashyan and Verzhine Stepanyan**, alleging violations of statutory prohibitions on charitable disbursements during the official pre-election period. The prosecution introduced intercepted telecommunications metadata as

[11] Pracht, Alexander. "Samvel Karapetyan Arrested on Charges of Economic Crimes." CIVILNET, November 4, 2026. https://civilnet.am/en/news/1015186
[12] Armenpress. "Armenia Declares 100% of ENA Shares to Be of Overriding Public Interest," October 15, 2026. https://armenpress.am/en/article/1262848

primary evidentiary material, alleging that financial assistance and preferential services had been provided to eligible voters.[13]

The court granted prosecutorial petitions for pre-trial custodial detention against both defendants. Defense counsel raised procedural objections regarding the necessity and proportionality of custodial detention applied to non-violent electoral offenses, noting that Ms. Ghumashyan was the primary caregiver of three minor children, including an infant, whom she still breastfeeds. Following formal defense appeals, the judicial authority subsequently modified Ms. Ghumashyan's preventive measure from pre-trial detention to house arrest.

- In May 2026, the Investigative Committee arrested **Aleksan Aleksanyan**, founder and head of the NGO *Preservation of National Values – Our Way*. Aleksanyan was indicted on public criminal charges of financially incentivizing participation in political assemblies and large-scale money laundering under Article 296 of the Criminal Code.

  The investigative hypothesis asserted that between September 2025 and May 2026, the NGO formally entered into employment contracts with approximately 1,400 citizens to facilitate their participation in public rallies organized in support of the Strong Armenia movement and Samvel Karapetyan. The prosecution identified bank transfers made to the NGO between October 2025 and March 2026 totaling approximately 1.6 billion AMD, €230,000, and $75,000 from corporate entities and charitable structures—including the Tashir Charitable Foundation, Intego Energo, and Tashir Capital—categorizing these financial flows as illicit capital utilized to subsidize political mobilization. Over 500 individuals were interrogated as witnesses, and Aleksanyan was placed under pre-trial custodial detention pending judicial examination.[14]

- On June 6, 2026, twenty-four hours prior to the parliamentary election, the Central Electoral Commission granted petitions submitted by the Prosecutor General's Office authorizing the initiation of criminal proceedings against candidate **Davit Ghazinyan** and consenting to his deprivation of liberty on charges of preparing to distribute electoral bribes.[15]

[13] Barseghyan, Arshaluys. "Armenia Investigates Two of Karapetyan's Affiliates for Pre-election Bribery." OC Media, April 15, 2026. https://oc-media.org/armenia-investigates-two-of-karapetyans-affiliates-for-pre-election-bribery/

[14] Barseghyan, Arshaluys. "Senior Figure From Karapetyan's Strong Armenia Alliance Detained on Money Laundering Charges." OC Media, June 15, 2026. https://oc-media.org/senior-figure-from-karapetyans-strong-armenia-alliance-detained-on-money-laundering-charges/

[15] Armenpress. "Davit Ghazinyan Detained on Suspicion of Preparing to Distribute Election Bribes," June 17, 2026. https://armenpress.am/en/article/1253352

Ghazinyan was placed under pre-trial detention, and his indictment was formally submitted to the court in July 2026. On July 24, 2026, the Anti-Corruption Court reviewed the detention order and ordered Ghazinyan's immediate release without the application of alternative preventive measures or financial bail. The court determined that following the official validation and certification of the parliamentary election results, statutory parliamentary immunity attached to Ghazinyan as an MP-elect, rendering his continued pre-trial detention legally impermissible prior to a formal vote by the newly convened National Assembly.

- Following the certification of the June 2026 election results, the Prosecutor General's Office formally indicted **Narek Karapetyan**—the designated prime-ministerial candidate for the Strong Armenia Alliance who secured a parliamentary seat—under charges of coercing participation in public assemblies through threats or financial leverage, as well as money laundering on an especially large scale.

  Prior to the inaugural session of the new parliament scheduled for August 2, 2026, prosecutors petitioned the Central Electoral Commission to authorize Narek Karapetyan's pre-trial detention. The CEC authorized the continuation of criminal proceedings but declined to grant authorization for custodial detention, ruling that administrative electoral bodies lacked constitutional jurisdiction to deprive an elected representative of freedom prior to the formal assembly of Parliament.

  Following the CEC's refusal to grant detention authorization, the prosecution sought financial and restrictive alternatives before the court of first instance. The court subsequently imposed an international travel ban alongside a financial bail requirement set at **1 billion AMD (~$2.7 million USD)**, establishing a significant financial condition for the MP-elect's release pending trial.[16]

The proceedings detailed above do not constitute an exhaustive inventory of all legal and investigative actions directed against members, candidates, and affiliates of the Strong Armenia Alliance.

[16] CIVILNET. "Armenia's Election Commission Rejects Bid to Detain Opposition MP-elect Narek Karapetyan," July 22, 2026. https://civilnet.am/en/news/1013182



The Case of Avetik Chalabyan

The systematic expansion of state judicial measures following the June 7 parliamentary elections extended beyond formal political parties to encompass independent civic movements and public figures aligned with the opposition, a pattern clearly demonstrated in the criminal prosecution of Avetik Chalabyan—a former senior partner at McKinsey & Company, public figure, and coordinator of the **HayaQve** National Civic Initiative. On April 29, 2026, the HayaQve initiative formally entered into a memorandum of cooperation with Samvel Karapetyan's **Strong Armenia** alliance, committing to unified pre-election campaigning, platform alignment, and joint monitoring of the electoral process aimed at securing a constitutional transition of executive power through parliamentary means.[17]

On June 24, 2026, coinciding with the Constitutional Court's pending review of opposition legal challenges against the election results, some seven law enforcement officers executed a search of Avetik Chalabyan's residence at 7:10 a.m., seizing his personal communication devices before taking him into custody. Although family members noted that the residential search yielded no incriminating material and characterized the operation as a politically motivated attempt to isolate key civic leaders during a crucial post-election legal challenge, state investigative authorities moved forward with formal charges. Specifically, the Investigative Committee initiated public criminal prosecution under Article 43-210, Part 2, Clauses 5 and 6 of the Criminal Code, charging Avetik Chalabyan **with preparation, by a group acting by prior agreement, to obstruct the free exercise of electoral rights through the abuse of official authority or influence.**

The prosecution's theory of the case rested on an investigative claim that on February 4, 2026, Chalabyan met with representatives of a foreign state at a café in Yerevan to persuade them to leverage their official influence over business owners operating abroad, allegedly to compel Armenian citizens employed in that foreign jurisdiction to travel to Armenia and vote for the Strong Armenia alliance on June 7. State authorities cited intercepted digital recordings and forensic audio analyses as primary evidence establishing the meeting and alleged agreement. Chalabyan and his legal defense team entirely rejected the accusations, framing the case as a fabricated intervention designed to neutralize influential civic organizers allied with the Strong

[17] CIVILNET. "Another Opposition Figure Arrested in Armenia Amid Post-election Crackdown," June 24, 2026. https://civilnet.am/en/news/1012705

Armenia coalition. While the court of first instance initially granted the prosecution's motion by remanding Chalabyan to pre-trial custodial detention for two months, the judicial posture shifted following the completion of the preliminary investigation and submission of the formal indictment **in August 2026, when the presiding judge denied the prosecutor's petition for a detention extension and ordered Chalabyan's release without alternative preventive restrictions pending trial.**[18]

IODA's investigation found that the prosecution of Avetik Chalabyan illustrates the broader risks of deploying criminal proceedings in an already politically charged electoral environment. In periods of heightened political tension, serious criminal allegations against prominent opposition-aligned figures can quickly be perceived and portrayed as established facts, effectively functioning as a verdict before any judicial determination. The resulting reputational damage extends beyond the individual defendant, potentially discrediting civic movements, undermining their political partners and distorting public perceptions during a sensitive electoral period. In Chalabyan's case, these concerns are particularly acute given the timing of his arrest, while legal challenges to the election results were pending, and the subsequent court decision to release him without any preventive restrictions after the preliminary investigation had been completed and the indictment submitted. Although this decision did not determine the merits of the charges, it reinforces the importance of preventing unsubstantiated allegations from producing lasting political and reputational consequences before they have been tested in court.

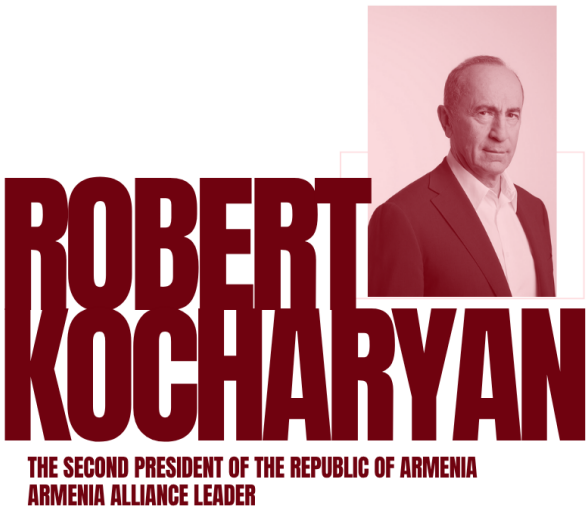
Chalabyan had previously faced judicial action in 2022 on charges related to anti-government demonstrations, a case referenced critically by international bodies including the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the U.S. Department of State.[19]

[18] Hetq.am. "Avetik Chalabyan Released From Pre-Trial Detention," August 21, 2026. https://hetq.am/en/article/183458

[19] U.S. Department of State, 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Armenia (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2023), https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/armenia/

B. ARMENIA ALLIANCE

This section examines the post-election application of criminal, administrative, and asset-forfeiture mechanisms targeting the second-largest parliamentary opposition bloc, the Armenia Alliance (*Hayastan Dashink*).



The Case of Robert Kocharyan

IODA's investigation found that the legal actions against Robert Kocharyan reveal a sustained pattern of prosecutorial pressure extending across successive electoral and post-electoral periods. Kocharyan has faced two major rounds of criminal proceedings between 2018 and 2024, and in 2026, involving multiple charges and court trials. The initial prosecution included accusations of overthrowing the constitutional order and accepting a large-scale bribe—charges that were ultimately dismissed or terminated on constitutional and procedural grounds. Kocharyan became an explicit target of the ruling party's electoral rhetoric, with Prime Minister Pashinyan publicly pledging to bring him to justice and send him to prison. The pressure intensified immediately after the June 2026 elections, culminating in a new criminal prosecution, coordinated arrests and searches, extensive asset freezes and the imposition and extension of pre-trial detention. The close convergence of political declarations and coercive state measures raises serious concerns about selective law enforcement and the instrumentalization of anti-corruption and asset-recovery mechanisms against a prominent opposition figure. IODA considers this pattern particularly alarming given its implications for the presumption of innocence, the proportionality of pre-trial detention, the protection of property rights and the ability of opposition forces to operate freely in a democratic political environment.

On June 17, 2026, ten days following the parliamentary election in which the Armenia Alliance secured 9.93% of the national vote, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) granted prosecutorial petitions to strip Robert Kocharyan of candidate immunity. The CEC authorized criminal prosecution and imposed an international travel ban in connection with economic-crimes investigations dating to a 2004 government-approved property allocation when Kocharyan was

president. Kocharyan subsequently surrendered his parliamentary mandate while initiating administrative appeals to overturn the CEC's determination.[20]

The political atmosphere shifted notably on August 25, 2026, following a heated exchange in the National Assembly during discussions on the government's five-year program draft between Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Levon Kocharyan, an opposition Member of Parliament and younger son of the former president. During the session, PM Pashinyan said that his cabinet will continue the process of returning assets obtained illegally and through corruption, including illegally privatized and leased forests, beaches, parks and gardens, educational institutions, and other public spaces. Levon Kocharyan criticized Pashinyan for inciting political persecution and interfering in the work of the courts, arguing that this behavior is incompatible with democratic values. *"At whose expense is your family a millionaire? Where did you get that wealth? Are you trying to say that your children should inherit your millions, and their children inherit them from them... I am telling you directly that this will not happen. This is not a personal issue, but a political task. Every single thing, piece by piece, must be returned to the Republic of Armenia."*, Pashinyan said in response. To which, Levon Kocharyan responded that whether the wealth was legal or illegal must be investigated by the law, not by PM Pashinyan.[21]

Within twenty-four hours of the parliamentary exchange, the Anti-Corruption Committee executed coordinated searches across commercial and residential properties linked to the Kocharyan family—including retail locations, recreational facilities, and corporate offices—and placed Robert Kocharyan, his eldest son Sedrak Kocharyan, and four associates under arrest. Concurrently, the Prosecutor General's Office initiated formal public criminal prosecutions against ten high-profile former officials, including former President Serzh Sargsyan, former Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan [deceased], and former Yerevan Mayor Gagik Beglaryan.[22]

The substantive charges filed by the Prosecutor General's Office against Robert Kocharyan comprise **three counts of abuse of official authority, two counts of particularly large-scale bribery, and four counts of large-scale money laundering.** The central investigative hypothesis alleges that during his tenure (1998–2008), President Kocharyan bypassed competitive statutory bidding to transfer high-value municipal and state assets to family members and corporate affiliates at fractions of market value. The target properties include:

[20] Kuenning, Xandie. "Former Armenian President Kocharyan's Parliamentary Immunity Revoked." OC Media, July 7, 2026. https://oc-media.org/former-armenian-president-kocharyans-parliamentary-immunity-revoked/
[21] Stepanian, Ruzanna. "Kocharian Arrested After Heated Parliament Exchange (UPDATED)." «Ազատ Եվրոպա/Ազատություն» Ռադիոկայան, August 25, 2026. https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33837717.html
[22] Demourian, Avet. "A Former Armenian President Is Detained in a Corruption Investigation | AP News." AP News, August 25, 2026. https://apnews.com/article/armenia-president-robert-kocharyan-arrest-39fa75bbc3e781bce897c05a243f3168

- A section of Yerevan's urban Cascade complex and the Kaputak Sevan resort facilities.
- A 30 percent corporate equity stake in Toyota Yerevan, allegedly transferred in exchange for undervaluation of Ministry of Defense real estate valued at 1.4 billion AMD ($4 million USD).
- Real estate holdings comprising 56 commercial units valued at 2.6 billion AMD ($7 million USD) constructed on the historical site of the Officers' House on Nalbandyan Street.

Financial enforcement mechanisms accompanying the criminal proceedings resulted in the freezing of domestic and international financial accounts totaling approximately 144 billion AMD ($310 million USD) linked to Sedrak Kocharyan, alongside dozens of real estate titles registered to family members.

Following a hearing on August 26, 2026, the Anti-Corruption Court granted prosecutorial motions remanding Sedrak Kocharyan to two months of pre-trial custodial detention, while simultaneously imposing administrative restrictions prohibiting all non-family visitation. Defense counsel noted that the transactions cited by the Anti-Corruption Committee occurred between 2001 and 2010, arguing that the passage of 15 to 25 years rendered arguments regarding potential evidentiary obstruction legally tenuous and asserting that the statutory period of limitations had expired for key allegations.

Following his arrest on August 25, Robert Kocharyan was hospitalized for acute cardiovascular distress. Upon his discharge, he was remanded to the Yerevan-Kentron Penitentiary Institution—a high-security detention facility operated within the headquarters of the National Security Service (NSS). Legal counsel formally filed procedural objections regarding confinement conditions in the NSS facility, describing them as deliberate psychological pressure tactics. On October 23, 2026, Judge Sargis Dadoyan of the Anti-Corruption Court reviewed the state's detention petitions and ordered a two-month extension of Robert Kocharyan's pre-trial detention. The judicial ruling was issued in absentia while Kocharyan remained hospitalized for health complications. Defense representatives and the Armenia Alliance condemned the continued custodial detention and asset freezes as an extrajudicial, politically driven attempt to paralyze the main parliamentary opposition bloc through state mechanisms.[23]

The Case of Ishkhan Saghatelyan

Within the broader structural framework of the Armenia Alliance, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF-*Dashnaktsutyun*) has faced focused administrative, financial, and investigative scrutiny from state enforcement authorities. This pattern is exemplified by the criminal proceedings and asset freezing orders executed against Ishkhan Saghatelyan, a senior opposition

[23] Hetq.am. "Court Extends Pre-Trial Detention for Former Armenian President Robert Kocharyan," October 23, 2026. https://hetq.am/en/article/184928



ISHKHAN SAGHATELYAN

ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARY FEDERATION [ARF] SUPREME BODY REPRESENTATIVE

Charges: According to the Investigative Committee's report, court had frozen 258 million AMD worth of assets belonging to Ishkhan Saghatelyan and his wife and barred them from managing their property. Authorities allege he failed to properly declare assets and supposedly failed to comply with a forfeiture order.
The criminal case was launched over alleged interference with frozen assets and failure to properly declare property and financial assets.

Member of Parliament, Representative of the ARF Supreme Body, and prominent leader within the parliamentary opposition coalition.

IODA found that the authorities used intrusive investigative measures and asset-recovery mechanisms to exert disproportionate financial and legal pressure on Ishkhan Saghatelyan while the opposition was contesting the parliamentary election results before the Constitutional Court. IODA considers the cumulative application of these measures, particularly their timing and severity, indicative of the instrumentalization of law-enforcement powers to pressure senior opposition representatives and constrain the opposition's ability to pursue its electoral challenges.

On June 23, 2026, officers from the Investigative Committee executed an early-morning search of Ishkhan Saghatelyan's private residence in Yerevan, as well as two vehicles registered to his spouse. During the operation, law enforcement personnel seized foreign currency and personal jewelry. Following the execution of the search warrants, the Investigative Committee publicly announced that the Anti-Corruption Court had placed an asset seizure order covering approximately 258 million AMD (~$680,000 USD) in real estate and financial holdings belonging to Ishkhan Saghatelyan and his spouse, formally barring them from managing, transferring, or disposing of their property.

The state initiated public criminal prosecution against Saghatelyan on charges of alleged non-compliance with prior judicial forfeiture directives, failure to properly declare income and financial assets, and illicit interference with court-frozen property.[24]

Legal defense counsel and Ishkhan Saghatelyan categorically rejected the charges, framing the property seizures and criminal indictments as an extralegal mechanism designed to financially disrupt and paralyze key opposition figures.

Parallel to directed criminal investigations against individual lawmakers, incumbent executive and legislative leadership have engaged in sustained political discourse questioning the institutional legitimacy and constitutional standing of the **Armenian Revolutionary Federation**. Ruling party

[24] Armenpress. "Opposition MP's Home Searched Amid Criminal Investigation - Updated," June 23, 2026. https://armenpress.am/en/article/1253741

officials have repeatedly asserted that the party's historical ideological framework and organizational structures are incompatible with modern state governance, periodically introducing rhetoric that implicitly or explicitly advocates for the statutory prohibition or complete exclusion of the party from the national political arena. This institutional posture culminated during the parliamentary session on September 15, 2026, when Civil Contract MP Arman Yeghoyan delivered an address from the rostrum of the National Assembly calling for the systematic removal of the ARF from Armenian political life. Addressing ARF MP Kristine Vardanyan directly, Arman Yeghoyan asserted that the *"Dashnak ideology must be eradicated"* and *"rooted out of Armenian political thought,"* explicitly declaring that Ms. Vardanyan should mark *"the last representative of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in Armenian political life"*—a statement that elicited applause from the ruling legislative majority.[25]

Opposition lawmakers and human rights observers condemned the parliamentary exchange as an unequivocal manifestation of state-sanctioned political intolerance, noting that calls from government officials to liquidate or "root out" a parliamentary opposition party undermine the fundamental principles of political pluralism, freedom of association, and equal electoral competition.[26]

C.PROSPEROUS ARMENIA PARTY

Unlike opposition coalitions that secured parliamentary representation, the enforcement actions against the **Prosperous Armenia Party** (*Bargavach Hayastan*) and its leader, tycoon Gagik Tsarukyan, showcase how state authorities have deployed post-electoral state mechanisms to dismantle an extra-parliamentary opposition force. After falling just several hundred votes short of the 4 percent parliamentary threshold—a result finalized after the Constitutional Court rejected opposition appeals regarding recount irregularities across three disputed constituencies, a rejection criticized by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)—Prosperous Armenia was stripped of legislative immunity defenses. Consequently, executive political directives quickly translated into comprehensive financial and corporate asset takeovers, systematic property freezes, and criminal custodial remands.

IODA's investigation identified a significant pattern in the timing and escalation of state action against Gagik Tsarukyan and his business interests. Following Tsarukyan and his Prosperous Armenia Party's announcement of their participation in the June 2026 parliamentary elections, Prime Minister Pashinyan issued public threats concerning the nationalization of major enterprises associated with Tsarukyan, alongside accusations of historical embezzlement. These warnings

[25] Barseghyan, Arshaluys. "Armenian Opposition Accuses Ruling Party of 'Fascism.'" OC Media, September 16, 2026. https://oc-media.org/armenian-opposition-accuses-ruling-party-of-fascism/
[26] PAN.am. "Criminal Complaint Filed Against Arman Yeghoyan Over Hatred Remarks," n.d. https://www.pan.am/en/625170

were followed by criminal and enforcement proceedings initiated just two days after the elections. The pressure intensified further after Prosperous Armenia narrowly failed to cross the parliamentary threshold, becoming one of the opposition forces with a direct stake in challenging the election results. As the party pursued electoral appeals, scrutiny of Tsarukyan's business empire escalated dramatically, encompassing coordinated searches, custodial detention, extensive asset freezes, civil forfeiture proceedings and the transfer of major commercial enterprises into state management. IODA considers this sequence particularly concerning: the escalation of enforcement measures against the party's leader and principal financial backer coincided with the period in which his political movement was contesting its exclusion from parliament. The cumulative effect extended far beyond restricting Tsarukyan's personal liberty and property rights, effectively undermining the economic infrastructure underpinning an extra-parliamentary opposition force and its capacity to remain politically active.

The Case of Gagik Tsarukyan

Executive warnings preceding the June vote—including public declarations by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan alleging historic embezzlement and outlining explicit plans to nationalize major industrial plants—materialized immediately following the certification of election results. On June 9, 2026, two days post-election, the Anti-Corruption Committee initiated criminal proceedings for large-scale tax evasion, placing **Gagik Tsarukyan** under an immediate foreign travel ban and stopping him at Yerevan's Zvartnots International Airport.[27]



[27] Ghazanchyan, Siranush. "Criminal Charges Filed Against Prosperous Armenia Leader Gagik Tsarukyan - Public Radio of Armenia." Public Radio of Armenia, June 9, 2026.

On July 6, 2026, law enforcement agencies executed coordinated raids across more than 70 addresses, including Gagik Tsarukyan's Arinj mansion and corporate headquarters operated under the **Multi Group Concern** umbrella. Following a 12-hour residential search, Tsarukyan was taken into custody. The visual execution of the arrest marked a significant point of public and political controversy: broadcast footage revealed heavily armed, masked law enforcement personnel forcing the 70-year-old tycoon to the floor and kneeling on him despite an absence of any physical resistance. During our meetings with associates, it was underscored that the tactical maneuver was deliberately orchestrated to inflict psychological humiliation on a prominent public figure, directly linking the staged posture of the arrest to Prime Minister Pashinyan's combative campaign rhetoric, fulfilling his explicit pledge to physically and politically "bring to their knees" the leadership of the opposition he branded the "three-headed war party" (comprising Strong Armenia, Armenia Alliance, and Prosperous Armenia).

On July 7, the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction granted prosecutorial petitions remanding Tsarukyan to two months of pre-trial custodial detention **on charges of large-scale fraud, tax evasion, and money laundering**—a detention order extended for an additional two months on September 4. State investigative bodies accompanied the arrest with wide publicity, releasing search footage detailing a private compound menagerie. The subsequent transfer of exotic animals to the Yerevan Zoo resulted in the death of a lion, prompting an auxiliary criminal inquiry into animal cruelty, alongside a separate investigation into illegal hunting after nearly 200 taxidermized specimens were seized at his residence.[28]

Simultaneously, state authorities moved against the commercial core of Tsarukyan's holdings:

1. **Ararat Cement Plant:** Citing alleged procedural violations during its early-2000s privatization, the Prosecutor General's Office filed for state expropriation, while the Anti-Corruption Court transferred plant management to state administrators. Police sealed the facility on July 6, halting production, withholding worker salaries for June, and sparking employee protests outside the gates as state leadership reaffirmed its intent to complete full nationalization.[29]
2. **Yerevan Ararat Brandy-Wine-Vodka Factory (*Noy*):** The court similarly ordered state management takeovers and production freezes across the historic *Noy* distillery network.[30]
3. **National Olympic Committee Land:** State judicial authorities ordered the expropriation of major sports infrastructure real estate valued at $100 million in the ski resort town of

https://en.armradio.am/2026/06/09/criminal-charges-filed-against-prosperous-armenia-leader-gagik-tsarukyan/

[28] Pracht, Alexander, and Ani Paitjan. "Court Orders Gagik Tsarukyan Into Pre-trial Detention." CIVILNET, July 8, 2026. https://civilnet.am/en/news/1012965

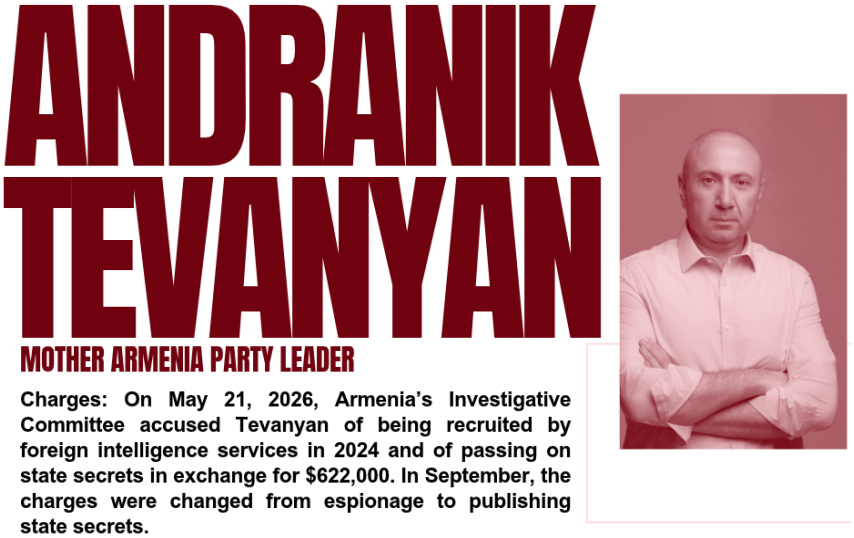
[29] Zargarian, Robert. "Two Tsarukyan Companies Officially Seized by the Government." «Ազատ Եվրոպա/Ազատություն» Ռադիոկայան, July 16, 2026. https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33805206.html

[30] Hetq.am. "Armenian Court Orders State Takeover of Gagik Tsarukyan's Yerevan Ararat Brandy Factory," July 31, 2026. https://hetq.am/en/article/182997

Tsaghkadzor from the National Olympic Committee of Armenia, which Tsarukyan had chaired for over two decades.[31]

4. **Regulatory Enforcement:** The Ministry of Economy revoked the operating license of the **Shangri La** casino complex over alleged filing discrepancies, while the ***Multi Wellness Centre and Pharaoh*** entertainment complexes faced administrative suspensions. Yerevan Municipality unilaterally terminated its construction and lease agreement with the Multi Wellness Center, taking over the facility and reopening it under city management, renaming it: Yerevan Wellness Center.[32]

The Prosecutor General's Department for the Recovery of Illicit Origin Property accompanied these operational shutdowns with civil forfeiture petitions seeking the formal confiscation of 75 real estate properties across Yerevan and Kotayk region, 42 vehicles, equity stakes in 38 legal entities, and liquid funds totaling nearly **106 billion AMD (~$289 million USD)**. Legal defense counsel and Prosperous Armenia representatives rejected all charges as fabricated political retribution, maintaining that the sweeping court-ordered freeze—covering 29 real estate units, 488 movable items, 33 vehicles, and stakes in 67 legal entities—was deliberately engineered to paralyze the party's financial capacity and eliminate it as an extra-parliamentary opposition force.[33]



The Case of Andranik Tevanyan

On May 21, 2026, during the parliamentary election campaign, the Investigative Committee of Armenia announced the initiation of a criminal investigation into Andranik Tevanyan – leader of the Mother Armenia party and candidate holding the second position on the Prosperous Armenia electoral list. A day before the arrest, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan publicly referenced the investigation in his statement, asserting that certain political

[31] Pracht, Alexander. "Armenian Court Seizes $100 Mn Ski Resort Land From Gagik Tsarukyan-led Olympic Committee." CIVILNET, June 16, 2026. https://civilnet.am/en/news/1012554
[32] Armenpress. "City Hall Rebrands Multi Wellness Amid Tsarukyan Probe," July 31, 2026. https://armenpress.am/en/article/1256872
[33] PAN.am. "Prosecutors Seek Major Asset Seizure from Tsarukyan," n.d. https://www.pan.am/en/335462

figures were engaging in unlawful espionage activities.[34]

IODA's investigation found that the prosecution of Andranik Tevanyan exposed the use of criminal justice as a means of inflicting political and reputational damage during an electoral campaign, well before the allegations could be tested in court. By publicly associating an opposition candidate with espionage and foreign intelligence operations, the authorities effectively imposed a public judgment in advance of a judicial one. The subsequent withdrawal of the most serious accusations did little to reverse the damage: the stigma had already entered the public domain, the electoral campaign had been affected, and the political movement Tevanyan represented had been placed under suspicion. The continued extension of his pre-trial detention, despite the substantial narrowing of the indictment, further demonstrates the danger of allowing coercive judicial measures to outlast the allegations that initially justified them. IODA considers this a particularly serious form of abuse: the state can achieve through public accusation and prolonged detention consequences that no eventual acquittal or reduction of charges can fully undo.

The Investigative Committee's initial public disclosures alleged that Tevanyan had been recruited in 2024 by foreign intelligence agents operating through a foreign geopolitical center. State investigators claimed he had unlawfully gathered and transmitted translated transcripts of a classified, closed parliamentary hearing held in April 2024 in exchange for $622,000 USD. Tevanyan categorically denied the allegations, characterizing the prosecution as a state-directed intervention aimed at undermining the **Prosperous Armenia** electoral campaign amidst broader geopolitical friction.

Just prior to the commencement of judicial proceedings on September 8, 2026—held behind closed doors under state secrecy classifications—defense counsel and public records revealed that the prosecution had substantively **modified the statutory indictment.** The Prosecutor General's Office **dropped the espionage and foreign recruitment charges**, removing all statutory references to foreign intelligence agencies and the alleged $622,000 transaction.[35] Legal representatives clarified that the financial figure cited in initial state press releases was derived from an unmonetized draft grant proposal prepared by a private research entity, rather than illicit foreign remuneration.[36]

[34] Armenpress. "NSS Raids 'Mother Armenia' Party Office Amid Treason Allegations Against Chairman - Updated," May 22, 2026. https://armenpress.am/en/article/1250919
[35] Barseghyan, Arshaluys. "Armenia Downgrades Foreign Espionage Charges Against Opposition Figure." OC Media, September 9, 2026. https://oc-media.org/armenia-downgrades-foreign-espionage-charges-against-opposition-figure/
[36] Barseghyan, Arshaluys. "Armenia Downgrades Foreign Espionage Charges Against Opposition Figure." OC Media, September 9, 2026. https://oc-media.org/armenia-downgrades-foreign-espionage-charges-against-opposition-figure/

The modified indictment substituted the treason and espionage counts with charges alleging the unauthorized publication or disclosure of state secrets—a statutory offense carrying reduced sentencing thresholds relative to national security crimes. Despite the formal withdrawal of the foreign espionage claims that formed the basis of the initial public press releases, the court granted prosecutorial petitions extending Tevanyan's pre-trial custodial detention for an additional three months.

The prosecution of Andranik Tevanyan incorporated proceedings against co-defendant **Aregnaz Manukyan**, a former Member of Parliament and associate within the **Mother Armenia** movement. Manukyan was taken into custody **on July 9, 2026**, and remanded to pre-trial detention on charges of disclosing state information obtained during her legislative tenure by allegedly providing parliamentary documentation to Tevanyan.[37]

During her custodial confinement, administrative restrictions initially limited access, with visitation rights regarding her minor child granted only in mid-August 2026. Following an extension of her pre-trial detention on September 8, the Yerevan Criminal Court of First Instance altered her preventive measure on September 22, replacing custodial detention with house arrest alongside strict communication prohibitions.[38]

Proceedings against Andranik Tevanyan and Aregnaz Manukyan point to a systemic vulnerability in the handling of electoral-period investigations. **Although the alleged offenses date back more than two years, the accusations were thrust into public discourse mere weeks before the election cycle.** Unveiling severe national security accusations through high-profile state channels ahead of judicial review creates an inescapable reputational impact. When those charges are subsequently scaled back or unravel during closed judicial proceedings, the preliminary narrative remains uncorrected, and extended pre-trial custody effectively accomplishes an operational disruption regardless of the ultimate judicial outcome.

D. ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH

The institutional campaign targeting the autonomous structures of civil society and traditional public institutions is further evidenced by state interference measures directed against the **Armenian Apostolic Church**. IODA's investigation has found that far from representing isolated legal disputes, the proceedings initiated against the Church hierarchy reflect a broader degradation of constitutional order, the rule of law, and due process standards in Armenia. Under fundamental principles of international human rights law—including Article 9 of the European Convention on

[37] PAN.am. "Opposition Politician Aregnaz Manukyan Arrested," n.d. https://www.pan.am/en/334919
[38] Armenpress. "Court Replaces Aregnaz Manukyan's Detention With House Arrest," September 22, 2026. https://armenpress.am/en/article/1261017

Human Rights (ECHR)[39] and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)[40]—freedom of religion and belief explicitly protects the institutional autonomy of religious communities, guaranteeing their sole right to internal self-governance, canonical discipline, and the independent appointment or dismissal of clergy. Articles 17 and 18 of Armenia's constitution guarantee the same rights.[41]

In Armenia, these constitutional, statutory and international guarantees have been compromised by executive-driven political imperatives. The systemic friction between Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and the top episcopate—ignited, when the Catholicos publicly characterized developments in Nagorno-Karabakh as ethnic cleansing and criticized ongoing proceedings against the former Artsakh leadership, calling for the immediate release of all Armenian prisoners held in Baku—has translated into the weaponization of the judicial and prosecutorial apparatus against the supreme leadership of the Church.[42] IODA documented a notable disregard for established judicial procedures, jurisdictional boundaries, and fair trial guarantees: **secular district courts have issued unprecedented preliminary measures overriding internal canonical decrees, while state prosecutors have leveraged these legal anomalies to criminally indict the Supreme Patriarch and senior bishops.** IODA's investigation has concluded that these criminal cases demonstrate how authorities have subordinated judicial oversight to executive political objectives, eroding fundamental institutional autonomy and procedural protections within the state.

The Case of Catholicos of All Armenians, Garegin II, and Six Bishops

The institutional confrontation escalated significantly after June 2025, when Prime Minister Pashinyan demanded the resignation of Catholicos Garegin II following the pontiff's statements at an international conference in Switzerland accusing Azerbaijan of ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh and border incursions into Armenia.[43] In the subsequent months, executive rhetoric expanded into multifaceted public attacks. The Prime Minister initially leveled allegations regarding breaches of monastic celibacy vows against senior church figures before pivoting to

[39] ECHR. "European Convention on Human Rights - ECHR Official Texts - ECHR - ECHR / CEDH," n.d. https://www.echr.coe.int/european-convention-on-human-rights
[40] Ohchr. "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." OHCHR, January 29, 2025. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights
[41] "Constitution of the Republic of Armenia - Library - the President of the Republic of Armenia," n.d. https://www.president.am/en/constitution-2015
[42] World Council of Churches. "Address of His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians at the Armenian Heritage Conference," n.d. https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/address-of-his-holiness-karekin-ii-supreme-patriarch-and-catholicos-of-all-armenians-at-the-armenian-heritage-conference
[43] Civilnet. "Pashinyan Demands Catholicos Karekin II Resign." CIVILNET, June 9, 2025. https://civilnet.am/en/news/955555

uncorroborated assertions that top clerics were operating as foreign intelligence agents.[44] During this period, three archbishops and one bishop were held in pre-trial detention for months under separate criminal charges before being transferred to house arrest. By October 2026, PM Pashinyan formally introduced a state-backed roadmap aimed at reforming church governance and securing the removal of the Catholicos.[45]

The immediate legal pretext for prosecuting the Church's supreme governance body arose from an internal administrative dispute involving Bishop Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan, Primate of the Masis (Masyatsotn) Diocese in Ararat Province. In late November 2025, Saroyan broke ranks with the episcopate to join the government-backed campaign against the Catholicos. On January 10, 2026, Catholicos Garegin II issued a pontifical decree relieving Saroyan of his diocesan post. Encouraged by incumbents, Saroyan refused to vacate his post and filed a lawsuit in a civil district court seeking the annulment of his dismissal and full reinstatement.[46]

On January 16, 2026, the district court issued an unprecedented preliminary injunction ordering the Church to temporarily reinstate Saroyan and allow him to exercise his administrative and financial duties pending a final verdict. Treating the matter as a civil labor dispute, the court barred the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin from interfering with Saroyan's tenure. Following Saroyan's continued refusal to abide by ecclesiastical authority, Catholicos Garegin II and the Supreme Spiritual Council formally defrocked him on January 27, 2026.[47]

In response, state prosecutors initiated public criminal prosecution against Catholicos Garegin II and six archbishops and bishops, **alleging that the ecclesiastical defrocking intentionally obstructed the execution of a binding judicial order.** In February 2026—one day after Prime Minister Pashinyan publicly vowed to prevent an upcoming Armenian episcopal conference in Austria—the Prosecutor General's Office formally indicted Catholicos Garegin II and the six senior clergymen, placing them under an international travel ban that barred them from attending the international assembly. This indictment marked the first time in Armenia's history—and unprecedented even under Soviet rule—that the Supreme Patriarch of All Armenians faced criminal prosecution by state authorities.[48]

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[44] Ghevondyan, Ani. "Explainer | What's Behind Armenia's Church-State Conflict." OC Media, August 8, 2025. https://oc-media.org/explainer-whats-behind-armenias-church-state-conflict/

[45] CIVILNET. "Pashinyan's Office Publishes Report on 'Armenian Church Crisis,'" September 24, 2026. https://civilnet.am/en/news/1014339

[46] Sookiasian, Paul Vartan. "Bishop Gevorg Saroyan Files Lawsuit Against Etchmiadzin." CIVILNET, May 21, 2026. https://civilnet.am/en/news/997078

[47] Bulghadarian, Naira. "Armenian Church Head Indicted After Pashinian's Threats." «Ազատ Եվրոպա/Ազատություն» Ռադիոկայան, February 14, 2026. https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33678498.html

[48] Badalian, Susan. "Defrocking of Pro-Pashinian Bishop Prompts Criminal Inquiry." «Ազատ Եվրոպա/Ազատություն» Ռադիոկայան, January 29, 2026. https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33664188.html

The criminal case against Catholicos Garegin II and the six bishops faced immediate procedural complications and judicial recusals:[49]

1. The initial court hearing, convened behind closed doors, adjourned within minutes after Judge Hakob Manukyan recused himself, citing a potential conflict of interest due to his professional history with Catholicos Garegin II's lead defense counsel, Ara Zohrabian.
2. The re-assigned judge, Serzh Rushanyan, ruled that the indictment failed to specify where the alleged offenses occurred and transferred the case to a Yerevan court.
3. Yerevan Judge Vahagn Melikyan subsequently referred the jurisdictional dispute to the Court of Cassation.
4. The Court of Cassation determined that the actions attributed to the seven clergymen occurred at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin during a session of the Supreme Spiritual Council, warning that subjective jurisdictional transfers risked creating undue delays and violating reasonable-time trial standards.

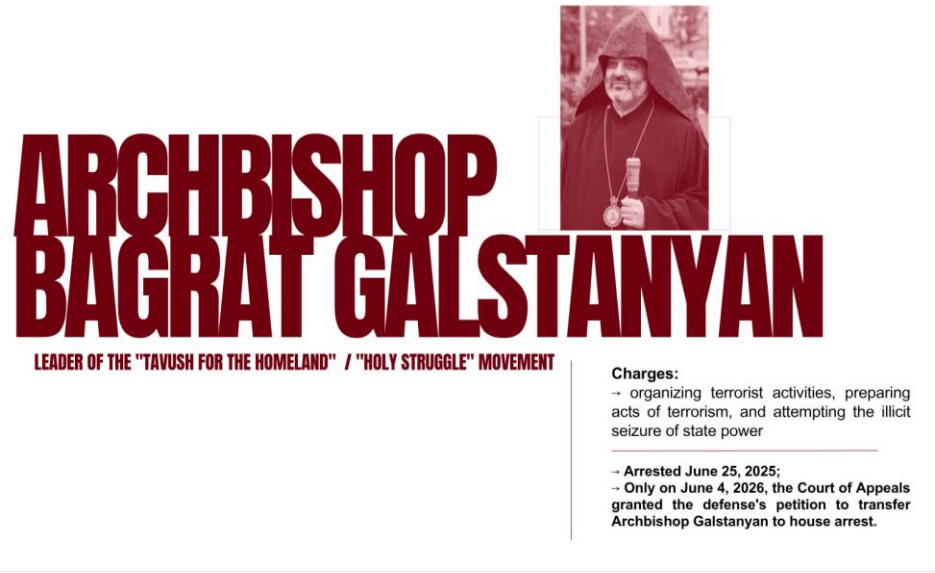
A significant shift occurred on October 22, 2026, when the underlying civil lawsuit collapsed. Judge Edgar Hovhannisyan of the First Instance Court dismissed Gevorg (Arman) Saroyan's lawsuit against Catholicos Garegin II and **revoked the January 16 injunction**. The court concluded that no employment relationship or contractual documentation existed between the Church and the bishop under civil labor law, ruling that the appointment and removal of diocesan leaders constitute the exclusive prerogative of the Catholicos under centuries-old canon law and internal church statutes.[50]

Consequently, the civil court ruled that it lacked subject-matter jurisdiction over internal ecclesiastical appointments. Despite the total judicial invalidation of the underlying civil injunction, Saroyan continued to physically occupy the diocese headquarters in Masis under state police protection while appealing the ruling, and the separate criminal prosecution against Catholicos Garegin II and the six bishops remained pending before the courts.

The prosecution of the supreme leadership was accompanied by symbolic and administrative exclusions designed to minimize the Church's institutional presence in public governance. Breaking with a Constitutional rule of procedure established throughout Armenia's post-Soviet history (Article 33 of the Constitutional Law on Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly), state authorities intentionally omitted Catholicos Garegin II from the opening ceremony of the newly elected parliament following the June 2026 elections, denying him his statutory right to deliver a welcoming address.

[49] Armenpress. "Case Involving Catholicos Garegin II and Six Other Bishops to Be Heard by Armavir Court," September 7, 2026. https://armenpress.am/en/article/1259880
[50] Saribekian, Gayane. "Defrocked Armenian Bishop Defeated in Court." «Ազատ Եվրոպա/Ազատություն» Ռադիոկայան, October 22, 2026. https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33881757.html

Subjecting canonical decisions regarding the defrocking of clergy to criminal penalties for "obstruction of justice" constitutes an arbitrary executive and judicial intrusion into religious internal affairs, undermining the constitutional separation of church and state and infringing upon protected guarantees of freedom of conscience and institutional autonomy.



The Case of Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan and 'Holy Struggle' movement

The criminal proceedings instituted against Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan—primate of the Diocese of Tavush and leader of the "Tavush for the Homeland" (*subsequently renamed "Holy Struggle"*) movement—epitomize the convergence of state coercive measures against senior church leadership. This case exemplifies the strategic weaponization of grave national security indictments coupled with the systematic, prolonged reliance on pre-trial custodial detention to neutralize high-profile opposition figures.

The movement, formed in early 2024 to oppose the state's unilateral border delimitation process in the Tavush region and advocate for political change, mobilized large-scale civil disobedience campaigns across the country.

A. Mass Arrests, Counterterrorism Charges, and Evidentiary Discrepancies

On June 25, 2025—one day prior to a major public address by Prime Minister Pashinyan outlining plans for structural interventions within the Church hierarchy—state law enforcement agencies executed coordinated raids targeting the leadership of the "Holy Struggle" movement. Law enforcement personnel arrested Archbishop Galstanyan along with 15 supporters, subsequently bringing public criminal prosecutions against a total of 18 individuals.

The Investigative Committee formally charged Archbishop Galstanyan and his co-defendants with organizing terrorist activities, preparing acts of terrorism, and attempting the illicit seizure of state power. State authorities announced that over 90 residential and commercial searches were executed in connection with the investigation, claiming the recovery of firearms, ammunition, and specialized tactical gear. Legal defense representatives vigorously challenged these assertions, establishing that the seized items comprised non-lethal, commercially

available pyrotechnics and smoke devices commonly utilized in civil protest actions, and the seized weapons were collector's items. Defense counsel emphasized that the movement's activities were confined to peaceful civil disobedience, public assemblies, and political speech protected under constitutional guarantees.[51]

Following the initial detentions, Prosecutor General Anna Vardapetyan delivered public statements alleging that Archbishop Galstanyan and his associates had orchestrated targeted assassination plots aimed at Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and other high-ranking state officials. However, when the preliminary investigation concluded and the formal indictment was submitted to the court, **the prosecution omitted all statutory counts related to attempted assassination or targeted murder**.

This persistent gap between high-level executive rhetoric and formal court filings highlights a defining enforcement tactic across the 2025–2026 period: the strategic broadcast of severe national security allegations to establish an immediate narrative of threat and justify prolonged pre-trial detention, irrespective of whether those claims ultimately survive judicial scrutiny.

B. Abuse of Pre-Trial Detention and Trial Proceedings

While all of Archbishop Galstanyan's 17 co-defendants were gradually released or transferred to house arrest following the formal commencement of their trial in August 2025, the presiding trial judge repeatedly rejected defense motions seeking the archbishop's release on bail or alternative non-custodial measures. Archbishop Galstanyan remained incarcerated in pre-trial detention facilities for nearly a full year.[52]

Only on June 4, 2026, the Court of Appeals overturned the first-instance court's detention orders, granting the defense's petition to transfer Archbishop Galstanyan to house arrest. The archbishop publicly rejected the partial modification of his custodial status, maintaining his innocence, condemning the prosecution as a politically orchestrated effort to neutralize civic and religious opposition, and demanding full acquittal.

C. International Human Rights Interventions: UN Special Procedures[53]

The criminalization of the "Holy Struggle" movement triggered severe formal scrutiny from international human rights bodies. Six independent United Nations Special Procedures' Mandate Holders—including the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Special Rapporteur on

[51] Papachristou, Lucy. "Armenia Arrests Archbishop Over Alleged Coup Plot." Reuters, June 25, 2025. https://www.reuters.com/world/armenia-arrests-archbishop-over-alleged-coup-plot-2025-06-25/
[52] Ռ/Կ Ազատություն». "Another Armenian Archbishop Moved to House Arrest." «Ազատ Եվրոպա/Ազատություն» Ռադիոկայան, June 4, 2026. https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33772794.html
[53] CIVILNET. "UN Experts Challenge Armenia Over Terrorism Charges Against Archbishop and Supporters," July 19, 2026. https://civilnet.am/en/news/1013128

extrajudicial executions, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers—issued a joint communication to the Armenian government expressing grave concern over the case.[54]

The exchange was formalized through official UN correspondence published in July 2026, comprising the UN experts' joint communication dated May 11, 2026, and a 31-page formal defense submitted by Armenia's Permanent Mission in Geneva on July 9, 2026.[55] In their communication, the UN Special Rapporteurs raised fundamental questions regarding:

1. **Misuse of Counterterrorism Legislation:** The experts expressed concern that broad counterterrorism definitions were being systematically deployed to criminalize legitimate political opposition, civil disobedience, and religious exercise.
2. **Proportionality and Arbitrary Detention:** The UN communication questioned the legal necessity and proportionality of maintaining prolonged pre-trial custodial detention against opposition figures based on protest-related activities.
3. **Fair Trial and Equality of Arms:** The mandate holders cited specific allegations that state investigative bodies selectively leaked intercepted communications and edited audio recordings to the media to shape public perception, while simultaneously imposing gag orders and strict confidentiality restrictions that prevented defense lawyers from releasing exculpatory evidence.
4. **Disproportionate Use of Force:** The communication required state authorities to account for law enforcement responses during public demonstrations, warning that the criminalization of movement leaders risks violating Armenia's binding obligations under the ICCPR and the ECHR.

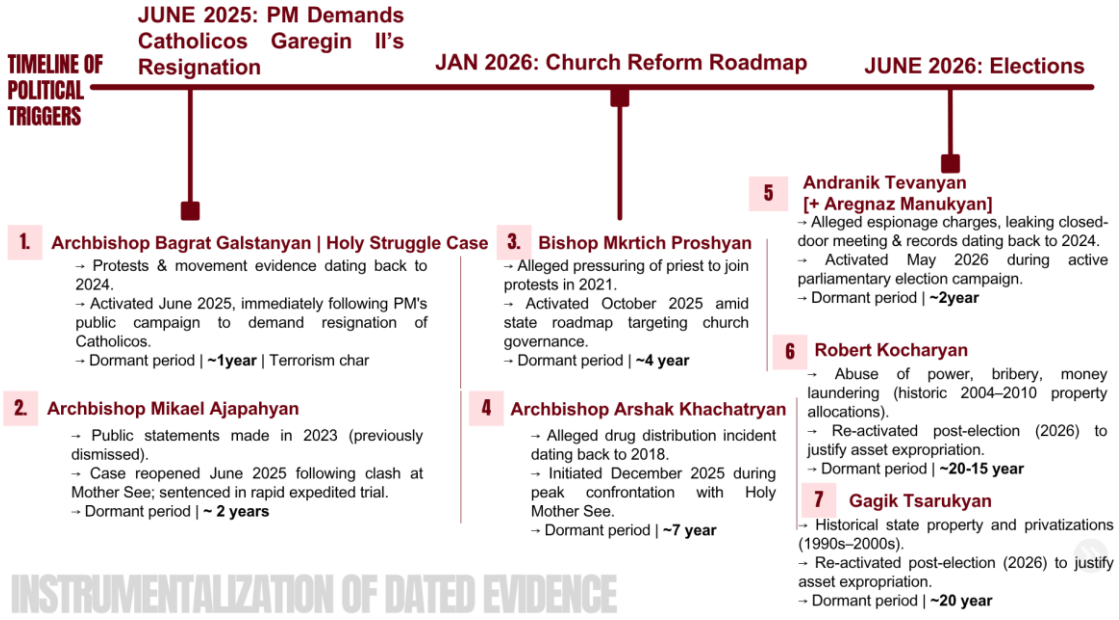
In its 31-page response, the Armenian government rejected the UN experts' findings, maintaining that the investigative actions were grounded in objective physical evidence of violent preparations and an attempted unconstitutional seizure of power. However, the international intervention by six UN special rapporteurs highlights growing international consensus that the state's deployment of grave counterterrorism charges against Archbishop Galstanyan and the "Holy Struggle" movement reflects a questionable conversion of national security frameworks into tools for suppressing political dissent and religious leadership.

[54] UN OHCHR Special Procedures, “Public Communication File, AL ARM 1/2026.” https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=30965
[55] UN OHCHR Special Procedures, “Public Communication Document (gId 39769).” https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadFile?gId=39769

V. SYSTEMIC PATTERNS OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND JUDICIAL COERCION

SECTION 1: Politically Convenient Timing & Instrumentalization of Dated Evidence

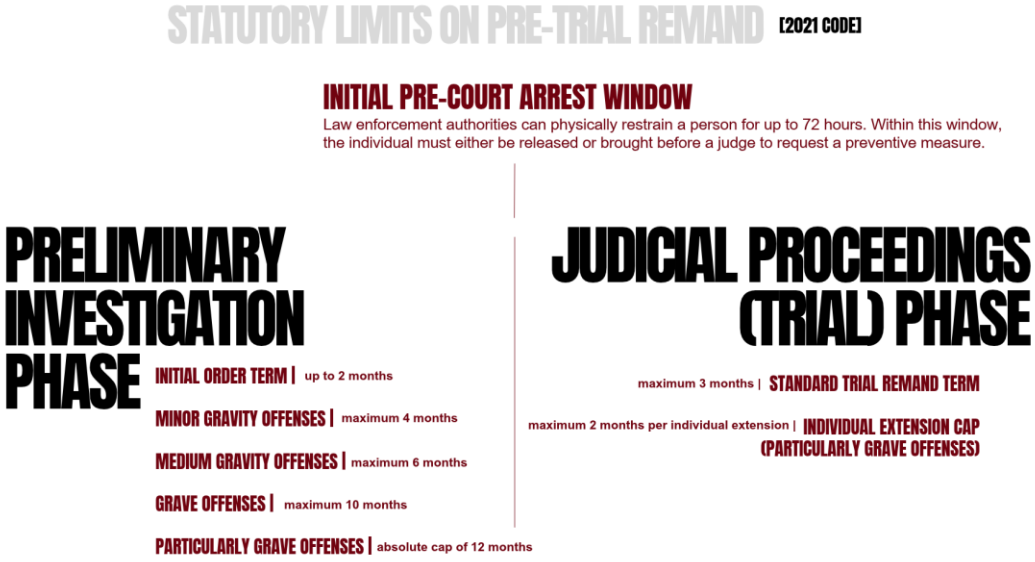
Complex criminal investigations, financial audits, and counterterrorism indictments inherently demand extensive forensic preparation and legal review. However, IODA's review of investigative records demonstrates a persistent temporal alignment between public political statements by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan (and ruling party officials) and the immediate activation or reopening of dormant criminal files. IODA found that investigative authorities have mobilized evidentiary records and public statements that lay unaddressed for months, years, or decades are routinely mobilized at moments of maximum political utility for the executive branch. The table below outlines key instances where law enforcement agencies escalated long-standing or dormant matters immediately following public executive signals:



The selective resurrection of long-dormant, high-gravity files—ranging from severe national security breaches and narcotics offenses to complex financial crimes—immediately following executive announcements exposes a deep structural compromise of prosecutorial independence. When such grave felony charges are deployed strictly when politically advantageous to the incumbents, rather than following objective procedural timelines, the enforcement apparatus functions as a reactive instrument of political strategy rather than an independent guarantor of the rule of law.

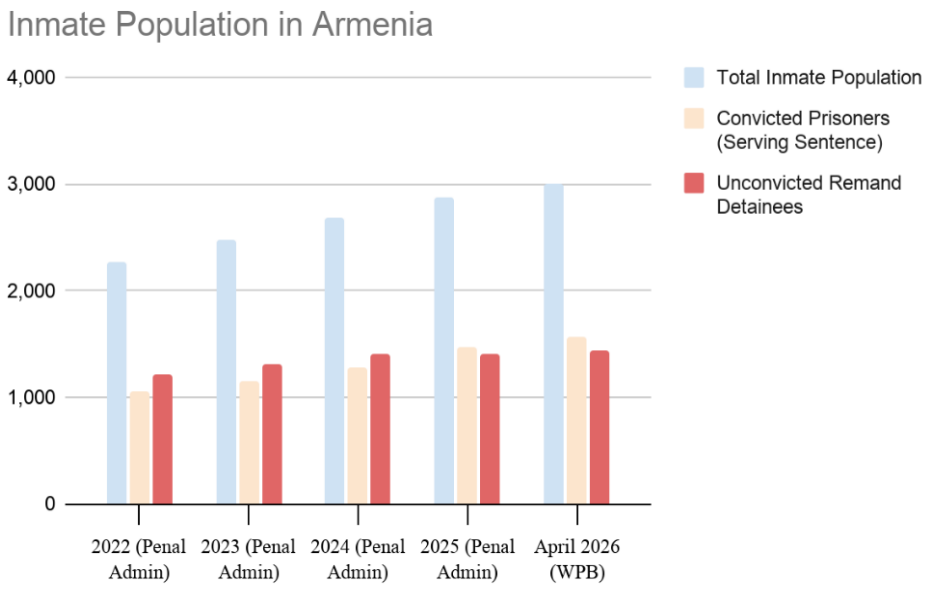
SECTION 2: Systemic Abuse of Pre-Trial Detention and Preventive Measures

IODA's investigation found a profound ga between Armenia's nominal statutory standards and the realities of its detention practices, revealing that pre-trial detention has been systematically distorted from an exceptional measure of last resort into a routine instrument of coercion. Despite legislative reforms codified in the 2021 Code of Criminal Procedure, domestic law enforcement and judicial authorities consistently rely on physical detention as a default enforcement mechanism—leaving nearly half of the nation's prison population unconvicted and awaiting trial. Supported by comparative penal data and European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) jurisprudence, this section demonstrates how the routine deployment of boilerplate judicial justifications, systemic investigative delays, and penal net-widening have subverted the presumption of innocence, transforming pre-trial remand into a de facto extrajudicial penalty prior to any adjudication of guilt.



Statutory Intent vs. Empirical Reality | Under the 2021 Code of Criminal Procedure of the Republic of Armenia, pre-trial detention (*kalank*) is codified as an exceptional procedural measure of last resort, subject to strict standards of necessity, proportionality, and judicial authorization.[56] Designed to secure the integrity of criminal proceedings rather than serve as a pre-conviction punishment, the statutory framework establishes mandatory temporal thresholds across two distinct procedural phases:

[56] "Criminal Procedure Code, Armenia, WIPO Lex," n.d. https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/23327



Despite legislative provisions designed to favor non-custodial preventive measures (such as bail, house arrest, administrative supervision, and travel bans), IODA's review of empirical metrics demonstrates that deprivation of liberty remains the default enforcement mechanism. Data from domestic penal authorities and the World Prison Brief (WPB) reveals that nearly half of Armenia's total prison population consists of unconvicted individuals awaiting trial.[57] [58]

Between 2022 and April 2026, Armenia's total inmate population grew by 32.6% (from 2,265 to 3,003), while unconvicted remand prisoners consistently accounted for nearly half of all incarcerated individuals. When measured against European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) Article 5 criteria,[59] this empirical record reveals three core institutional failures:

1. **Inversion of the Exceptionality Principle and Presumption of Innocence |** Under ECtHR jurisprudence, pre-trial detention must function as an exceptional measure of last resort. Maintaining a pre-trial population near 50% across five consecutive years proves that physical custody operates as the state's default enforcement tool. Holding unconvicted individuals at this rate systematically inverts the presumption of innocence (Article 6 § 2), transforming pre-trial remand into an immediate, extrajudicial punishment prior to any court verdict.
2. **Judicial Reliance on "Stereotyped Formulae" Over Non-Custodial Alternatives |** Under Article 5 § 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, judges are obligated to actively evaluate and explicitly rule out non-custodial preventive measures (such as bail, house arrest, administrative supervision, or travel bans) before authorizing physical custody. Despite the 2021 statutory procedural reforms nominally designed to prioritize these alternatives, the absolute number of remand detainees in Armenia rose by 19.3%, from 1,210 in 2022 to 1,444 in April 2026. This persistent upward trend reflects a deeply entrenched judicial practice previously condemned by the European Court of Human

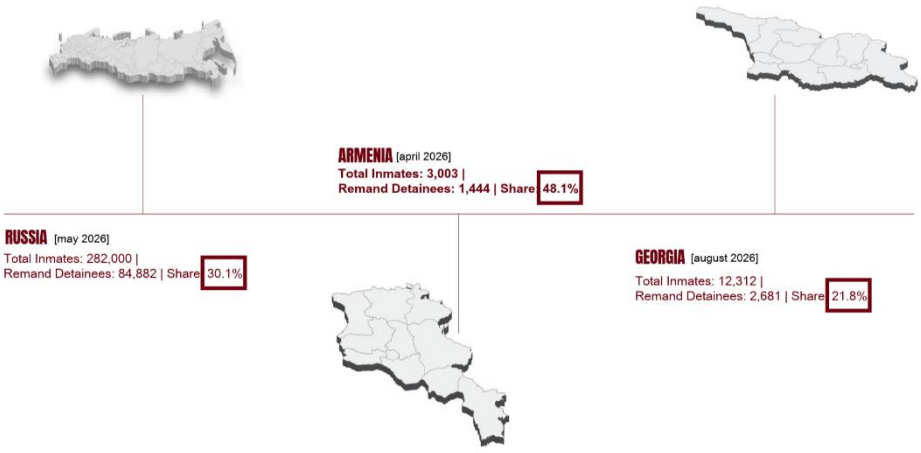
[57] Civilnet. "More Detainees Than Convicts: Pretrial Detention in Armenia Still Functions as Punishment." CIVILNET, August 26, 2025. https://civilnet.am/en/news/970942
[58] "Armenia | World Prison Brief". https://prisonstudies.org/country/armenia
[59] European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), Guide on Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights: Right to Liberty and Security (Strasbourg: Council of Europe), https://ks.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr-ks/guide_art_5_eng

Rights (ECtHR). In Grigoryan v. Armenia (App. no. 14875/20, § 53), the Court explicitly held that the reliance on "stereotyped formulae" when imposing and extending detention constitutes a "recurring problem in Armenia," noting that domestic courts routinely cite risks of absconding or obstructing proceedings in an abstract, repetitive manner without addressing the specific facts of the case or substantiating why such risks exist. By substituting boilerplate prosecutorial assertions for the individualized, evidence-based reasoning mandated by Strasbourg jurisprudence, domestic courts systematically bypass non-custodial alternatives and perpetuate arbitrary pre-trial confinement.

3. **Net-Widening and Breach of the "Special Diligence" Mandate |** The ECHR requires states to process cases involving detained suspects with "special diligence." The concurrent expansion of both convicted (+47.8%) and unconvicted (+19.3%) inmate populations demonstrates penal net-widening and systemic investigative bottlenecks. Relying on physical detention to isolate defendants while long investigations unfold directly violates the principle that the mere persistence of initial suspicion cannot justify extended pre-trial confinement.

Regional Comparison (2026)

Armenia's pre-trial detention rate is more than double that of neighboring Georgia (21.8%) and significantly higher than the Russian Federation (30.1%). Maintaining roughly half of the national prison population in pre-trial detention indicates a structural erosion of the presumption of innocence. Pre-trial remand effectively functions as an immediate extrajudicial penalty, inflicting isolation, operational disruption, and reputational harm prior to a trial court's evaluation of an indictment.



Several of the rulings reviewed by IODA found that judges frequently repeat prosecutorial assertions—citing generic risks of "evidence tampering," "witness intimidation," or "flight"—to justify the imposition of pretrial detention of a defendant without offering case-specific evidentiary justification. This pattern violates Article 5 § 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights

(right to liberty and security). Between 2018 and 2022, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) issued 19 rulings against Armenia specifically for the systemic use of stereotyped detention orders lacking individualized reasoning. Rather than reforming these practices, IODA has found that domestic judicial proceedings in 2025–2026 indicate a continued reliance on standardized formulas to justify the extended isolation of opposition figures.

High-Profile Remand Trajectories

1. **Former President Robert Kocharyan:** Remanded on **August 25, 2026**, to the Yerevan-Kentron Penitentiary Institution (located within the headquarters of the National Security Service). The underlying charges involve state property allocations from **2004–2010**. Because all institutional decrees and records are archived in official state repositories, the defense demonstrated there was no physical possibility of altering the investigative record. Furthermore, the defendant had maintained consistent procedural compliance during prior proceedings.
2. **Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan:** Arrested **June 25, 2025**, alongside 17 co-defendants under identical counterterrorism charges. Over subsequent months, trial courts released or transferred all 17 co-defendants to non-custodial regimes or house arrest. However, the court consistently rejected bail or house arrest for Archbishop Galstanyan, maintaining his isolation for nearly a full year. This selective application indicates that pre-trial remand was used to isolate the movement's public leadership rather than to manage a collective security risk. He was transferred to house arrest on **June 4, 2026**, only after the joint communication from six UN Special Procedures mandate holders on 11 May 2026.
3. **Gagik Tsarukyan:** Following his **July 6, 2026,** arrest and initial remand, the Yerevan Court of General Jurisdiction extended his detention on September 4, 2026, citing potential risks of corporate record tampering. However, by early July, the Anti-Corruption Court and law enforcement had already placed comprehensive asset freezes on all 67 corporate entities linked to him, sealed major manufacturing facilities (such as Ararat Cement), and appointed state managers over primary holdings (Noy distillery). With operational access removed, extended physical detention served no risk-mitigation purpose.

SECTION 3: Structural Erosion of Judicial Independence and Institutional Capture

IODA's investigation found that Armenia's judiciary's susceptibility to political pressure stem from structural weaknesses within the country's institutional appointment and governance frameworks—a systemic pattern previously documented in IODA's earlier report. While appointment procedures for central oversight and judicial bodies—including the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), and the Prosecutor General—assign a decisive role to the National Assembly in accordance with standard parliamentary models, their practical

independence relies on legislative pluralism. Under the unilateral dominance of the ruling Civil Contract party, formally compliant procedures have been systematically leveraged to staff nominally independent institutions with executive loyalists, eroding both institutional safeguards and public confidence.

Politicization of Judicial Governance and Key Appointments

The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), constitutionally mandated to act as the guarantor of judicial independence, illustrates this dynamic most acutely. Because the National Assembly elects half of the SJC's non-judge members, parliamentary dominance translates directly into executive leverage over judicial administration and discipline:

- Removal of Ruben Vardazaryan and Appointment of Karen Andreasyan: The controversial 2022 dismissal of former SJC Chairman Ruben Vardazaryan—followed by criminal proceedings and his subsequent 2025 conviction for obstruction of justice—raised sustained concern among legal experts regarding opaque disciplinary grounds and political pressure. Authorities subsequently installed former Justice Minister Karen Andreasyan as SJC Chair. His prior service in Prime Minister Pashinyan's cabinet drew widespread scrutiny regarding political affiliation, which was further reinforced in November 2024 when Andreasyan resigned immediately following a public request from the Prime Minister, alongside a coordinated wave of departures by the Interior Minister (Vahe Ghazaryan), Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (Gnel Sanosyan), Investigative Committee Chairman (Argishti Kyaramyan), Anti-Corruption Committee Head (Sasun Khachatryan), and State Revenue Committee Head (Rustam Badasyan).
- Capture of Constitutional and Oversight Bodies: Parallel appointment trajectories have compromised other core accountability institutions. On March 25, 2026, the National Assembly elected Vladimir Vardanyan as a judge of the Constitutional Court in a vote boycotted by the opposition, with only ruling Civil Contract MPs participating. Vardanyan had resigned his seat as a prominent ruling-party MP and Chair of the Standing Committee on State and Legal Affairs only days prior. This mirrors earlier appointments documented in IODA's prior report, including the installation of former Prime Minister's Assistant Anna Vardapetyan as Prosecutor General and former ruling-party MP Vahagn Hovakimyan as CEC Chair (who formally left the ruling faction four days before the vote and cast the decisive 65th ballot for his own election).

Bench Manipulation and Case Allocation Vulnerabilities

Although Armenian law mandates an automated, randomized case-distribution system to guarantee judicial neutrality, IODA's consultations and case reviews reveal that the practical

operation of this mechanism frequently diverges from its formal design in politically sensitive proceedings:

- **Disproportionate Concentration Among Specific Judges:** Within Yerevan's relevant jurisdiction—where approximately 30 judges serve and cases should be broadly distributed across the bench—a small, identifiable subset of judges handles a disproportionate share of high-profile political and public-interest files. Legal practitioners and observers consistently identified Judges Masis Melkonyan, Mnatsakan Martirosyan, and Karen Farkhoyan as recurrently assigned to sensitive cases, noting their near-uniform pattern of granting prosecutorial motions for pre-trial detention, search warrants, and restrictive measures.
- **Procedural Timing and Leave Irregularities:** Prosecutors have exploited statutory filing windows—specifically the 60-hour post-arrest window for detention motions and the subsequent 12-hour judicial ruling window—by timing submissions to coincide with specific duty rosters. Additionally, IODA interlocutors noted instances in which judges known for deferring to prosecutorial requests returned unexpectedly from administrative leave precisely when sensitive political files entered the queue.

Weaponization of Disciplinary Proceedings Against Judges

A critical element maintaining judicial compliance is the use of disciplinary proceedings against members of the bench. Domestic judges in Armenia face structural caseload pressures, often managing hundreds of active civil or criminal files simultaneously. Under these conditions, minor procedural delays, administrative oversights, or technical recording errors inevitably occur across standard dockets. As described in the case below, IODA's investigation found that state oversight bodies have selectively exploited these minor technical irregularities to initiate formal disciplinary actions against targeted judges.

IODA's investigation found that the Ministry of Justice and the SJC routinely overlook these technical irregularities on ordinary dockets, yet selectively convert them into severe disciplinary charges against judges who grant bail, reject prosecutorial detention motions, acquit opposition figures, or recuse themselves from politically sensitive trials:

Target 1:Retaliation Following High-Profile Political Trials

- **Judge Anna Danibekyan (2024):** On July 16, 2024, SJC Chairman Karen Andreasyan announced the dismissal of Yerevan First Instance Judge Anna Danibekyan for an alleged "gross disciplinary violation." Danibekyan had presided over the four-year trial of former President Robert Kocharyan, which terminated without a verdict in December 2023 after

the statute of limitations expired. The SJC endorsed the Ministry of Justice's assertion that Danibekyan negligently permitted defense delays.[60]

- **Judge Vahe Misakian (2024):** In October 2024, the SJC granted a Ministry of Justice petition to dismiss Judge Misakyan shortly after he acquitted former President Serzh Sargsyan of corruption charges. Rather than referencing the Sargsyan acquittal directly, the Ministry anchored its complaint in procedural delays during an unrelated trial involving opposition figure Vazgen Manukyan—ignoring evidence that the three-year duration stemmed from extreme docket overload and law enforcement's repeated failure to bring the defendant to court.[61]

Target 2: Penalizing Recusals in Clergy Prosecutions

- **Judge Gevorg Manukyan (October 2026):** The SJC formally reprimanded District Court Judge Gevorg Manukian after he recused himself from the drug-charge trial of Archbishop Arshak Khachatrian, acting directly on a complaint by the Justice Ministry demanding punitive action.[62]
- **Judge Hakob Manukyan (October 2026/ongoing):** The ministry initiated parallel disciplinary proceedings against Armavir Court Judge Hakob Manukian after he refused to preside over the August 2026 trial of Catholicos Garegin II and six senior clergymen. Judge Manukian cited a conflict of interest, noting he had received his law license from Ara Zohrabian, Garegin's lead defense counsel and former head of the national bar association.[63] The SJC scheduled a formal disciplinary review for December 7, 2026.

Target 3: Suppression of Judicial Speech

- **Judge Davit Harutyunyan (2023):** The SJC initiated disciplinary proceedings against Yerevan General Jurisdiction Judge Davit Harutyunyan after he gave a media interview critiquing public remarks made by SJC Chairman Karen Andreasyan. Following administrative sanctions by the SJC, Harutyunyan petitioned the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), challenging the absence of impartial review and the suppression of judicial free expression within Armenia's internal disciplinary apparatus.[64]

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[60] Mirror-Spectator, Armenian. "SJC Ousts Judge Anna Danibekyan." The Armenian Mirror-Spectator, July 18, 2024. https://mirrorspectator.com/2024/07/18/sjc-ousts-judge-anna-danibekyan/

[61] Galstian, Shoghik. "Sarkisian Trial Judge Also Sacked." «Ազատ Եվրոպա/Ազատություն» Ռադիոկայան, October 4, 2024. https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33146271.html

[62] Bulghadarian, Naira. "Judge Disciplined for Refusing to Try Armenian Archbishop." «Ազատ Եվրոպա/Ազատություն» Ռադիոկայան, November 3, 2026. https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33889704.html

[63] Mkrtchian, Anush. "Judge Risks Dismissal After Refusing to Try Armenian Church Head." «Ազատ Եվրոպա/Ազատություն» Ռադիոկայան, October 30, 2026. https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33887392.html

[64] European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), Davit Harutyunyan v. Armenia, App. No. 24886/23 (communicated April 23, 2025) https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22itemid%22:[%22001-243285%22]}

SECTION 4: Property Forfeiture & Asset Confiscations

Following the 2018 political transition, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan consistently articulated a foundational policy commitment: that individuals accused of systemic corruption would not only face criminal prosecution, but that the state would systematically expropriate their wealth. This executive doctrine materialized in 2020 with the passage of the *Law on Civil Forfeiture of Illegal Assets* and the subsequent establishment of specialized Anti-Corruption Courts.[65]

While framed as a democratic mechanism to recover stolen public assets, IODA's examination of empirical trial monitoring and structural legal analysis reveal that this framework has evolved into a centralized tool of state leverage. Operating in tandem with pre-trial criminal proceedings, the system targets opposition figures, consolidates executive influence, and executes a state-directed redistribution of wealth.

Structural Mechanics and Procedural Asymmetries of the 2020 Forfeiture Law

The 2020 Law introduced an *in rem* asset recovery regime that functions completely independently of a criminal conviction. A prosecutor can initiate forfeiture proceedings under two primary channels:

1. **Predicate Criminal Links:** If an individual is implicated in a corruption-related criminal case, the General Prosecutor's Office can apply directly to the Anti-Corruption Civil Court for asset forfeiture.
2. **Financial Intelligence Audits:** If state intelligence suggests an individual possesses assets exceeding their verifiable lawful income, the property is legally presumed illicit until the owner proves otherwise.

Key Legal Mechanics Expanding Prosecutorial Power

- **Reversed Burden of Proof →** Overturning standard presumption principles, the statute presumes assets are of illegal origin unless the owner affirmatively proves lawful acquisition. Defendants are forced to produce financial records, tax filings, and banking documentation dating back decades—a requirement that frequently proves impossible due to missing or incomplete state archives from the early post-Soviet era.
- **Retroactive Reach to 1991→** State auditors are empowered to audit an individual's entire lifetime asset portfolio if that individual served even a single day in public office after September 21, 1991. Although recent regulatory updates stipulate that assets acquired prior to assuming office should be excluded unless tied to criminal activity, recent constitutional and appellate jurisprudence confirms that prosecutors continue to initiate comprehensive lifetime audits based on minimal historical state service.

[65] LAW OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA ON CIVIL FORFEITURE OF ILLEGAL ASSETS. "LAW OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA ON CIVIL FORFEITURE OF ILLEGAL ASSETS," n.d. https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/200187

- **Three-Year Investigation and Modification Window**→ Prosecutors enjoy an asymmetric three-year pre-claim study period during which they maintain full, unrestricted access to state repositories, intelligence databases, and private banking records. Within this window, prosecutors can repeatedly amend claims, refresh proceedings, and introduce new state witnesses without limitation, while defense teams operate under immediate, preliminary asset freezes.
- **Low Statutory Trigger Baseline** (50 million AMD / ~$130,000 USD) → Set at a low baseline, real estate inflation across Yerevan effectively brings standard property owners and mid-tier political actors within prosecutorial reach, expanding state leverage far beyond high-level illicit enrichment.
- **Judicial Binding and Mandatory Interim Freezes** → Anti-Corruption Court judges are statutorily bound to grant prosecutorial motions for interim property freezes upon request. This framework strips judges of discretionary authority to evaluate the proportionality or necessity of an asset freeze prior to a full trial on the merits.

Parallel Legal Toolboxes and Targeted Property Interventions

State enforcement agencies deploy a diverse array of civil, administrative, and criminal mechanisms to target opposition leaders and major economic actors, demonstrating an operational pattern tailored to institutional targets.

1. **Samvel Karapetyan & Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA)**: Administrative Expropriation

State authorities combined personal criminal restrictions (placing Karapetyan under house arrest based on abstract flight risks cited due to dual citizenship) with administrative corporate takeovers. The executive branch moved to invalidate long-standing privatization agreements governing ENA by invoking overriding **"public priority interest."** When international arbitration bodies ruled in favor of Karapetyan, state authorities bypassed the international ruling, took physical control of company assets, and appointed state interim managers over operations.

2. **Gagik Tsarukyan & Corporate Holdings:** Public Interest Nullification and Pre-Trial Management

The General Prosecutor's Office initiated separate civil and administrative proceedings against business magnate Gagik Tsarukyan and his family members, alleging that municipal land allocations and construction permits issued decades prior violated public interest at inception. In a departure from standard civil practice, domestic courts not only froze corporate assets prior to judgment, but appointed state-backed interim managers over operational commercial enterprises (including manufacturing plants and distilleries). While cases against Tsarukyan's family members resulted in partial home confiscations, the high-profile manner of his arrest and the

immediate takeover of his commercial holdings reflected a calculated effort to inflict public humiliation and operational paralysis.

3. **President Robert Kocharyan & Family**: Expired Criminal Charges as Civil Triggers

The multi-track prosecution of former President Robert Kocharyan and his sons illustrates the systemic integration of criminal and civil enforcement. State prosecutors initiated criminal proceedings based on transactions that fell outside statutory limitations. Even where criminal counts are legally subject to dismissal due to expired statutory terms, the formal filing of the criminal indictment satisfies the statutory predicate required to launch parallel civil forfeiture proceedings in the Anti-Corruption Court. This structural sequence ensures that even if a criminal charge is acquitted or dismissed, the underlying wealth remains vulnerable to state seizure.

The operational integrity of the Anti-Corruption Court is further compromised by direct executive pressure and institutional vulnerabilities surrounding judicial appointments:

- **Executive Intimidation and Disciplinary Proceedings**: The independence of the bench is directly challenged by escalating public statements from Prime Minister Pashinyan warning that judges who fail to align with executive anti-corruption priorities will face dismissal. This political framing is operationalized through the weaponization of disciplinary proceedings. Given the extreme case backlogs and heavy workloads carried by domestic judges, technical procedural delays or minor administrative oversights are easily identified and weaponized by state oversight bodies to initiate targeted disciplinary actions, pressuring judges into approving prosecutorial asset freezes.
- **Prohibitive Financial Barriers to Appeal**: Targeted property owners face severe structural barriers when appealing Anti-Corruption Court decisions, driven by an escalating state duty framework that weaponizes mandatory litigation costs. Under the Law on State Duty and the Civil Procedure Code, state duties for property claims and forfeiture actions are calculated *ad valorem* as a percentage of the total property value under contest—requiring **3%** of the claim value at first instance (capped at **AMD 25,000,000**, approx. $68,800 USD). Challenging an adverse ruling on appeal requires an additional state duty of **4%** of the disputed amount (capped at **AMD 15,000,000**, approx. $41,300 USD), while pursuing a further appeal to the Court of Cassation requires **5%** (capped at **AMD 10,000,000**, approx. $27,500 USD). Because public prosecutors are statutorily exempt from paying court duties under state-interest provisions, this asymmetrical framework places the entire multi-million-dram burden on defense teams. Compounded by preliminary preservation orders that freeze liquid bank accounts, this mandatory upfront fee scheme creates an insurmountable procedural bottleneck, effectively restricting targeted property owners from accessing the appellate courts.[66]

[66] VLO Law Firm, Cost of Litigation in Armenia: Legal Fee Guide https://vlolawfirm.com/guides/cost-of-litigation-in-armenia-legal-fee-guide

- **Concerns Over Opaque Wealth Redistribution**: The long-term management and liquidation of confiscated assets raise critical questions regarding institutional transparency. Current legislative proposals under discussion within the Ministry of Justice favor creating a centralized state registry to reallocate seized assets for selective public or social needs, rather than returning them to the public domain via transparent tenders. Without rigid judicial oversight and objective distribution criteria, this framework creates substantial risks of state-directed wealth redistribution favoring executive-aligned networks over genuine public restoration.

International Law and Human Rights Compliance Assessment

The documented mechanics of civil asset forfeiture and property intervention in Armenia conflict with international legal standards governing property rights, fair trial guarantees, and non-discrimination.

- **Protection of Property** (ECHR Article 1 of Protocol No. 1, UDHR Article 17, EU Charter Article 17): Under European jurisprudence, state interference with property must satisfy a strict tripartite test: legality, legitimate public interest, and proportionality ("fair balance"). In Armenia, mandatory interim freezes strip judges of proportionality review, while the low 50 million AMD threshold captures ordinary assets, imposing an excessive individual burden without proportionality testing.
- **Presumption of Innocence** (ICCPR Article 14(2), ECHR Article 6(2)): International standards require that permanent property confiscation be anchored in a final criminal conviction possessing *res judicata* force. Armenia's regime executes permanent *in rem* asset forfeiture without a prior criminal conviction and applies a **reversed burden of proof** retroactively to 1991, effectively imputing criminal liability outside criminal trial safeguards.
- **Provisional vs. Permanent Measures** (Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism (CETS No. 198), EU Directive 2024/1260): Pre-trial freezes are permitted solely as temporary, reversible precautionary controls to prevent asset dissipation. The pre-judgment appointment of state interim managers over private corporate entities converts provisional control into *de facto* pre-conviction expropriation and commercial paralysis.
- **Prohibition of Ulterior Motives** (ECHR Article 14 & Article 18): Article 18 explicitly prohibits governments from using legitimate statutory powers for improper political goals, such as bankrupting or silencing opponents. The systematic alignment between executive directives and immediate forfeiture actions against opposition leadership indicates a clear breach of Article 18 standards.

VI. OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

While a comprehensive investigation of every individual administrative or criminal enforcement action lies beyond the primary scope of this report, the mission identified a series of parallel legal and regulatory developments that warrant urgent documentative concern. Across multiple sectors—including digital speech, environmental advocacy, public assembly, and civil sector reserve requirements—state institutions and corporate entities operating under state license are increasingly utilizing statutory mechanisms, speech-related criminal provisions, and civil litigation frameworks to suppress public-interest oversight, criminalize political discourse, and intimidate government critics.

1. **Systemic Pre-Electoral Interventions and De Facto Opposition Exclusion in Municipal Elections :** The abuse of administrative power and targeted law enforcement escalated during the autumn 2026 local self-government (LSG) elections held across 46 municipal communities. The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) structured these elections across three staggered voting cycles: September 27, October 25, and November 29, 2026. Because the third voting cycle remains scheduled for late November 2026, following the publication of this report, this analysis constitutes a temporal assessment. Nevertheless, the empirical patterns and outcomes documented across the first two cycles already reveal severe systemic vulnerabilities and state-directed interventions that fundamentally compromise local electoral integrity.

A. Targeted Anti-Corruption Committee Raids and Pre-Electoral Detentions

In the days immediately preceding the major October 25 elections across 19 communities, the Anti-Corruption Committee initiated a series of rapid criminal searches, detentions, and interrogations that concentrated heavily on leading opposition figures and party slate leaders:

→ **Stepanavan (Lori Province):** On October 21, 2026—four days before the vote—law enforcement executed widespread searches targeting campaign infrastructure of the opposition "Strong Armenia" party. The Anti-Corruption Committee formally announced the arrest of 14 individuals, explicitly including Arsen Gevorgyan, the party's mayoral candidate, who was placed in pre-trial detention. Tragically, **Gevorgyan died in state custody** at the Nubarashen Penitentiary **on November 10** following a sudden deterioration in his health and suspected cardiac arrest.[67] Despite the pre-electoral arrest of its lead candidate, "Strong Armenia" secured 19.62% of the vote,

[67] Armenpress. "Strong Armenia Party's Stepanavan Mayoral Candidate Arsen Gevorgyan Dies in Jail," November 10, 2026. https://armenpress.am/en/article/1265227

while the incumbent "Businessman" (*Gortsarar*) Party defeated Civil Contract (41.38% vs. 35.20%).[68]

→ **Artik (Shirak Province):** On October 21, coordinated law enforcement operations targeted Artur Astoyan, lead candidate for the "Country to Live In" (*Aprelu Yerkir*) party, placing him in custody. Simultaneously, key campaign organizers for Levon Vahradyan, mayoral candidate for the "Homeland" (*Hayrenik*) party, were detained and subjected to interrogation at the Anti-Corruption Committee.[69]

→ **Martuni (Gegharkunik Province):** State enforcement agencies conducted mass detentions against representatives of the "Our Community" (*Mer Hamaynkë*) opposition alliance, including community head candidate Aram Karapetyan (a member of the Republican Party of Armenia Council), effectively crippling the alliance's campaign apparatus days before polling.[70]

While prosecutorial authorities publicly asserted that these raids were executed within active criminal investigations into election-related offenses, the selective timing and execution of these actions isolated opposition leaders, disrupted campaign operations, and deprived local voters of competitive choice.

B. Allegations of Administrative Patronage: The Case of Spitak

Beyond direct custodial actions, administrative levers were deployed to consolidate executive authority ahead of upcoming votes, such as the November 29 elections in Spitak. Formal administrative appeals submitted to state authorities revealed that the head of Spitak Community, Civil Contract candidate Kajayr Nikoghosyan, appointed an unqualified administrative director to a municipal institution. When challenged, Nikoghosyan acknowledged in administrative filings that he made the appointment upon the direct request of Lori Governor Aren Mkrtchyan and CEC Chairman Vahagn Hovakimyan in exchange for securing his official nomination as the ruling party's candidate. This incident demonstrates administrative coercion and official intervention in municipal candidate selection.[71]

C. Electoral Disproportionality and Post-Enforcement Outcomes

[68] Hetq.am. “Fourteen Arrested in Stepanavan Anti-Corruption Raid Days Before Local Election,” October 21, 2026. https://hetq.am/en/article/184859

[69] Panorama. “Armenian Opposition Candidate, Party Members Detained Ahead of Local Elections,” October 24, 2026. https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2026/10/24/opposition-detentions-local-elections/3171816

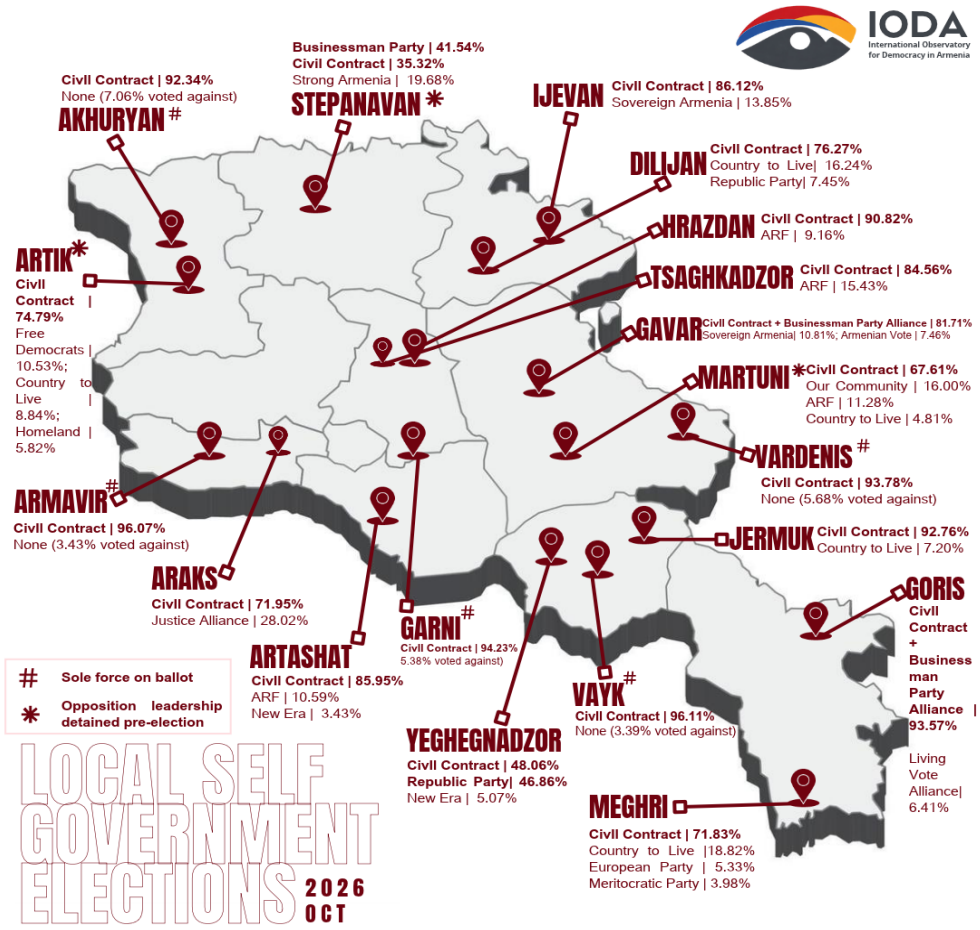
[70] Pracht, Alexander. “Armenia’s Ruling Civil Contract Party Wins Local Elections in Most Constituencies.” CIVILNET, October 26, 2026. https://civilnet.am/en/news/1015009

[71] Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly-Vanadzor, “Statement on the Alleged Misuse of Administrative Resources and Official Powers in the Spitak Community.” November 4, 2026. https://hcav.am/en/statement-04-11-26/

The cumulative impact of candidate detentions and administrative leverage shaped the structural outcome of the municipal elections across both cycles:

- **The September 27 Cycle (Majoritarian & Proportional Baseline):** Local elections took place across four small communities. In Tumanyan (Lori Province)—the only community utilizing a proportional party-list system during this cycle—the ruling Civil Contract party ran completely unopposed, capturing 95.1% of the vote. In Lermontovo, Arzni, and Ferik, majoritarian elections proceeded with single-candidate or highly constrained slates.
- **The October 25 Cycle (Consolidated Results Across 19 Municipalities):** Following the October 21 wave of raids and detentions, official preliminary results published by the CEC reflected a sweeping victory for Civil Contract across almost all contested jurisdictions.[72]

The preliminary CEC data reveals two prominent operational outcomes:



1. **Total Absence of Opposition Slates:** In five major municipal contests (Armavir, Vardenis, Vayk, Garni, and Akhuryan), Civil Contract ran as the sole registered political force, securing between 92.34% and 96.11% of the vote. Voters had no alternative candidate lists, rendering approval of the ruling party the only functional option.
2. **Impact of Targeted Pre-Electoral Detentions:** In communities where law enforcement operations targeted opposition leaders, days before the vote (such as Artik and Martuni), ruling or pro-government slates secured decisive majorities (74.79% and 67.61% respectively) following the physical removal of key opposition figures.

[72] Simonian, Karine, and Astghik Bedevian. "Pashinian Touts Local Election Sweep." «Ազատ Եվրոպա/Ազատություն» Ռադիոկայան, October 26, 2026. https://www.azatutyun.am/a/33884656.html

2. Selective Criminalization of Digital Speech and "Hooliganism"

State enforcement agencies have increasingly weaponized criminal speech statutes to silence online critics of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, while leaving anti-refugee hate speech unpunished:

- **Prosecution of Vahram Sahakyan:** On September 29, 2026, playwright Vahram Sahakyan was detained over a January 2025 Facebook post based on a state expert assessment completed 20 months after the text was published. The court placed him under administrative supervision and banned him from posting online on topics outside his professional theatrical work. Conversely, investigative bodies refused to prosecute public figures declaring displaced Nagorno-Karabakh refugees to be "enemies of the state."[73]
- **Remand of Artur Danielyan:** On October 7, 2026, Adekvat party founder Artur Danielyan was placed under a two-month pre-trial custodial remand for Information and Communications Technologies (ICT)-facilitated "hooliganism." The indictment stemmed from Facebook posts criticizing government border management policies, establishing a precedent of converting digital political commentary into criminal offenses.[74]

3. Strategic Corporate Litigation (SLAPPs) Against Environmental Defenders

Ahead of Armenia hosting the COP17 international conference, mining operator Lydian Armenia initiated synchronized Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) against environmental watchdogs focusing on the Amulsar gold mine:

- **Targeting Advocates:** Civil suits were filed against lawyer Nazeli Vardanyan (Armenian Forests NGO) over a media interview and journalist Tehmine Yenoqyan (Green Armenia NGO) over a Facebook post documenting local water pollution.[75]
    - The lawsuits demand judicial orders for public retractions alongside 6 million AMD (~€13,000 EUR) in financial damages per defender. Human rights organizations (including FIDH and OMCT in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders programme) warned that deploying coordinated civil litigation against individual defenders exerts a severe chilling effect on public participation surrounding environmental governance.

[73] CIVILNET. “Pashinyan Critic Detained Over Facebook Post, Drawing Accusations of Selective Justice,” September 30, 2026. https://civilnet.am/en/news/1014479
[74] CIVILNET. “Opposition Figure Artur Danielyan Remanded for Two Months Over Facebook Posts (Updated),” October 8, 2026. https://civilnet.am/en/news/1014633
[75] International Federation for Human Rights. “Armenia: Renewed Judicial Harassment Against Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders Nazeli Vardanyan and Tehmine Yenoqyan,” n.d. https://www.fidh.org/en/region/europe-central-asia/armenia/armenia-renewed-judicial-harassment-against-women-environmental-human

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of the Republic of Armenia

1. Pre-Trial Restraints and Due Process Framework

- **Operationalize Detention Strictly as an Exceptional Measure:** Enforce pre-trial detention strictly as an exceptional measure of last resort in full compliance with Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), relevant European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) jurisprudence, and United Nations (UN) international standards on criminal justice.
- **Prohibit Template-Based Detention Requests:** Issue binding statutory directives and judicial guidelines instructing prosecutors and courts to prohibit abstract, boilerplate justifications ("stereotyped formulae") and mandate rigorous, individualized evidentiary proof demonstrating specific flight, interference, or reoffending risks prior to ordering any deprivation of liberty.

2. Reform of the Asset Forfeiture Framework

- **Comprehensive Legislative Alignment:** Conduct a comprehensive legislative review of the 2020 *Law on Civil Forfeiture of Illegal Assets* to rectify structural due-process deficits, restore robust judicial discretion in proportionality assessments under Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 to the ECHR, and eliminate arbitrary, retroactive application.
- **Establish Balanced Burden of Proof Standards:** Amend the statutory presumption of illegal origin to ensure it operates within international due process norms, requiring the prosecution to establish a specific *prima facie* link between contested assets and alleged unlawful conduct before shifting the evidentiary burden to the respondent.
- **Mandatory Venice Commission Review:** Formally submit the *Law on Civil Forfeiture of Illegal Assets* and its implementation record to the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Council of Europe Venice Commission) for evaluation of its compliance with Council of Europe (CoE) standards and ECHR jurisprudence.

3. Institutional Safeguards for Judicial Autonomy

- **Protect Judicial Independence from Executive Oversight:** Guarantee the functional, operational, and institutional autonomy of the judiciary in line with CoE and UN standards on the independence of the judiciary, halting the weaponization of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) for targeted disciplinary proceedings, salary penalties, or arbitrary removals of judges.
- **Cease Executive Retaliation and Public Pressure:** Require high-ranking public officials—including the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers—to immediately refrain from public statements, directives, or declarations of intent that signal targeted legal action, administrative audits, or prosecutions against political opponents, civil society actors, and members of the clergy.

To the International Community (EU, UN, Council of Europe, and OSCE)

1. Strict Democratic Conditionality

- **Enforce Measurable Rule-of-Law Benchmarks:** Link all bilateral financial assistance, structural support programs, and political partnership frameworks directly to verifiable benchmarks in judicial independence, due process, and human rights, requiring clear institutional reversals of autocratic practices as a prerequisite for continued engagement by the European Union (EU), UN agencies, and international institutions.

2. Structured Institutional Oversight

- **Establish Formal Monitoring Frameworks:** Institute mandatory, quarterly EU-Armenia rule-of-law review sessions under bilateral cooperation agreements, integrating direct, structured reporting and trial-monitoring evidence from independent civil society organizations and trial observers.
- **Expand Multilateral Scrutiny:** Increase technical monitoring, systematic trial observation, and reporting by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Council of Europe (CoE) monitoring bodies, UN treaty bodies and Special Procedures regarding judicial independence, civic space contraction, and administrative abuses in Armenia.

3. Deployment of Special Procedures Fact-Finding Missions

- **Mandate In-Loco International Fact-Finding:** Request relevant UN Special Procedures mandate-holders—including the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief—alongside the EU Special Envoy for Human Rights and the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, to execute urgent *in loco* fact-finding missions to Armenia, evaluate systemic violations, and publish their findings.

4. Public Diplomatic Advocacy

- **Proactive Public Condemnation:** Maintain an unequivocal diplomatic posture across the EU, UN, CoE, and OSCE by issuing timely, joint public declarations that explicitly condemn politically synchronized prosecutions, administrative intimidation, and structural erosion of constitutional checks and balances.