



**HUMAN
RIGHTS
HOUSE**

Yerevan

Targeting of Civil Society During the June 20, 2021 Snap Parliamentary Elections



BRIEF ANALYSIS

TARGETING OF CIVIL SOCIETY
DURING THE JUNE 20, 2021
SNAP PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

BRIEF ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

Snap parliamentary elections were held in the Republic of Armenia on 20 June 2021. The need for a snap election stemmed from the new realities in Armenia as the aftermath of the 44-day war in 2020, that is, the great human and territorial losses suffered by the Armenian side as a result of the war, the declaration-agreement fixing the defeat of the Armenian side,¹ internal political tensions and divisions that all called for an agenda of forming a new government through snap parliamentary elections. As a result of the democratic elections, the public vote should have given legitimacy to the new forming authorities, ensuring the smooth and transitional operation of the authorities, outlining the public consensus on the future domestic and foreign policy course of the country. For months, representatives of various political forces and civil society have been speaking out about the need for snap parliamentary elections.²

Snap parliamentary elections were scheduled for June 20, 2021. The total number of parties (including alliances of parties) registered for the elections was 26, of which 25 participated in the elections. As envisaged by the RA Electoral Code, the pre-election campaign for the snap parliamentary elections began on June 7 and ended on June 18. The leader in the results of the June 20 snap parliamentary elections in Armenia is the Civil Contract Party led by Nikol Pashinyan with 53.91% of the votes, followed by the Armenia Alliance with 21.09% of the votes, and I Have Honor Alliance with 5.22%.³

The election observation mission was carried out by international organizations and foreign non-governmental organizations,⁴ as well as local organizations.⁵ According to the joint statement of the International Election Observation Mission (preliminary assessment), the June 20, 2021 snap parliamentary elections in the Republic of Armenia were competitive and generally well-managed within a short timeframe.⁶ However, both international and domestic observers have noted disturbing trends, mainly in terms of intensifying the current polarization between different sections of society.⁷

¹ The statement was signed on November 10, 2020 between the Prime Minister of Armenia, the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia, see [The Statement of the Prime Minister of Armenia, the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia \(azatutyun.am\)](#), in Armenian.

² See [The statement of civil society representatives on the imperative of holding early parliamentary elections](#), Union of Informed Citizens (uic.am), in Armenian.

³ According to the results of the voting, the National Assembly of the 8th convocation will have 107 deputies, of which Civil Contract - 71, Armenia Alliance - 29, I Have Honor - 7. For more details, see [CC - 53.91, "Armenia" - 21.09, "I Have Honor" - 5.22%: The final results of the elections \(azatutyun.am\)](#), in Armenian.

⁴ See the full list at [dit20.06.21m.pdf \(elections.am\)](#), in Armenian.

⁵ In particular, "Independent Observer" Public Alliance (see [Union of Informed Citizens, uic.am](#)) in Armenian, as well as Akanates (Eyewitness) Observation Mission ([Transparency International Anticorruption Center, transparency.am](#)).

⁶ See [INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION \(osce.org\)](#). For an announcement of local observer organizations, see, for example, [Independent observer. Summary of the long-term monitoring of the 2021 pre-election campaign of the National Assembly snap elections, HCAV](#), in Armenian. See also [1624299724-1-664266.pdf \(transparency.am\)](#), in Armenian.

⁷ The statement of the International Election Observation Mission states, in particular, mentions that although the elections were competitive and generally well-managed, however they were characterized by intense polarization and marred by increasingly inflammatory rhetoric among key contestants. [INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION \(osce.org\)](#). And according to "Independent Observer" Public Alliance's assessment, "The targeting of families and children was continuous. This behavior is also expressed in a negative way in public relations. The gaps between groups with different political views are deepening", [Independent observer. Summary of the long-term monitoring of the 2021 pre-election campaign of the National Assembly snap elections, HCAV](#), in Armenian.

THE PURPOSE OF MONITORING

Committed to its mission to support and protect human rights defenders and to advance the protection of their rights, Human Rights House Yerevan (HRHY) has monitored the cases of targeting civil society during the elections. The monitoring was carried out before, during and after the pre-election campaign. In addition, the pre-election programs of the parties (alliances of parties) participating in the elections were analyzed in order to identify their approaches to human rights and fundamental freedoms, equality and discrimination.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN PRE-ELECTION PROGRAMS

HRHY studied the pre-election programs and booklets of 22 out of 25 parties (including alliances of parties) that participated in the elections.⁸ In 13 out of 22 pre-election programs, human rights and fundamental freedoms are not mentioned at all. It is noteworthy that issues related to human rights and fundamental freedoms are mainly discussed along with issues related to the exercise of democracy (referendums, the right to propose a bill through civic initiative, etc.), preferred forms of government (semi-presidential, parliamentary), and the rule of law. In this analysis, we discuss human rights in the context of other related issues as well. And so, in the case of 2 out of 9 pre-election programs (Armenian National Congress Party⁹ and “Awakening ” National Christian Party) the program provisions refer exclusively to the form of the government,¹⁰ and no reference is made to human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In 2 of the remaining 7 pre-election programs, in the case of The United Homeland Party and the [Verelk Party](#), the reference to human rights and fundamental freedoms is fleeting, and in the case of the [Bright Armenia](#) Party, there is a general reference in the context of individual-society-state. The other 4 parties (alliances of parties), that is, the [Civil Contract](#) Party, I Have Honor Alliance, “[Citizen’s decision](#)” Social-Democratic party, Armenia Alliance, made a more detailed reference to human rights. The most inclusive of the mentioned 4 parties (alliances of parties) are the pre-election programs of the Civil Contract Party and the “Citizen Decision” Social-Democratic Party. In the case of the Civil Contract party, in particular, there is a reference of further amendment of legislation to fight against violence, hatred, hostility and discrimination in order to protect democracy and prevent abuses of rights. Moreover, a specific reference is made to human rights defenders, which reads: *“We will guarantee legal and practical conditions for genuinely free and unhindered activities for human rights defenders”*. In the case of the second one, the “Citizen’s Decision” Social-Democratic Party, the following is clearly stated in the program: *“To contribute to the elimination of discrimination, promote gender equality, equality of opportunities for all in the areas of individual, family, work and public life...”*.

As for the [I Have Honor](#) Alliance, the human rights and fundamental freedom sections of the pre-election program emphasize the need to envisage constitutional and judicial guarantees and structures for human rights protection, without referring to equality and discrimination per se. It also calls to form “a new type of a citizen”, that is “an individual, who is national in their origin, worships the homeland, does not imagine their happiness without the homeland, and is law-abiding”. As for the [Armenia Alliance](#), there is no reference to equality and elimination of discrimination as such. There is a separate provision on combating disinformation. It also mentions the elimination of the pressure of political power on the judiciary and about ending the vicious practice of depriving a person of liberty based on political motives.

⁸ In the case of the other 3, the election programs were not found online.

⁹ The names of the parties in English provided in here are a literal translation from Armenian, and doesn’t necessarily correspond to their statutory names.

¹⁰ In fact, both of them prefer the semi-presidential system.

THE CAMPAIGN AND TARGETING OF CIVIL SOCIETY

And so, civil society (civil society organizations) were mostly targeted by the radical opposition political forces participating in the elections and their adjacent circles, including the media. Disinformation and hate speech, threats, including statements about restricting the activities of non-governmental organizations, have almost always been present in the discourse of those political forces. To discredit the current authorities in the eyes of the general public, the latter are defined as forces acting under the influence of foreign-funded civil society organizations, the aim of which is to dismantle state and national institutions (church, army, family, etc.), to strengthen the influence of foreign “unfriendly” states inside the country, to violate national values, to weaken national security. And therefore, to put an end to the “destructive” activities of these organizations, first of all, it is necessary to get rid of the current authorities.

Robert Kocharyan, the second President of the Republic of Armenia, who leads the list of the Armenia Alliance, which took second place as a result of the voting, in particular, during the pre-election meeting in Yeghvard on June 11, 2021, mentions: “During 3 years, there were two spheres that were systematically attacked”, then he details: “One of them is [is the attack] on the army since 2018, and the second one on national ideology. The “Sorosians” entered the state system, started reviewing the programs, attacked the church. This was not accidental ...”.¹¹

The aforementioned is only one of the many cases of R. Kocharyan targeting civil society. And so, in the period before the campaign, during one of the regular meetings, R. Kocharyan spoke about the need to make changes in the RA Law on Non-Governmental Organizations, noting “The state has a very serious job to do here; it cannot step aside and leave the upbringing of the generation to a few foreign-funded organizations, especially in a small country like Armenia”. The Open Society Foundations - Armenia (OSF) was under Kocharyan’s target particularly. In the event of their coming to power, he declared, “the activities of ‘Soros offices’ will either be banned or severely restricted.”¹²

During the period under discussion, there were also reports of targeting election observers, in particular, the Independent Observer Public Alliance, as well as the targeting of journalists, including through fake accounts. To detail, in order to arouse suspicion about the activities of the “Independent Observer” Public Alliance, and thus devaluing the observation mission, while counting votes was ongoing at the election night, an e-mail was sent to the observers from a fake e-mail opened in the name of Anton Ivchenko, one of the coordinators of the observation mission. The letter instructed the observers to “turn a blind eye” to the election violations in favour of the Civil Contract. The observers’ base of the 2018 parliamentary elections was made available to other persons under suspicious circumstances, as a result of which it became possible to send the mentioned e-mails. Anton Ivchenko posted about this on his Facebook page.¹³

¹¹ [“The shark must be constantly in motion, it must have an aggressive attitude. We have such a phenomenon within the current government, this is their DNA: Robert Kocharyan \(video\)”, in Armenian.](#)

¹² [Kocharyan announced his intention to ban or severely restrict the activities of “Soros offices”, \(armenpress.am\), in Armenian.](#)

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/anton.ivchenko/posts/10227215304908622>.

CONCLUSION

HRHY study of the pre-election programs of the parties (including the alliances of parties) participating in the snap parliamentary elections, as well as the results of the monitoring targeting of civil society during the elections, demonstrate the following:

- Most parties (including alliances of parties) did not envisage human rights and fundamental freedoms in their pre-election programs as such, which, in addition to denouncing human rights and fundamental freedoms, essentially reflects their attitude towards democratic values and the rule of law. In our opinion, such an approach ignores the importance of establishing a democratic state by respecting, guaranteeing and protecting the human rights of all.
- Some of the parties (including alliances of parties), whose election programs, nevertheless, address the issue of human rights and fundamental freedoms, have adopted a more formal, non-inclusive approach (in particular, I Have Honor and Armenia alliances). Unlike those, however, the Civil Contract and “Citizen’s Decision” Social-Democratic Party essentially stressed equality and elimination of discrimination in the context of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Civil society organizations have been targeted exclusively by self-proclaimed radical opposition forces. These far-right forces continue to undermine the activities of civil society and human rights defenders in order to advance their narrow party interests, especially in the context of significant political events. In public-political discussions, these forces are mainstreaming the thesis that the current authorities serve the interests of “outside forces” through “Soros offices”. Moreover, the current authorities are presented as “foreign agents” influenced by the latter. Civil society organizations and human rights defenders are presented as entities acting against national and state institutions, traditional and family values. In this context, R. Kocharyan, the leader of the Armenia Alliance, directly states that he will restrict the activities of non-governmental organizations by amending the RA Law on Non-Governmental Organizations, and ban the activities in the case of “Soros offices”. Such an attitude of these opposition forces towards civil society organizations - as leaders in the protection of human rights and public interests, in fact, invalidates their vision of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and democracy, thus nullifying the pre-election program provisions.
- To achieve their goals, these opposition forces not only target civil society organizations, but also organizations carrying out observation missions in particular, which is also carried out through alleged illegal actions. This is an encroachment of the Armenian society’s recent years’ achievement to change the regime through free and transparent elections.

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