

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	315
Land:	Armenien
Kilde:	Freedom House
Titel:	Freedom on the Net 2020 – Armenia
Udgivet:	14. oktober 2020
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	7. januar 2021

Document #2039050

Freedom House

Freedom on the Net 2020 - Armenia

FREE

75

/ 100

A [Obstacles to Access](#) 20 / 25B [Limits on Content](#) 28 / 35C [Violations of User Rights](#) 27 / 40

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

76 / 100 Free

Scores are based on a scale of 0 (least free) to 100 (most free)

Overview

Internet freedom in Armenia has improved since the Velvet Revolution swept Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan into power in 2018. Access continues to grow. Users generally do not encounter restrictions on online content, nor do they usually face legal or extralegal punishment for their online activities. However, in the early days of the government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, officials moved to censor online news outlets and individual social media users. In addition, the government began to collect metadata from users' mobile devices for contact tracing purposes, raising alarm among privacy advocates.

The Pashinyan government has pledged to deal with long-standing problems including systemic corruption, opaque policymaking, a flawed electoral system, and weak rule of law. Despite the government's reformist stance, concerns about political interference in the judiciary and hostile rhetoric toward the media from government officials persist.

Key Developments, June 1, 2019 - May 31, 2020

- Toward the end of 2019, the Public Services Regulatory Commission proposed that internet service providers (ISPs) should log their subscribers' data, including their browsing history. The proposal met with criticism from civil society and did not advance during the coverage period (see C6).
- In March 2020, the government began to collect metadata and geolocation data from users' mobile devices in order to control the spread of COVID-19 (see C5).
- From March 16, 2020 to April 13, 2020, the government banned news media and social media users from publishing unofficial information about COVID-19 (see B2).

A Obstacles to Access

Internet access in Armenia continued to grow during the coverage period. The country's information and communications technology (ICT) market is diverse. A planned merger that would have united two major ISPs fell apart in May 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic put stress on Armenia's ICT infrastructure, leading some users to complain about the quality of their internet connections.

A1 0-6 pts

Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections? 5 / 6

Internet access is widespread in Armenia's capital, Yerevan, and is expanding elsewhere throughout the country. The reliability and speed of internet connections across Armenia have generally improved in recent years. Most shopping malls, cafés, schools, and universities in Yerevan provide free Wi-Fi access. There are also public Wi-Fi hotspots in central areas of the capital, on certain public buses, on the metro, in some railway stations, and in some taxis. It is also possible to find public Wi-Fi hotspots in other major cities, though not to the same extent as in Yerevan.

In 2019, the number of broadband internet subscriptions increased by 6.7 percent over 2018, to 3.09 million (in a country of approximately 3 million people).¹ According to World Bank survey data, 96 percent of households in Armenia have access to the internet.² 3G service is widely available, covering about 90 percent of the country (excluding mostly unpopulated mountainous regions).³ 4G+ networks, meanwhile, now cover 89.5 percent of settlements.⁴ Mobile operators are also working to build 5G networks.⁵ ISPs offer fixed broadband services through telephone networks (ADSL) and fiber-optic cables, as well as Wi-Fi and Wi-Max technologies.

Connection speeds improved during the coverage period. According to data published by Speedtest in May 2020, the average speed of a fixed broadband connection was 26.80 Mbps, while the average speed of a mobile internet connection was 34.84 Mbps.⁶ During the spring of 2020, when COVID-19 quarantine measures were in full effect and all schools went online, there were numerous complaints about the quality of internet connections, mostly related to the quality of video conferences. ISPs observed a 15–25 percent increase in traffic.⁷

Four ISPs maintain fiber-optic backbone networks that connect to the international internet via the Republic of Georgia. There is also a limited fiber-optic connection through Iran, which mostly serves as a backup.⁸ In February 2019, the Armenian ISP Ucom signed a memorandum of understanding with ISPs in Iran and Qatar to build an internet transit link between the Gulf states and Europe through Armenia.⁹

The limited number of internet connections to and from Armenia present challenges in ensuring uninterrupted internet access. On March 22, 2020, users experienced disruptions for several hours due to technical problems in Georgia.¹⁰ In early 2019, users briefly experienced internet disruptions or slow connection speeds as a result of physical damage to ICT infrastructure in Georgia.¹¹

A2 0-3 pts

Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the 2 / population for geographical, social, or other reasons? 3

In general, internet connections are affordable in Armenia. According to 2019 analysis from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the most affordable entry-level monthly fixed broadband subscription cost 2.9 percent of gross national income (GNI) per capita, while the most affordable mobile package offering at least 1.5 GB of data per month cost 1.5 percent of GNI per capita.¹² According to official statistics, wages have risen,¹³ while average prices for “internet access provision services” remained unchanged in January 2020 compared to 2019.¹⁴ According to World Bank survey data, there is “no significant difference in the levels of internet access by income group.”¹⁵ However, many lower-income households cannot afford high-speed fixed broadband and mobile connections.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, major ISPs and mobile service providers offered free, unbilled access to online educational and government resources, including videoconferencing platforms such as Skype and Zoom.¹⁶

There is a minor digital divide between major population centers and more rural areas. By 2020, 100 percent of settlements had access to broadband internet: 99.4 percent with mobile broadband connections and 51.5 percent with fixed broadband connections.¹⁷ The quality of service may be limited outside of cities due to lack of competition between providers. In contrast to the diverse market in Yerevan, some villages have only one or two mobile broadband services from which to choose. As of January 2020, all 1,003 settlements in Armenia were covered by 2G and 3G mobile networks, and 89.5 percent of settlements were covered by 4G+ mobile networks.¹⁸

A3 0-6 pts

Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of 6 / restricting connectivity? 6

The government does not shut down internet access, and control of Armenia’s internet infrastructure is decentralized. ISPs exchange traffic through an internet exchange point (IXP) operated by the ARMIX Foundation, a nonprofit organization (see A5). However, under the Law on Electronic Communication, the government is empowered to assume “responsibility for the operation and management of any or all electronic communications networks or services” during a state of emergency.¹⁹

The government and the Public Services Regulatory Commission (PSRC), the telecommunications regulator, do not interfere with the planning of network topology. Private companies plan and develop their own networks independently.

A4 0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers? 5 / 6

The telecommunications market is reasonably diverse, with three mobile service providers and dozens of ISPs.²⁰ There are no significant constraints on entering the market. In 2013, amendments to the Law on Electronic Communication removed requirements that ISPs obtain a license, instead requiring that they simply notify the PSRC before providing services or operating a telecommunications network.²¹

According to the PSRC, there were 171 ISPs in Armenia as of the end of 2019.²² However, three operators control nearly all of the fixed broadband internet market. In the first quarter of 2020, Ucom had 155,722 reported subscribers,²³ Rostelecom 56,057,²⁴ and Beeline 52,482.²⁵

At the end of 2019, Vivacell-MTS, a Russian company, was the largest mobile service provider (controlling 58 percent of the market), followed by Beeline and Ucom.²⁶

In December 2019, Ucom sought the approval of the PSRC to acquire Veon Armenia (which operates under the trademark Beeline), producing expectations of market consolidation in 2020.²⁷ However, the proposed takeover fell apart in May 2020.²⁸ In June 2020, after the coverage period, Team.Telecom, a new company established by Ucom’s founders after they had a falling-out with Ucom management,²⁹ announced plans to purchase Veon Armenia.³⁰

Public access points such as cafés, libraries, schools, and community centers must be licensed if they offer internet service for a fee; free internet access points are exempt.³¹

A5 0-4 pts

Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a 2 / free, fair, and independent manner? 4

The PSRC operates relatively transparently, and its activities in the telecommunications sector are generally fair. However, the body’s past conduct—particularly with respect to public utilities like gas and water—has been marred by corruption.³² The body’s decisions are made during open meetings, in which the public can participate.³³ The PSRC must submit an annual report to the National Assembly, but the parliament cannot intervene in its decisions, preserving the body’s independence. The PSRC primarily focuses its regulatory activities on companies with significant market power.

The PSRC was assigned responsibility for regulating the telecommunications sector under the Law on Electronic Communication.³⁴ Its authority, mechanisms for commissioners’ appointments, and budgeting principles are defined under the Law on Public Service Regulation Commission.³⁵ One of the weakest elements of the telecommunications regulatory framework is the absence of term limits for commissioners. Commissioners are appointed by the president based on recommendations from the prime minister that are subject to parliamentary approval. Once appointed, commissioners can be dismissed only if they are convicted of a crime, fail to perform their professional duties, or violate other rules, such as those that prohibit obtaining shares of companies regulated by the PSRC.

Though industry self-regulation remains underdeveloped, three well-established nonprofit organizations have helped shape Armenia’s ICT sector. The oldest is the national chapter of the Internet Society (ISOC Armenia), a global organization that supports the development of the internet around the world. It has ceded much of its early regulatory role to the PSRC, but continues to maintain the registry of country-level domain names according to best practices recommended by ICANN, the nonprofit that manages global domain name systems. A second well-established industry association is the Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises (UATE). A third institution, the ARMIX Foundation, was established by leading telecommunications companies, ISOC Armenia, and the UATE to create a local data traffic exchange point.

B Limits on Content

The government does not block access to social media platforms or other websites. For a few weeks during the coverage period, police censored online news items containing unofficial information about COVID-19.

B1 0-6 pts

Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content? 6 / 6

In general, online content is widely accessible, and no social media platforms, communication apps, or other popular websites were restricted during the coverage period. Blocking is typically limited to locally hosted content found to contravene laws on pornography. It is implemented by deregistering websites using the .am or .huy country code top-level domains (ccTLDs).³⁶

B2 0-4 pts

Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content 2 / hosts, or digital platforms to delete content? 4

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 after the government forced online news media and social media users to remove content containing unofficial information about COVID-19.

According to the latest transparency reports from Facebook, Google, and Twitter, the government did not issue any requests to remove content.³⁷

On March 16, 2020, the government instituted a state of emergency in response to the outbreak of COVID-19. The state of emergency regime included restrictions on mass media and on social media users, stating that “if persons or the mass media outlets want to post information about the current and new cases of coronavirus, people’s health condition, source of infection, the number of isolated persons on the internet including on social media or by all other ways, they should only use the official information provided by the incident commander’s office. The same applies to such information which leads to panic or contains panic-provoking danger. Such posts are subject to immediate deletion by the persons that have posted them.”³⁸ Under Article 182.3 of the code of administrative violations, those deemed in breach of these restrictions could be fined 500–800 times the monthly minimum wage.³⁹ Additionally, outlets and users could be fined the equivalent of \$1,000–\$2,000 for refusing to remove unofficial information within 24 hours, according to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).⁴⁰

By March 23, the authorities had contacted 22 media outlets and an unspecified number of individuals, asking them to edit or remove information that was inconsistent with “official information,” according to Hayk Mhryan, the deputy chief of police.⁴¹ For example, at the request of the authorities, *Hraparak* removed a story about prisoners who complained that they would no longer receive care packages from loved ones due to COVID-19.⁴² Individuals also fell afoul of these restrictions: in one case, police forced a plastic surgeon to take down a Facebook post urging the government to impose a stricter lockdown to stop the spread of the virus.⁴³ Some of the content targeted for censorship by the authorities was not even related to Armenia. Aravot.am was obliged to edit a story quoting an analyst who claimed that the Russian government was undercounting the number of COVID-19 cases in Russia.⁴⁴ Similarly, Armenia Public Television removed a story from its website citing US-based news outlet CNN that discussed the COVID-19 fatality rate in Iran.⁴⁵

Amid strong criticism of these actions, the government eased restrictions on March 26 and then provisionally lifted censorship on April 13.⁴⁶

B3 0-4 pts

Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, 3 / 4 or an independent appeals process?

There are limited grounds for restricting content by blocking websites. Armenia permits the filtering of internet content only under a narrow set of circumstances, and decisions to block content require a court order.⁴⁷ Armenian courts can issue orders to block illegal content, including child pornography and content that violates intellectual property rights.⁴⁸ Orders to block content can be challenged in court by content owners, who may claim compensation if a judge finds the blocking order to be illegal or unnecessary. Since Armenia is a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), appeals of content-blocking decisions can also be filed at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). The government is, however, legally empowered to limit mass media, including online mass media, during states of emergency.⁴⁹

ISPs and content hosts are shielded from liability for illegal content stored on or transmitted through their systems without their prior knowledge.⁵⁰

Community standards for social media platforms, particularly Facebook, are nontransparent for Armenian users. Facebook has banned the accounts of a number of Armenian opinion leaders and media outlets for violating its terms of service. According to rights activists, the decisions lacked transparency, and some of those banned have been accused of hate speech without evidence to support the claims.⁵¹

B4 0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship? 3 / 4

Online journalists, commentators, and ordinary internet users do not engage in widespread self-censorship. Diverse political opinions proliferate on social media, and robust political debates are common online.

In July 2018, in the wake of Armenia’s Velvet Revolution, a group of prominent journalists, including several from online media outlets, issued a statement decrying an “atmosphere of intolerance” on social media platforms and denouncing online incitements to violence, including by supporters of the revolution, against the news media in reaction to unfavorable reporting.⁵² In the highly polarized post-revolutionary media landscape, “critical friends” of the Pashinyan government, often members of Armenia’s vibrant civil society scene, are sometimes loath to speak out online for fear of being co-opted by members and supporters of the old regime.⁵³

Armenia’s relationship with Azerbaijan is a topic of some sensitivity. In the past, Armenian officials have instructed citizens to refrain from discussing the situation in the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh during moments of tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

B5 0-4 pts

Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful 2 / 4 actors to advance a particular political interest?

The online information landscape in Armenia is polarized and subject to political pressure. At certain outlets, online journalists are not allowed to deviate from the editorial policies of their employers, who in some cases are linked to political parties or forces. The wife of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Anna Hakobyan, has drawn controversy for her role as the editor-in-chief of the *Armenian Times*. In a May 2018 interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Hakobyan vowed that she and her staff would “criticize everyone.”⁵⁴ However, some observers have noted that the *Armenian Times* has published a “suspiciously large number of scoops” since Pashinyan took power, contributing to concerns that the outlet is being used to advance the interests of the prime minister.⁵⁵

Despite these concerns, some analysts argue that undue political influence on the online information landscape is less prevalent under Pashinyan. In a February 2019 interview with Eurasianet, Gegham Vardanyan, the editor of the media analysis website Media.am, said that “the media [in Armenia] is freer now than it was under the former government. Editors and journalists told me that in the past there were calls [from the government] to dictate the main topics of the news agenda. Now it is easier, there are no longer calls like that.”⁵⁶

In January 2019, Facebook announced that it had removed hundreds of accounts and pages originating from Russia, some of which targeted Armenian users, that spread misinformation aimed at influencing public opinion.⁵⁷ In September 2019, the Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) exposed a set of inauthentic

Facebook pages and groups tied to employees of Sputnik Armenia that targeted members of the Armenian diaspora with the Kremlin-controlled outlet’s content.⁵⁸ After this exposé, some of these pages and groups became unavailable.

Armenia’s far right is also a significant source of dis- and misinformation online, which is spread through an ecosystem comprising social media accounts (notably, Facebook pages and YouTube channels) and friendly websites.⁵⁹

Both the reigning My Step Alliance and the opposition Prosperous Armenia party have been accused of using fake accounts on social media platforms to spread partisan narratives.⁶⁰

In March 2020, Armenia’s National Security Service (NSS) claimed that hackers from Azerbaijan were using compromised Armenian social media accounts to spread disinformation about COVID-19.⁶¹ The Information Checking Center, a government body under the prime minister, repeated the same claim days later.⁶²

In May 2020, an investigative report revealed that MedMedia.am, a website partially backed by a grant from the United States government, was peddling false information on Facebook about COVID-19, calling it a “fake pandemic” and fabricating a story that “a morgue offered 100,000 AMD (\$205) to a dead patient’s relatives to sign a document saying the death was caused by COVID-19.”⁶³ The US government later rescinded funding for the website.⁶⁴

B6 0-3 pts

Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users’ ability to publish content 3 / online? 3

Since the Velvet Revolution, media outlets and other users have not faced arbitrary economic or regulatory constraints that would significantly impact their ability to publish online. In fact, the Velvet Revolution helped drive growth in the digital media sector.

IREX’s 2019 Media Sustainability Index notes that only broadcast media outlets must obtain licenses and that “market entry and tax structure for media are fair.”⁶⁵ While the advertising market remains small, it is less politicized. According to IREX, “if previously the advertising spending was controlled (by government circles) and only select online outlets could receive advertising, now it is more liberal, and online outlets can also secure advertising.”⁶⁶ According to one expert, in 2018 the online advertising market in Armenia was worth about \$3.5 million, with most revenue going to gambling websites.⁶⁷ The market is reportedly growing rapidly.

While net neutrality is not explicitly enshrined in Armenian law, a 2014 government resolution supports the principle.⁶⁸ A 2008 PSRC decision requires ISPs to inform subscribers of any discriminatory network traffic management policies.⁶⁹

B7 0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity? 3 / 4

Users are able to access a wide array of content online, primarily in Armenian, English, and Russian.⁷⁰ According to a 2019 media consumption survey, the internet is the primary source of information for a plurality of Armenians (36.5 percent), edging out traditionally more popular mediums such as radio and television.⁷¹ A variety of independent and opposition web resources provide audiences with politically neutral content as well as opposition viewpoints. However, IREX’s 2019 Media Sustainability Index notes that “it is rare for an individual media outlet to include multiple points of view.”⁷²

The social media platforms Facebook, Odnoklassniki, Twitter, VKontakte, and YouTube are among the most-visited websites in Armenia. Many users get their news from these platforms, including from a growing crop of bloggers, vloggers, and influencers. According to a 2019 media consumption survey, Facebook is the most popular social media platform. However, online news and livestreams, including on Facebook and Facebook Live, are perceived as less-trustworthy sources of information than traditional mediums like print and television.⁷³

During a January 2019 stream on Facebook Live, Prime Minister Pashinyan declared, without citing evidence, that 90 percent of the Armenian media belongs to former government officials or opposition figures.⁷⁴

B8 0-6 pts

Do conditions impede users’ ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on 6 / political and social issues? 6

There are no restrictions on social media platforms in Armenia, on which activists and protest movements rely to mobilize citizens and gather support. In July 2019, journalist Lucy Kocharyan helped kick-start a reckoning with sexual violence by collecting and publishing stories from anonymous survivors of assault on Facebook using the hashtag #բռնություն ձայնը (“Voices of Violence”).⁷⁵

Throughout the coverage period, social media platforms played an integral role in local environmental activists’ long-running campaign against the planned Amulsar gold mine. Online facets of the campaign included the use of Change.org to circulate petitions against the project,⁷⁶ the use of Facebook to organize demonstrations (for example, on Environmental Mobilization Day, September 20),⁷⁷ and the use of the hashtag #SaveAmulsar to spread awareness.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, several online flash mobs pushed people to maintain social distance, wear masks, and take other precautions. Prime Minister Pashinyan, a frequent Facebook user, asked his supporters to film people without masks,⁷⁸ which various observers criticized as violating ethics and privacy rights.⁷⁹

C Violations of User Rights

The coverage period saw relatively few users face legal punishments for online activities that may be protected under international human right standards. Even fewer users suffered extralegal retaliation for online activities. However, surveillance measures put in place by the government in response to COVID-19 encroached on users' privacy rights.

C1 0-6 pts

Do the constitution or other laws fail to protect rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom, including on the internet, and are they enforced by a judiciary that lacks independence? 3 / 6

The constitution guarantees freedom of speech to both individuals and media outlets.⁸⁰ Armenian criminal legislation grants journalists certain protections. According to Article 164 of the criminal code, hindering the legal professional activities of a journalist, as well as forcing a journalist to disseminate or withhold information, is punishable by fines or imprisonment for up to one year. The same actions committed by an official in abuse of their office is punishable by up to three years in prison and a ban on holding certain posts in the government for up to three years.⁸¹ However, neither the criminal code nor media legislation clearly defines who qualifies as a journalist, or whether these rights apply to online journalists and bloggers.

The 2003 Law on Mass Media adopted a unified regulatory framework for all forms of media content, including online content.⁸²

Armenia's judiciary lacks independence and is one of the least trusted public institutions in the country.⁸³ In May 2019, Prime Minister Pashinyan announced that he would attempt to comprehensively reform the judiciary and improve its independence,⁸⁴ but the centerpiece of this effort, a national referendum that would have allowed him to dismiss constitutional court judges, was scrapped amid the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸⁵

C2 0-4 pts

Are there laws that assign criminal penalties or civil liability for online activities? 3 / 4

Some laws threaten the constitution's guarantees of freedom of online expression, though they have not been widely implemented to suppress online speech. Armenian criminal legislation prohibits the dissemination of speech that incites racial, religious, or national hatred, as well as calls to seize state power or change the constitutional order by force.⁸⁶ These laws apply to expression both online and offline, and some rights activists fear that they could be used to arrest and prosecute critics of the government.

Defamation laws have been used by politicians to restrict public criticism in the past. Defamation was decriminalized in 2010,⁸⁷ and in 2011 the Constitutional Court ruled that courts should avoid imposing large fines on media outlets for defamation, resulting in a decrease in the number of defamation cases.⁸⁸

Armenian laws on pornography and copyright infringement generally align with European legal standards,⁸⁹ and companies have not been held liable for illegal content shared by users (see B3). The act of downloading illegal materials or copyrighted publications is not subject to prosecution unless prosecutors can prove the content was stored with intent to disseminate it. Armenia is a signatory to the Council of Europe's Convention on Cybercrime, and Armenian cybercrime legislation is in accordance with the principles declared in the convention.

In April 2020, the parliament adopted amendments to the criminal code that criminalize violent hate speech. Accordingly, publicly inciting or justifying violence based on gender, race, skin color, ethnic or social origin, or other characteristics will be subject to penalties including fines and imprisonment for up to three years.⁹⁰ At the time of writing, no criminal cases had been opened under these new provisions. The amendments were met with some skepticism; one opposition lawmaker asserted that “it will be very difficult to implement the law without badly affecting freedom of speech.”⁹¹ A civil society leader seconded these doubts, noting that “when insult, intolerance, hate speech and in some cases even obscenity is voiced from the highest rostrums of the country, it is not realistic to expect that civilians will keep high standards of decorum.”⁹²

In December 2019, a member of parliament introduced a bill that, if passed, would punish the dissemination of “false information” with prison terms of up to two years.⁹³ The bill did not advance during the coverage period.

C3 0-6 pts

Are individuals penalized for online activities? 5 / 6

Users are not often detained, prosecuted, or punished for protected online activities. However, civil defamation cases, usually against journalists, are sometimes brought for such activities. According to international watchdog group Reporters Without Borders, “the number of lawsuits alleging defamation or insult... has tripled in the past four years.”⁹⁴ In 2019, 89 such lawsuits were brought against journalists and media outlets.⁹⁵ According to the nongovernmental organization (NGO) CEE Bankwatch Network, the company behind the planned Amulsar gold mine (see B8) has filed at least 15 defamation lawsuits against environmental activists, reporters, and news outlets.⁹⁶

In February 2020, Armenia’s Special Investigation Service (SIS) began a criminal investigation after two news outlets, *Hraparak* and *Iragir.am*, reported that Minister for Local Government Suren Papikyan had a criminal record.⁹⁷ Without denying the reports, Papikyan asserted that they revealed “secret information relating to my private life.”⁹⁸ At the time of writing, no public information was available regarding the SIS inquiry into the allegedly illegal collection and dissemination of private information.

In January 2020, the NSS detained a social media user who had posted a Facebook status under a fake name falsely claiming that Prime Minister Pashinyan had congratulated US President Donald Trump on the assassination of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani. The post had garnered a great deal of attention in Azerbaijan and Iran,⁹⁹ prompting Pashinyan to declare on Facebook that “this is the case when the false ‘freedom’ of speech poses a threat to our national security. The authors of the news and their motives need to be clarified.”¹⁰⁰ After detaining the user, the NSS published a video in which he confessed to creating a fake Facebook profile to discredit Pashinyan.¹⁰¹ He was also charged under Articles 226 and 245 of the criminal code for allegedly inciting racial, religious, or national hatred and misappropriating “computer data.”¹⁰² No public information was available at the time of writing regarding progress in the case.

In April 2019, the NSS arrested the author of a controversial Facebook page entitled “High Spirit Armenia Open Society,” charging the individual (whose identity remained unknown to the public at the end of the coverage period) with sowing racial, religious, or national hatred under Article 226 of the criminal code.¹⁰³ Although the page had posted offensive content, rights activists expressed concern that the arrest was an attack on online expression. The arrest followed a call by Pashinyan for a “counterstrike” against purveyors of “fake news” on social media.¹⁰⁴ At the time of writing, no public information was available regarding the progress of the case against the author.

C4 0-4 pts

Does the government place restrictions on anonymous communication or encryption? 3 / 4

Anonymous communication and encryption tools are neither prohibited nor restricted in Armenia. Individuals are required to present identification when purchasing a SIM card for mobile phones.¹⁰⁵

C5 0-6 pts

Does state surveillance of internet activities infringe on users’ right to privacy? 3 / 6

Electronic state surveillance remains a threat to Armenians’ online privacy rights. Armenia, a member of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, is widely believed to possess Russian-designed System for Operative Investigative Activities (SORM) electronic surveillance capabilities. The NSS has lawful interception powers, and surveillance without a court order is permitted for up to 48 hours when national security is imminently threatened.¹⁰⁶

In January 2020, the parliament passed amendments to the law regulating law enforcement and intelligence activities that authorized the police to seek and obtain warrants to tap phones for surveillance purposes. Previously, the law authorized only the NSS to tap phones.¹⁰⁷ According to lawmaker Mikayel Zolyan (from the ruling My Step coalition), the amendments allow the police to conduct investigations without NSS supervision, thereby curtailing some of the power of the NSS.¹⁰⁸

In March 2020, the parliament adopted a law that requires telecommunications companies to provide the authorities with their subscribers’ phone records, including their phone numbers and the location, time, and date of their calls and texts, in order to facilitate COVID-19 contact tracing.¹⁰⁹ The law does not let the government access users’ communications, only their metadata, and only applies for the duration of the state of emergency, which had not expired by the end of the coverage period.¹¹⁰ The metadata collected via this program was to be deleted within one month of the end of the state of emergency. In mid-May 2020, officials claimed that they had traced phone calls made by 1,938 people and found 735 instances of direct contact with people who had tested positive for COVID-19.¹¹¹ However, by that time Armenia’s COVID-19 caseload was increasing by several hundred each day,¹¹² raising doubts as to the program’s effectiveness. One opposition lawmaker claimed the metadata could only identify the location of users in open spaces—and only then to within 20-100 meters—meaning the program provides “no information on personal interactions.”¹¹³

Members of civil society expressed concern that the information collected by the program could be used for other purposes, including bulk surveillance. A main concern is that the government has not communicated the workings of the program in a transparent manner. Moreover, there is no evident public control over the program. The collected metadata are stored by the state E-Government Infrastructure Implementation Office, while the program’s technical infrastructure is overseen by the NSS.¹¹⁴ A public information request asking who developed the program was denied, as the government explained that “the system was not obtained through procedural purchase but by volunteers and for free. Individual programmers developed and provided the system as a donation. ... At the same time, the programmers do not wish their names to be public and did not agree to publicize their free help.”¹¹⁵

In February 2019, a Eurasianet report revealed that the Pashinyan government was continuing negotiations with Huawei to bring the Chinese company’s “Smart City” technology to Yerevan.¹¹⁶ Talks began in 2017, during the administration of former president Serzh Sargsyan. “Smart City” technology, which entails, inter alia, the deployment of a CCTV network loaded with artificial intelligence-driven facial recognition software, raises the specter of enhanced state surveillance and control at the expense of citizens’ privacy. Furthermore, Huawei’s ties to

the Chinese government have elicited concern among national security experts in Armenia and elsewhere, who fear that data collected through “Smart City” technology could end up in Beijing’s hands. Following the report, an official from the office of the mayor of Yerevan reported that the negotiations had been suspended.^{[117](#)}

The Personal Data Protection Law, which came into effect in 2015,^{[118](#)} protects citizens’ right to privacy with respect to the processing of personal data in line with European standards. The law created the Personal Data Protection Agency, which has the authority to appeal the decisions of state agencies if they have the potential to violate citizens’ right to privacy through the use of personal data. Under the same law, government and law enforcement bodies are allowed to collect an individual’s personal data, but only with a court order. State monitoring and storage of personal data is illegal unless it is required for the provision of state services. Only data obtained in line with these narrow legal requirements may be used as evidence in legal proceedings. Nonetheless, the courts generally support data collection requests from law enforcement bodies.

C6 0-6 pts

Are service providers and other technology companies required to aid the government in monitoring 4 / the communications of their users? 6

Score Change: The score declined from 5 to 4 because the government required service providers to hand over subscribers’ metadata, ostensibly so it could be used to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Armenian legislation does not require service providers to monitor traffic or content. Moreover, the Personal Data Protection Law mandates that service providers store only personal data required for billing purposes.^{[119](#)}

However, under the Electronic Communications Law, providers must make customer data available to authorities “in connection with surveillance, inquest, or criminal prosecution.”^{[120](#)} Upon a court order, they must also give authorities access to “any communications equipment... including wiretapping devices.”^{[121](#)} Moreover, during the state of emergency imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, service providers were obligated to provide user metadata to the government. Cybercafés and other public access points are not required to identify clients or to monitor or store personal data and traffic information.

In October 2019, the PSRC drafted a set of data retention requirements, circulating them among ISPs.^{[122](#)} The vaguely worded requirements would have ISPs collect a wealth of personal data, including metadata, and store it for two years.^{[123](#)} The draft was leaked and ignited outrage among politicians and civil society actors. A number of NGOs claimed the proposed requirements were illegal.^{[124](#)} Although the PSRC defended the draft, it appeared to be dead as of the end of the coverage period.^{[125](#)}

C7 0-5 pts

Are individuals subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence by state authorities or any other 4 / actor in retribution for their online activities? 5

Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 to reflect the general absence of extralegal intimidation, including physical violence, against journalists and internet users.

In Armenia, online journalists in particular are sometimes subject to extralegal intimidation or physical violence in retaliation for their work. However, intimidation and violence have subsided in the wake of the Velvet Revolution. Just four cases of physical violence against reporters were logged in 2019, down from 21 the year prior.^{[126](#)} Of the two cases that occurred during the coverage period, neither involved retribution for online activities.

In March 2020, a blogger was roughed up after mocking a so-called COVID-19 super-spreader in an online video. Relatives of the infected person allegedly tracked the blogger down and assaulted him.^{[127](#)}

A systemic problem is hate speech towards LGBT+ people. It mostly directed by far-right organizations and political movements.^{[128](#)}

C8 0-3 pts

Are websites, governmental and private entities, service providers, or individual users subject to 2 / widespread hacking and other forms of cyberattack? 3

Technical attacks target both government websites and civil society groups in Armenia. Oftentimes, these attacks originate in neighboring Azerbaijan. The scope and pace of cyberattacks from Azerbaijan increased just after the coverage period amid violent clashes between the two countries.

In March 2020, cybersecurity researchers reported that hacking group Turla (which is possibly sponsored by the Russian government) targeted four Armenian websites—those of the consular section of the embassy of Armenia in Russia, the Armenian Deposit Guarantee Fund, the Armenian Institute of International and Security Affairs (an independent organization), and the Ministry of Nature Protection and Natural Resources of the unrecognized Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). The websites were compromised and infected with malware that could spread to visitors’ computers.^{[129](#)}

Starting from December 12, 2019, forrights.am, the website of the NGO Journalists for Human Rights, was subjected to a distributed denial-of-service attack for two weeks.^{[130](#)} The website’s editor, Zhanna Alexanyan, stated on Facebook that she believed the attack was related to the NGO’s investigation into the relatives of a highly influential Armenian (she didn’t mention the individual’s name).^{[131](#)}

In April 2019, the ICT giant Cisco announced that a hacker group had compromised Armenia's .am ccTLD.¹³² However, several domain registrars in Armenia have denied this report, and cybersecurity experts did not observe any unusual activity in the .am domain.¹³³

Footnotes

- 1 “Ինտերնետ հասանելիության ծառայությունների դորտի ցուցանիշները և զարգացման միտումները,” Hetq, 14 February 2020, <https://hetq.am/hy/article/113323>
- 2 Siddhartha Raja and Gohar Malumyan, “Internet use in Armenia: How might connectivity shape access to opportunity?,” World Bank, 22 April 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/europeandcentralasia/internet-use-armenia-h...>
- 3 PSRC 2019 Annual Report [in Armenian] <http://psrc.am/uploads/topics/15876281035176.pdf>
- 4 PSRC 2019 Annual Report [in Armenian] <http://psrc.am/uploads/topics/15876281035176.pdf>
- 5 “Mobile operators comment on prospects of 4G and 5G networks in Armenia,” Itel, November 28, 2017, <http://www.itel.am/en/news/9514>
- 6 “Speedtest Global Index,” Ookla, Accessed May 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200619010906/https://www.speedtest.net/gl...>
- 7 Impact of state of emergency on internet traffic (Armenian), 31 March 2020, <https://hetq.am/hy/article/115341>
- 8 Samvel Martirosyan, “The Problems of Armenian Internet Domain,” Noravank Foundation, January 12, 2016, http://www.noravank.am/arm/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=14326#1_b
- 9 “Connecting Europe-Armenia-Iran-Qatar: Ucom Exceeds Turkish Ones And Gets Involved In A Large Regional Project,” Ucom, February 27, 2019, <https://www.ucom.am/en/news/2019/02/27/connecting-europe-armenia-iran-q...>
- 10 “Ucom told about internet disruption reasons” [in Armenian], Armenian News, 22 March 2020, <https://newsarmenia.am/am/news/society/Ucom-y-nshel-e-HH-um-/>
- 11 “Ucom: Georgian cable damage causes internet disruption in Armenia,” News.am February 4, 2019 <https://news.am/en/news/494368.html>
- 12 “Measuring Digital Development: ICT Price Trends 2019,” International Telecommunication Union, <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/prices20...>
- 13 Average monthly nominal wages, drams, Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, <https://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=12&id=08001>
- 14 Internet access provision services, Consumer Price Index in the Republic of Armenia January 2020, Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, p. 14 https://armstat.am/file/article/cpi_01_2020-eng.pdf
- 15 Siddhartha Raja and Gohar Malumyan, “Internet use in Armenia: How might connectivity shape access to opportunity?,” World Bank, 22 April 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/europeandcentralasia/internet-use-armenia-h...>
- 16 Statements from mobile operators: “Zoom application in ‘PRO tariff plans,” Beeline, June 18, 2020, <https://www.beeline.am/en/news/2020/06/18/zoom-application-in-pro-tarif...>; “UCOM Mobile Subscribers to use distance learning tools without paying for internet,” Ucom, September 25, 2020, <https://www.ucom.am/en/news/2020/04/08/ucum-mobile-subscribers-to-use-d...>; “Yev’ Tariff Plan: ‘Facebook,’ ‘Instagram,’ and more top apps to use without consuming megabytes,” MTS, April 23, 2020, <https://www.mts.am/en/individual-customers/news/detail/2020/04/23/yev-t...>
- 17 PSRC 2019 Annual Report [in Armenian] <http://psrc.am/uploads/topics/15876281035176.pdf>
- 18 PSRC 2019 Annual Report [in Armenian] <http://psrc.am/uploads/topics/15876281035176.pdf>
- 19 Law on Electronic Communication, Legal Information System of Armenia, <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=68804>
- 20 “Information and Telecommunication Technologies Sector in Armenia 2014 State of Industry Report,” EIF, <https://perma.cc/EAS2-23YQ>
- 21 On Amendments and Additions to the Law on Electronic Communication, Legal Information System of Armenia, <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=83556>
- 22 License registry as of September 2019, Public Services Regulatory Commission of the Republic of Armenia <http://www.psrc.am/images/docs/license/communication/2019/%D4%BC%D5%AB%...>
- 23 “Report on the Main Economic and Technical Indicators of Fixed Telecommunication Services for 2020 1st Q,” Ucom, https://www.ucom.am/file_manager/reports/20-1%20eng.pdf
- 24 “Information about Main Indicators,” GNC-Alfa, <https://www.rtarmenia.am/images/statements/PSRC-1st-2020.pdf>
- 25 “Information about Economic and Technical Indicators of Fixed Telecommunication Services for 2020 1st Q,” Beeline, https://www.beeline.am/file_manager/Results%20&%20Reporting/VEON_2020/T...

- [26](#)“MTS PJSC Annual Report,” MTS, https://s22.q4cdn.com/722839827/files/doc_news/AGM_Materials/2020/06/4-...
- [27](#)“Ucom requests watchdog’s approval for acquiring Beeline,” Armenpress December 30, 2019, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1000498.html>
- [28](#)“VEON walks away from talks to sell Armenian arm to Ucom,” CommsUpdate, 7 May 2020, <https://www.commsupdate.com/articles/2020/05/07/veon-walks-away-from-ta...>
- [29](#)“Yesayan brothers to create new company called Unet,” CommsUpdate, 23 April 2020, <https://www.commsupdate.com/articles/2020/04/23/yesayan-brothers-to-cre...>
- [30](#)“Armenia: Yesayan Brothers Seek to Buy Veon Armenia CJSC Telecommunications Company,” Hetq, 9 June 2020, <https://hetq.am/en/article/118092>
- [31](#)Article 43, Law of the Republic of Armenia on Licensing, May 30, 2001, with several amendments from 2002-2012, National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, http://www.parliament.am/law_docs/270601HO193eng.pdf?lang=eng
- [32](#)Tatev Danielian, “French Water Operator Under Corruption Probe In Armenia,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 27, 2018. <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29456213.html>; See also: “One of the 7 officials bribed by Veolia Jur is now a minister,” Fact Investigation Platform, November 7, 2018. <https://fip.am/en/4825>
- [33](#)Article 11, Law of the Republic of Armenia on Public Service Regulation Commission, Legal Information System of Armenia, <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=114423>
- [34](#)Law of the Republic of Armenia on Electronic Communication, Legal Information System of Armenia, <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=1869>
- [35](#)Law of the Republic of Armenia on Public Service Regulation Commission, Legal Information System of Armenia, <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=114423>
- [36](#)“Policy of Domain Names Registration in “.Am” and “.Հայ” Domain Zones,” Internet Society Armenia, https://www.isoc.am/file_manager/pdf/Policy_EN.pdf
- [37](#)“Facebook Transparency: Content Restrictions Based on Local Law: Armenia,” Facebook, <https://transparency.facebook.com/content-restrictions/country/AM>; “Google Transparency Report: Government Request to Remove Content: Armenia,” Google, <https://transparencyreport.google.com/government-removals/by-country/AM>; “Twitter: Transparency Reports: Removal Requests,” Twitter, <https://transparency.twitter.com/en/removal-requests.html>
- [38](#)“What to expect during state of emergency,” Government of the Republic of Armenia, March 17, 2020, <https://www.gov.am/en/news/item/9730/>
- [39](#)“Violation of the Rules of the legal regime of the state of emergency is punishable by a fine” [in Armenian], CivilNet, March 19, 2020, <https://perma.cc/E6FS-9CXU>
- [40](#)“Coronavirus response should not impede the work of the media in Armenia, says OSCE Media Freedom Representative,” OSCE, March 24, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/449098>
- [41](#)“Armenia: State of Emergency Press Restrictions Continue; 22 Media Outlets Told to Remove/Edit Coronavirus Content,” Hetq, March 23 2020, <https://hetq.am/en/article/114899>
- [42](#)Grisha Balasanyan, “Media in Armenia Voice Concerns Over State of Emergency Restrictions; Two Papers Forced to Edit Coronavirus Articles Deemed ‘Panic-Mongering’,” Hetq, March 19, 2020, <https://hetq.am/en/article/114706>
- [43](#)“Armenia: State of Emergency Press Restrictions Continue; 22 Media Outlets Told to Remove/Edit Coronavirus Content,” Hetq, March 23 2020, <https://hetq.am/en/article/114899>
- [44](#)Tigran Petrosyan, “Analysts criticize restrictions on press freedom in Armenia ascribed to coronavirus,” Caucasian Knot, March 20, 2020, <https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/50352/>
- [45](#)Petros Ghazaryan, “If they write, ‘We learned that there are 10 infected soldiers,’ it is a disgrace, lie and panic” [in Armenian], Avarot, March 21, 2020, <https://www.aravot.am/2020/03/21/1101397/>
- [46](#)“Armenia Extends Coronavirus State of Emergency,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 13, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30551374.html>
- [47](#)Armen Hunanyan and Zaruhi Stepanyan, “The Principle of Net Neutrality in the Republic of Armenia.” Presentation at 31st BEREC Plenary Meetings, Cascais, Portugal, May 2017, https://berec.europa.eu/files/document_register_store/2017/6/Session%20...
- [48](#)Intellectual Property Agency, Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia, <https://www.aipa.am/en/laws/>
- [49](#)Law of the Republic of Armenia on Legal Regime of Emergency, Legal Information System of Armenia, <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=121572>

- [50](#)Tamamyán, Hasmik and Movses Hakobyan, “Internet Freedom in Armenia and Execution of Basic Human Rights in Online Freedom,” Media Initiatives Center, December 2017, <https://mediainitiatives.am/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Internet-Freedom...>
- [51](#)Samvel Martirosyan, “Without Realizing, Facebook Suppresses Freedom of Speech,” media.am, March 4, 2018, <https://media.am/en/critique/2018/04/03/9533/>
- [52](#)Israelyan et al., “Statement of representatives of media outlets on noticeable disturbing tendencies linked to the activity of the media”, 168.am, July 18, 2018, <https://en.168.am/2018/07/18/26570.html>
- [53](#)Armine Ishkanian and Sona Manusyan, “The Postprotest Context in Armenia: Divergent Pathways for Civic Actor,” Carnegie Europe, 24 October 2019, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2019/10/24/postprotest-context-in-armenia-div...>
- [54](#)“Anna Hakobyan will continue to be the chief editor of Armenian Times,” Aysor.am, May 15, 2018, <https://www.aysor.am/am/news/2018/05/15/%D4%B1%D5%B6%D5%B6%D5%A1-%D5%80...>
- [55](#)Ani Mejlumyan, “In the new Armenia, media freedom is a mixed bag,” Eurasianet, February 6, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/in-the-new-armenia-media-freedom-is-a-mixed-bag>
- [56](#)Ani Mejlumyan, “In the new Armenia, media freedom is a mixed bag,” Eurasianet, February 6, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/in-the-new-armenia-media-freedom-is-a-mixed-bag>
- [57](#)“Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior from Russia,” Facebook, January 17, 2019, <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2019/01/removing-cib-from-russia/>
- [58](#)“Inauthentic Sputnik-Linked Pages Target the Armenian Diaspora,” Digital Forensic Research Lab, Atlantic Council, September 5, 2019, <https://medium.com/dfrlab/inauthentic-sputnik-linked-pages-target-the-a...>
- [59](#)Armen Grigoryan, “Armenia first”: behind the rise of Armenia’s alt-right scene,” openDemocracy, September 4, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/armenia-first-behind-the-rise-of-a...>
- [60](#)Lilit Arakelyan, “Armenia Searches for Solutions to Fake News,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, February 10, 2020, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/armenia-searches-solutions-fake-news>
- [61](#)Statement [in Armenian], National Security Service, March 20, 2020, <https://www.sns.am/hy/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B2%D5%B8%D6%80%D5%A4%D5%A1%D5%A3...>
- [62](#)“Azerbaijani hackers target Armenian social media accounts to spread disinformation,” Armenpress, March 31, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1010626.html>
- [63](#)Tatev Hovhannisyán, “Revealed: US-funded website spreading COVID misinformation in Armenia,” openDemocracy, May 28, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/us-money-armenia-misinformation-c...>
- [64](#)Tatev Hovhannisyán and Claire Provost, “US ends funding for Armenian website that spread COVID-19 misinformation,” openDemocracy, June 9, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/us-ends-funding-armenian-website-...>
- [65](#)Media Sustainability Index 2019: Armenia, IREX, <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index...>
- [66](#)Media Sustainability Index 2019: Armenia, IREX, <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index...>
- [67](#)“In 10 years Armenian online advertisement market has 10 times growth” [in Armenian], arka.am, http://arka.am/am/news/interview/Havastanum_internet_govazdi_shukan/
- [68](#)Appendix of the 34th Protocol Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia, Internet Governance Principles, August 14, 2014, http://igf.am/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/IG_Principles_EN.pdf
- [69](#)Decision of the Public Services Regulatory Commission of the Republic Of Armenia to Establish the Order for Publishing Data and Internet Access Services, Legal Information System of Armenia, September 3, 2008, <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=77489>
- [70](#)“Study on Media Consumption and the Level of Misinformation in Armenia,” Advanced Public Research Group NGO, 2019, https://www.aprgroup.org/images/Library/NED_report/presentation_2019-04...
- [71](#)“Study on Media Consumption and the Level of Misinformation in Armenia,” Advanced Public Research Group NGO, 2019, https://www.aprgroup.org/images/Library/NED_report/presentation_2019-04...
- [72](#)Media Sustainability Index 2019: Armenia, IREX, <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index...>
- [73](#)“Study on Media Consumption and the Level of Misinformation in Armenia,” Advanced Public Research Group NGO, 2019, https://www.aprgroup.org/images/Library/NED_report/presentation_2019-04...
- [74](#)“Government is not robbing the people and the state – Pashinyan about campaign in media against the government” [in Russian], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 15, 2019, <https://rus.azatutyun.am/a/29710650.html>
- [75](#)Ani Mejlumyan, “Armenia’s #metoo aims to break silence on sexual violence,” Eurasianet, July 9, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/armenias-metoo-aims-to-break-silence-on-sexual-v...>

- ⁷⁶“Stop Mining in Amulsar! Don’t finance Lydian!” Change.org, 2020, <https://perma.cc/C6VR-RAPC>
- ⁷⁷“Environmental Mobilization Day” [in Armenian], Facebook post, September 20, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/events/724596531334864/>
- ⁷⁸Nikol Pashinyan, “Coronavirus Announcement,” Facebook post, June 12, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/2663363290650716>
- ⁷⁹“Pashinyan Criticized For Shaming People In Anti-Coronavirus Drive,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, June 5, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30655102.html>
- ⁸⁰Armenia’s Constitution of 1995 with Amendments through 2015, available at: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Armenia_2015.pdf?lang=en
- ⁸¹Art. 164, Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia as amended on January 6, 2006, National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, <http://parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=1349&lang=eng>
- ⁸²Law of the Republic of Armenia on Mass Media as of December 13, 2003, National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, <http://parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=1890&lang=arm>
- ⁸³“Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia,” International Republican Institute, 2019, https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/iri_poll_armenia_septem...
- ⁸⁴“Armenian PM Calls For Radical Justice Reforms As ‘Second Phase Of Revolution,’” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 20, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenians-heed-call-to-block-courts-pashinian-t...>
- ⁸⁵Ejmin Shahbazian and Maritsa Mandalyan, “What Happened to the Constitutional Referendum?,” EVN Report, June 7, 2020, <https://www.evnreport.com/politics/what-happened-to-the-constitutional-...>
- ⁸⁶Art. 226 and 301 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia, National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, <http://parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=1349&lang=eng>
- ⁸⁷“Analysis of Armenia’s Judicial Practice in Cases of Libel and insult,” Yerevan Press Club, 2012, <https://ypc.am/upload/Analysis%20of%20Armenia%E2%80%99s%20Judicial%20Pr...>
- ⁸⁸“Guide on Defamation and Insult,” OSCE, September 11, 2019, <https://www.osce.org/yerevan/123446>
- ⁸⁹Cybercrime was defined under the new Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia, adopted on April 18, 2003. The first prosecution case for the dissemination of illegal pornography via the internet was recorded in 2004.
- ⁹⁰“Armenia criminalises public calls to violence,” CSO Meter, April 2020, <https://csometer.info/armenia-criminalises-public-calls-to-violence/>
- ⁹¹“In Armenia, law on hate rhetoric provokes skepticism among human rights defenders,” Caucasian Knot, April 16, 2020, <https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/50620/>
- ⁹²Mania Israyelyan, “Hate Speech: Armenian Leaders Set Bad Example,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, June 22, 2020, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/hate-speech-armenian-leaders-set-bad-exa...>
- ⁹³Ani Mejlumyan, “Armenia debates cracking down on ‘fake news’ and hate speech,” Eurasianet, 13 February 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-debates-cracking-down-on-fake-news-and-h...>
- ⁹⁴“Concern about judicial harassment of Armenia’s media,” Reporters Without Borders, 12 February 2020, <https://rsf.org/en/news/concern-about-judicial-harassment-armenias-media>
- ⁹⁵“Annual report of CPFE on the Situation with Freedom of Expression and Violations of Rights of Journalists and Media in Armenia-2019,” Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, 24 January 2020, <https://khosq.am/en/reports/annual-report-of-cpfe-on-the-situation-with...>
- ⁹⁶David Hoffman, “SLAPPD: the Armenian activists fighting a mining multinational’s lawsuits,” Bankwatch Network, June 22, 2020, <https://bankwatch.org/blog/slappd-the-armenian-activists-fighting-a-min...>
- ⁹⁷“Criminal Investigation Against Two Media Outlets Puts Sources at Risk,” Council of Europe, March 2, 2020, <https://perma.cc/S5Y3-QVMZ>
- ⁹⁸“Disclosure of Armenian Minister’s Criminal Record Investigated,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 20, 2020, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/30445892.html>
- ⁹⁹Lusine Sargsyan, “Fighting Fake News or Censoring Speech Online,” EVN Report, January 20, 2020, <https://www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/fighting-fake-news-or-censorin...>
- ¹⁰⁰Nikol Pashinyan, “Armenian language (fake) page spreads fake news that I congratulated US President Donald Trump on organizing an anti-Armenian ‘successful’ operation...” Facebook post, January 4, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/posts/2517628801890833>
- ¹⁰¹Siranush Ghazanchyan, “Author of Pashinyan’s ‘fake congratulation’ to Trump identified,” Public Radio of Armenia, January 5, 2020, <https://en.armradio.am/2020/01/05/author-of-pashinyans-fake-congratulat...>
- ¹⁰²Araks Mamulyan, “The person running the Facebook page named ‘Diana Harutyunyan’ has been arrested,” Hetq, January 8, 2020, <https://hetq.am/hy/article/111845>
- ¹⁰³“Coordinator of High Spirit Armenia Open Society Facebook page arrested: NSS,” Aysor.am, April 10, 2019, <https://www.aysor.am/en/news/2019/04/10/fake-arrest/1549663>

- [104](#)Joshua Kucera, “Pashinyan takes on ‘fake news’,” Eurasianet, April 9, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/pashinyan-takes-on-fake-news>
- [105](#)“Timeline of SIM Card Registration Laws,” Privacy International, June 11, 2019 <https://privacyinternational.org/long-read/3018/timeline-sim-card-regis...>
- [106](#)Tamamyán, Hasmik, Movses Hakobyan, “Internet Freedom in Armenia and Execution of Basic Human Rights in Online Freedom,” Media Initiatives Center, December 2017, <https://mediainitiatives.am/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Internet-Freedom...>
- [107](#)“Parliament gives police authority to conduct phone tapping surveillance,” Armenpress, January 21, 2020, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1002039.html>
- [108](#)“Is Armenia’s proposed wiretapping bill unconstitutional?” Armenian Weekly, December 19, 2019, <https://armenianweekly.com/2019/12/11/armenias-proposed-wiretapping-bil...>
- [109](#)See “On making amendments to the legal regime of emergency” [in Armenian], IRTEK, <https://www.irtk.am/views/act.aspx?aid=152585>
- [110](#)“Armenia: Law Restricts Privacy Amid COVID-19 Fight,” Human Rights Watch, April 3, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/03/armenia-law-restricts-privacy-amid-...>
- [111](#)“How many infected people found using controversial law” [in Armenian], Factor, May 19, 2020, <https://factor.am/251289.html>
- [112](#)“COVID-19 Pandemic in Armenia,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_Armenia
- [113](#)Lilit Arakelyan, “Armenia: Can Mass Surveillance Halt Covid-19?” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, April 16, 2020, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/armenia-can-mass-surveillance-halt-covid...>
- [114](#)Liana Sayadyan, “The NSS maintains the software and security control of the infected people” [in Armenian], Hetq, May 6, 2020, <https://hetq.am/hv/article/116810>
- [115](#)Astghik Karapetyan, “Efficiency, Flaws and Potential Dangers of Phone Tracking,” EVN Report, July 28, 2020, <https://www.evnreport.com/politics/efficiency-flaws-and-potential-dange...>
- [116](#)Grigor Atanesian, “Armenia mulls Chinese surveillance tech,” Eurasianet, February 20, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-mulls-chinese-surveillance-tech>
- [117](#)Interview with spokesman for the office of the Mayor of Yerevan
- [118](#)“Law on Protection of Personal Data,” National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, <http://www.parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=5275>
- [119](#)Law on Protection of Personal Data, available at: http://www.foi.am/u_files/file/Personaldataprotectionlaw_ENG.pdf
- [120](#)Law on Electronic Communications, Legal Information System of Armenia, https://www.arlis.am/Annexes/4/elektr_com_en.pdf
- [121](#)Law on Electronic Communications, Legal Information System of Armenia, https://www.arlis.am/Annexes/4/elektr_com_en.pdf
- [122](#)“Armenian communications regulator to force ISPs to collect user data,” OC Media, October 28, 2019, <https://oc-media.org/armenian-communications-regulator-to-force-isps-to...>
- [123](#)Harout Manougian, “Logging your internet activity: What’s true and what’s not,” EVN Report, October 31, 2019, <https://www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/logging-your-internet-activity...>
- [124](#)“The right to personal data protection cannot be breached,” Open Society Foundations Armenia, September 2019, <https://www.osf.am/2019/10/the-right-to-personal-data-protection-cannot...>
- [125](#)Kristine Hovhannisyan, “Two different approaches to data retention: what can Armenia learn?” EVN Report, February 27, 2020, <https://www.evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/two-different-approaches-to-da...>
- [126](#)“Annual report of CPFE on the Situation with Freedom of Expression and Violations of Rights of Journalists and Media in Armenia-2019,” Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, 24 January 2020, <https://khosq.am/en/reports/annual-report-of-cpfe-on-the-situation-with...>
- [127](#)“Armenian blogger claims beating after posting video about coronavirus patient,” Caucasian Knot, March 18, 2020, <https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/50326/>
- [128](#)Armen Grigoryan, “‘Armenia first’: behind the rise of Armenia’s alt-right scene,” openDemocracy, 4 September 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/armenia-first-behind-the-rise-of-a...>
- [129](#)“Tracking Turla: New backdoor delivered via Armenian watering holes,” WeLiveSecurity, March, 12, 2020, <https://www.welivesecurity.com/2020/03/12/tracking-turla-new-backdoor-a...>
- [130](#)“Forrights.am human rights web-site under massive hacking attack (Armenian),” Forrights.am, December 25, 2019, <https://perma.cc/X778-ZEA6>
- [131](#)Zhanna Alexanyan, “Journalists for Human Rights (forrights.am), a human rights website, has been under attack for 10 days,” Facebook post, <https://www.facebook.com/zhanna.alexanyan/posts/2548722655181965>

- [132](#)Andy Greenberg, "Cyberspies Hijacked the Internet Domains of Entire Countries," Wired, April 14, 2019, <https://www.wired.com/story/sea-turtle-dns-hijacking/>
- [133](#)According to interviews with Freedom House's analyst

ecoi.net summary:

Report on digital media and
internet freedom (reporting period
June 2019 - May 2020)

Country:

Armenia

Source:

[Freedom House](#)

Original link:

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/armenia/freedom-net/2020>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

14 October 2020

Document ID:

2039050

Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum
Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien
T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583
F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
Imprint & Disclaimer
F.A.Q.
Data Protection Notice

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

