

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Freedom in the World 2022 - Armenia

Partly Free

55

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 23 / 40

[Civil Liberties](#) 32 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status

55 / 100 Partly Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

Note

The numerical scores and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is examined in a separate report. *Freedom in the World* reports assess the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area, regardless of whether they are affected by the state, nonstate actors, or foreign powers. Disputed territories are sometimes assessed separately if they meet certain criteria, including boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. For more information, see the report methodology and FAQ.

Overview

Armenia is in the midst of a significant transition following mass antigovernment protests and elections in 2018 that forced out an entrenched political elite. The new government has pledged to deal with long-standing problems including systemic corruption, opaque policymaking, a flawed electoral system, and weak rule of law. The country continues to be seriously affected by the 2020 conflict with Azerbaijan, which saw several months of fighting over control of the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Key Developments in 2021

- In February, the Armenian military demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan following the dismissal of the country's top military officer, leading to widespread antigovernment protests. Pashinyan initially refused to resign, and accused the army of attempting a coup, before resigning in April to trigger snap elections.
- Snap parliamentary elections were held in June, following a months-long political crisis sparked by the defeat of Armenian forces in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Pashinyan remained in his post as prime minister when his Civil Contract Party (KP) won a parliamentary majority; two new electoral blocs, both under the leadership of former presidents, filled the remaining parliamentary seats.
- In May, Azerbaijani forces advanced across the border into Armenia, reigniting the conflict and creating serious security concerns in the border regions. In November, large-scale hostilities broke out along the border, resulting in more than a dozen casualties from both sides, and the capture of 32 Armenian soldiers.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 2 / 4

In 2015, voters approved constitutional changes that, among other things, transformed the country from a semipresidential to a parliamentary republic. The president, who had been directly elected for up to two five-year terms, would henceforth be chosen by the parliament for a single seven-year term, and most executive power would shift to the prime minister, who would also be chosen by a parliamentary majority. In 2018, the parliament elected diplomat Armen Sarkissian to the presidency.

Executive elections held before 2018 were dominated by the Republican Party (HHK), with incumbent elites benefiting from the abuse of administrative resources and severe limitations imposed on opposition candidates. However, Pashinyan swept the December 2018 parliamentary elections, which were markedly freer and fairer than elections in previous years.

In June 2021, Pashinyan's Civil Contract Party won a majority of seats in the snap elections, allowing him to retain his position as prime minister. Though Pashinyan's win was contested by the opposition, the Constitutional Court upheld the election results, and international observers considered the elections to be free and fair.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? **2 / 4**

The National Assembly consists of a minimum of 101 members elected for five-year terms under a newly adopted closed list proportional representation system, simplifying the previous two-tier proportional representation system. Up to four additional seats are reserved for ethnic minority representatives, and further seats can be added to ensure that opposition parties hold at least 30 percent of the seats.

In April 2021, Pashinyan resigned as prime minister, in order to trigger snap parliamentary elections that June. Three parties gained seats in the June parliamentary elections, with Pashinyan's Civil Contract Party winning a stable majority of 71 seats with 53.9 percent of the vote. The new Armenia Alliance, lead by former president Robert Kocharyan, gained 29 seats with 21.1 percent of the vote. Another new bloc, the I Have Honor Alliance, was founded by former president Serzh Sargsyan, and gained 7 seats in the parliament after receiving 5.2 percent of the vote. Though party alliances are required to meet a 7 percent electoral threshold, the threshold was waived for Sargsyan's alliance, as Armenian law mandates that legislature must be composed of no fewer than three parties.

Local and international observers deemed the elections to be competitive, well organized, and fairly administered.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? **3 / 4**

Members of the Central Election Commission (CEC) are recommended and then confirmed by the parliament for six-year terms. According to international observers, during the June 2021 elections, the CEC conducted its work in a transparent and efficient manner, meeting all legal deadlines and enjoying a high level of confidence in its capacity to deliver its mandate.

In April 2021, the parliament amended existing electoral laws to reflect recommendations made by the Venice Commission and the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The June 2021 snap elections were successfully administered under the reformed system, which eliminated territorial lists, simplifying the existing electoral system. The amendments enjoyed broad support by political forces and civil society; further reforms were adopted in May 2021, and are set to take effect in 2022.

Score Change: The score improved from 2 to 3 because the parliament approved electoral code amendments that addressed a number of weaknesses, in keeping with recommendations from international experts.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? **3 / 4**

Political parties and opposition groups have been able to operate in a much freer environment since 2018.

In January 2021, amendments to the Law on Parties took effect, tying public funding of political parties to female and nationwide representation and capping individual donations.

An unprecedented number of political entities (22 political parties and 4 alliances) took part in the June 2021 snap parliamentary elections.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 3 / 4

Before 2018, elections were highly flawed; the HHK had been the main ruling party since 1997, and opposition groups had little chance of winning power. However, that year's election transformed the political landscape, and elections have become significantly more competitive.

International and local observers deemed the June 2021 snap elections, which saw two opposition alliances gain parliamentary seats, to be competitive.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 2 / 4

In April 2021, the parliament adopted amendments calling for heavier penalties for vote buying, election-related violence, and disrupting the electoral process, and criminalized the obstruction of pre-election campaign activities.

Though the 2021 elections saw a decline in such practices, international observers reported allegations of election disruption, including isolated incidents of vote buying and the misuse of administrative resources.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 2 / 4

A system introduced as part of the 2015 constitutional reforms mandates the inclusion of up to four members of parliament representing ethnic minorities; all four must be elected on a party list. In 2021, Civil Contract won three minority seats representing ethnic Russians, Yazidis, and Kurds, while the Armenia Alliance won one seat representing ethnic Assyrians.

No openly LGBT+ people have run in elections or been appointed to a public office in Armenia. Women remain underrepresented in politics and government, and most parties do little to address women's interests aside from meeting the gender quota on candidate lists.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 2 / 4

Through its significant majority, gained in a free and fair election, the Civil Contract Party controlled parliamentary decision-making after the June 2021 snap elections.

Though Pashinyan promised to loosen the influence of business over policymaking, two wealthy businessmen entered the parliament from his party list. Some opposition parliamentarians also maintain close ties to businesspeople.

Since facilitating the November 2020 cease-fire agreement ending the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia wields increased influence in Armenia as the main mediator in Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations.

In February 2021, the Armenian military demanded the resignation of Pashinyan's administration following the dismissal of Tiran Khachatryan, the military's deputy chief of the general staff. In response, Pashinyan accused the army of attempting a coup, though the military took no further action.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 2 / 4

Relationships between politicians, public servants, and businesspeople have historically influenced policy and contributed to selective application of the law. Though such relationships persist, the government has made steady progress in investigating past wrongdoing and fortifying anticorruption mechanisms.

In April 2021, the parliament adopted legislation providing for the creation of an anticorruption court. The government also established a new agency to investigate cases of corruption; the Anti-Corruption Committee (ACC) began operating in October.

However, despite such developments, international bodies, including the UN Human Rights Committee (OHCHR) and the Council of Europe's anticorruption monitoring unit, the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), have found that serious shortcomings remain in the government's anticorruption strategies; as of 2021, GRECO has deemed the Armenian government's compliance with global corruption prevention standards unsatisfactory.

While law enforcement agencies have initiated a number of high-profile corruption investigations, such cases are slow to progress. In 2021, several high-level corruption cases were initiated, including cases against former president Serzh Sargsyan; Armen Gevorgyan, a former official allied to ex-president Robert Kocharian; former prosecutor general Aghvan Hovsepyan; former police chief Vladimir Gasparyan; and former minister of defense David Tonoyan.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 2 / 4

Transparency has historically been limited, and enforcement of asset-declaration rules for public officials has been weak. In 2020, the parliament made strides in enhancing transparency, including by strengthening asset-declaration requirements, though a lack of transparency and accountability persists.

In July 2021, local NGOs spoke out against proposed amendments that would curtail existing freedom-of-information laws, voicing concerns that such amendments would lead to an increase in corruption.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 2 / 4

Independent and investigative outlets operate relatively freely in Armenia, and generally publish online. Small independent outlets often provide robust coverage challenging the narratives of state broadcasters and other establishment media. By comparison, most print and broadcast outlets are affiliated with political or larger commercial interests.

The government imposed several new restrictions on journalistic freedoms in 2021, including limiting the free movement of journalists in the parliament and in parts of the Syunik region. These measures have been widely condemned by local and international organizations, and local media organizations have called for an end to government obstruction and harassment of the media.

Violence against journalists also increased in 2021; the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression (CPFE), a local nongovernmental organization (NGO), counted nearly two dozen instances of violence against members of the media as of October.

In July, the parliament criminalized the act of directing serious insults towards officials and public figures; journalists' associations and human rights NGOs have raised concerns that the law can easily be abused to curtail free expression and to direct political pressure against media organizations that criticize politicians.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public 2 / 4 and private?

Article 18 of the constitution recognizes the Armenian Apostolic Church as a "national church" responsible for the preservation of Armenian national identity; 94 percent of the population identifies as Armenian Apostolic. Religious minorities have reported some discrimination in the past.

In 2020, the National Security Service (NSS) opened an investigation into Yazidi activist Sashik Sultanyan after he publicly stated that Yazidis experience discrimination in Armenia; international human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have criticized the investigation as retaliatory and unlawful.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political 2 / 4 indoctrination?

Although the constitution protects academic freedom, administrative and accreditation processes remain open to political influence. There is some self-censorship among academics on politically sensitive subjects.

In March 2021, the parliament issued an executive order allowing the government to appoint most members of the boards of trustees for three of the country's leading state universities, which enables the authorities to exercise more control over the universities' key decisions, including the election of university rectors.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 3 / 4

Private discussion is relatively free and vibrant. The law prohibits wiretapping or other electronic surveillance without judicial approval, though the judiciary lacks independence and has been accused of excessive deference to law enforcement agencies requesting consent.

In July 2021, the government criminalized defamation, leading to at least 9 criminal cases being opened against people accused of insulting public figures, including Pashinyan, raising concerns regarding citizens' ability to fully exercise their right to freedom of expression.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 3 / 4

The right to assemble is legally guaranteed but inconsistently upheld in practice.

Frequent antigovernment protests took place throughout the country in the run-up to the 2021 parliamentary elections. Despite some violent interference by police and the temporary detention of protesters, demonstrations were mostly allowed to proceed without undue obstacles.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 3 / 4

Outspoken NGOs operate in Armenia, with most of them based in Yerevan. These NGOs lack significant local funding and often rely on foreign donors. Despite this impediment, civil society was active in the 2018 protests, and has consulted with the government on policy matters, most notably on electoral, constitutional, and anticorruption reform.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 2 / 4

The law protects the rights of workers to form and join independent unions, strike, and engage in collective bargaining. However, these protections are not well enforced, and employers are generally able to block union activity in practice.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 1 / 4

The courts face systemic political influence, and judicial institutions are undermined by corruption. Judges reportedly feel pressure to work with prosecutors to convict defendants, and acquittal rates are extremely low. The government published a five-year judicial-reform strategy in 2019; reforms continued to be enacted in 2021, though progress has been slow.

In 2021, the parliament adopted a new Criminal Code and a new Criminal Procedure Code; the codes were drafted based on recommendations issued by the Council of Europe, and are intended to better guarantee the protection of citizens' human rights and improve trust in the judicial system. Both Codes will take effect in 2022.

In March 2021, the Constitutional Court dismissed the case against former president Kocharyan on grounds that the charges against him were unconstitutional; Kocharyan had previously stated that the charges he was facing were based on political retaliation by Pashinyan.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 1 / 4

Authorities apply the law selectively, and due process is not guaranteed in civil or criminal cases. Lengthy pretrial detention remains a problem, and the Armenian judiciary is largely distrusted by the public.

The raft of corruption investigations aimed at HHK elites and allies have prompted concerns about the ability of the country's judicial and investigative mechanisms to ensure fair application of the law.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war 2 / and insurgencies? 4

Reports of police abuse of detainees and poor conditions in prisons persist. After the change in government in 2018, law enforcement agencies renewed dormant investigations into past cases of physical violence by police.

Conditions in areas adjacent to Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnic Armenian-majority territory that previously gained de facto independence from Azerbaijan in 1994, have declined following the 2020 military conflict in the region. Civilians in the region remain at risk of experiencing physical violence.

Azerbaijani forces have continued to occupy areas along the border since late 2020; in May 2021, Pashinyan alleged that Azerbaijani troops had crossed into Armenian territory to provoke further military clashes. In mid-November, large-scale hostilities erupted on the eastern border of Armenia resulting in at least 13 casualties and the capture of 32 Armenian soldiers. Dozens of Armenian prisoners of war reportedly remained in Azerbaijani custody in 2021. Some were reportedly tortured while in detention.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the 2 / population? 4

Women reportedly face discrimination in employment and education, despite legal protections.

Although same-sex sexual activity was decriminalized in 2003, LGBT+ people continue to face violence and mistreatment at the hands of police and civilians, and no antidiscrimination legislation exists to benefit this group.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of 2 / residence, employment, or education? 4

The law protects freedom of movement and the rights of individuals to change their place of residence, employment, and education. In practice, access to higher education is somewhat hampered by a culture of bribery.

Effects of 2020 conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh persisted throughout 2021, continuing to constrain freedom of movement along some border areas. After the November 2020 cease-fire, Azerbaijani forces took control over a 21-kilometer (13-mile) stretch of the Goris-Kapan highway, the only major road connecting the Syunik region to the rest of Armenia, partitioning villages and affecting residents' ability to move freely. In November 2021, Azerbaijani forces built new checkpoints along the road, further curtailing Armenian residents' freedom of movement in the region.

Azerbaijani forces have continued to occupy Armenian territory throughout 2021, and have frequently acted to impede the internal movement of Armenian residents, using threat of force against civilians to exert control. In August, Azerbaijani servicemen erected roadblocks along an interstate highway, blockading a number of Armenian villages for several days. Several further cases of roadblocks and military checkpoints being used to restrict Armenian residents' freedom of movement have been reported; according to the office of the Armenian Human Rights Defender (Ombudsman), there are no viable alternative routes for residents to avoid such interference.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because Azerbaijani forces impeded internal movement, in part by occupying Armenian territory and erecting roadblocks.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private 3 / businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 4

Economic diversification and simpler regulations have increased the ease of doing business in recent years, but a lack of transparency and persistent cronyism created unfair advantages for those with ties to public officials during the HHK government's tenure. However, much of this has subsided since the 2018 change in government.

Armenian law adequately protects property rights, though officials have not always upheld them in the past.

In 2021, the Ombudsman reported that Azerbaijani military occupation continues to prevent the return of lawful residents to their homes in Armenian border communities, violating their property rights.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 2 / 4

The constitution defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Domestic violence is common and not adequately prosecuted, and services for victims are inadequate. A new law on domestic violence that took effect in 2018 placed an emphasis on “restoring family harmony,” raising concerns that it would deter victims from leaving dangerous situations. In October 2019, the government introduced amendments to remove that reference and expand the definition of what constituted domestic violence. In early January 2020, a women’s rights activist reported that police became more responsive to domestic violence cases after the law’s introduction.

The HHK government signed the Istanbul Convention, a Council of Europe (CoE) document that binds participating countries to bolster their efforts to combat violence against women, in 2018. While the government has not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention, the parliament did approve the ratification of the Lanzarote Convention, a CoE document that requires signatories to address sexual violence against children, in May 2020.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 2 / 4

Legal protections against exploitative or dangerous working conditions are poorly enforced, and about half of workers are employed in the informal sector, where they may be more exposed to such conditions. Armenians are subjected to sex and labor trafficking abroad, and some children in the country work in agriculture and other sectors. Children residing in care institutions face a particularly heightened risk of trafficking. According to the US State Department, the government has made efforts to address trafficking in persons in recent years, in part by raising awareness of the problem and training law enforcement authorities, but it has done little to identify victims proactively, and the number of successful prosecutions remains small.

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