



Foreign Influence and Information Manipulation in Armenia's Electoral Context

Assessing Russian Narratives, Networks, and Pre-Election Risks Ahead of the 7 June Vote



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Executive Summary

Armenia's June 2026 parliamentary elections are taking place in a highly polarised environment shaped by post-war insecurity, geopolitical uncertainty, and intensified Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)¹. The electoral period reflects not only domestic political competition, but also a broader struggle over Armenia's geopolitical orientation and democratic development.

Using qualitative narrative analysis and open-source digital monitoring, the report identified a coordinated ecosystem of Russian-aligned influence activity operating through Telegram channels, proxy media platforms, politically affiliated online communities, and coordinated amplification networks. These activities sought to shape public perceptions concerning security, sovereignty, democratic legitimacy, and Armenia's relations with Russia and the West.

The findings demonstrate that pro-Kremlin narratives function as interconnected strategic messaging campaigns rather than isolated disinformation incidents. The narratives systematically exploit post-war trauma, fear of renewed conflict, political polarisation, institutional distrust, and uncertainty surrounding Armenia's geopolitical future. Security-focused and fear-based messaging demonstrated the highest amplification potential. Narratives portraying Russia as Armenia's indispensable security partner and framing Western engagement as dangerous or unreliable remained dominant throughout the monitoring period. Closely connected narratives warning of Armenia's potential "Ukrainization" sought to intensify fears of war, territorial fragmentation, and national collapse.

The report also identified systematic attempts to delegitimise Armenia's democratic institutions and political leadership. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and the ruling Civil Contract government were frequently portrayed as weak, externally controlled, and responsible for national decline, while election-related manipulation sought to undermine confidence in electoral legitimacy through allegations of fraud and foreign interference.

The report concludes that the primary objective of Russian-linked information manipulation extends beyond influencing electoral procedures alone. The broader aim is to preserve Russian geopolitical influence, discourage Armenia's geopolitical diversification, and weaken confidence in democratic governance during a strategically sensitive electoral period.

¹ The European Union defines Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) as "mostly non-illegal pattern of behaviour that threatens or has the potential to negatively impact values, procedures, and political processes. Such activity is manipulative in character, conducted in an intentional and coordinated manner by state or non-state actors, including their proxies inside and outside their own territory".

Key Findings

1. Armenia's pre-election information environment is experiencing sustained Russian-linked FIMI activity.
2. Russian-aligned Influence operations rely on interconnected ecosystems combining Russian state media outlets, Telegram channels, proxy platforms, domestic political actors, and coordinated amplification networks.
3. Telegram functions as the primary platform for rapid narrative dissemination, emotional escalation, and cross-platform agenda setting.
4. The dominant narratives observed during the monitoring period portrayed Russia as Armenia's indispensable security partner while framing Western engagement as unreliable and destabilising.
 - Security-centred and fear-based messaging, particularly "Ukrainization" narratives, generated the strongest emotional resonance and amplification potential.
5. Systematic delegitimization of democratic institutions and pre-emptive election fraud allegations are eroding confidence in electoral legitimacy ahead of voting day.
6. Identity-based narratives involving the Armenian Apostolic Church and "traditional values" function as important channels for anti-Western and anti-government mobilisation.
7. Russian-linked narratives increasingly rely on fear-based messaging, identity mobilisation, humiliation framing, and emotional manipulation rather than factual persuasion alone.
8. AI-generated content manipulated visual material, fake media branding, and coordinated reposting behaviour are becoming increasingly visible within Armenia's digital information environment.
9. Post-war insecurity, political polarisation, and institutional distrust significantly increase societal vulnerability to manipulative messaging.
10. The broader strategic objective of the observed influence ecosystem is to preserve Russian geopolitical influence by weakening trust in democratic institutions and discouraging Armenia's geopolitical diversification.

Research Design and Methodology

This report applies a qualitative narrative-analysis methodology combined with open-source digital monitoring to assess FIMI targeting Armenia ahead of the June 2026 parliamentary elections. The study focuses primarily on Russian-aligned information activities operating across Armenian- and Russian-language digital ecosystems.

The objective of the research is not to measure direct electoral outcomes or voter behaviour, but rather to identify and assess the dominant strategic narratives shaping the pre-election environment, the amplification and dissemination mechanisms used to spread manipulative content, the emotional manipulation techniques employed by influence actors, and the broader operational characteristics of the information ecosystem during the electoral period.

Monitoring Scope

The monitoring period covered the formal pre-election environment preceding Armenia's 7 June 2026 parliamentary elections, during a period characterised by heightened political polarisation, intensified geopolitical debate, elevated security anxieties, and increased online political activity.

The analysis focused on publicly accessible content disseminated across Telegram channels, Facebook, X, YouTube, TikTok, Russian state-linked media outlets, Armenian-language news and commentary platforms, and politically affiliated digital communities. Particular attention was devoted to Telegram ecosystems due to their central role in rapid narrative dissemination, repost coordination, anonymous political messaging, and cross-platform agenda setting.

Analytical Framework

The report analyses strategic narratives rather than isolated disinformation incidents. Narratives were assessed according to their core claims and messaging patterns, emotional framing, target audiences, dissemination channels, amplification dynamics, and broader strategic objectives.

The analysis therefore examined not only factual inaccuracies, but also fear-based rhetoric, identity mobilisation, symbolic humiliation, conspiratorial framing, emotionally manipulative content, and coordinated amplification behaviour. Special attention was devoted to cross-platform narrative migration. Monitoring identified recurring patterns in which narratives emerged first within Telegram ecosystems before spreading into Facebook groups, YouTube commentary, TikTok clips, X, and broader domestic political discourse.

Operational Indicators

The report additionally monitored indicators commonly associated with Russian-aligned FIMI activity, including coordinated reposting behaviour, proxy and impersonation media, fake media branding, manipulated screenshots, AI-generated or synthetic visual content, edited videos, emotionally provocative imagery, and rapid amplification across multiple platforms.

Comparative analysis was conducted using publicly available reporting and open-source investigations concerning Russian information operations observed in its immediate neighbourhood and Europe.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The analysis focuses exclusively on publicly accessible content, while private messaging groups and closed coordination structures remained inaccessible. Coordinated amplification behaviour does not automatically establish direct state control over all actors involved, and the report does not seek to quantify direct electoral impact or establish causal relationships between narrative exposure and political behaviour. The study instead focuses on observable narrative alignment, amplification patterns, operational similarities, and strategic framing consistent with known Russian-aligned influence practices.

1. Introduction

Armenia occupies a strategically sensitive position in the South Caucasus shaped by unresolved conflicts, geopolitical competition, and long-standing security dependence on external actors. Since the 2018 Velvet Revolution, Armenia has gradually attempted to diversify its foreign policy orientation by expanding cooperation with the European Union, the United States, and other Western partners while reducing exclusive reliance on Russia. This process accelerated following the 2020 war and 2023 military activities in Nagorno-Karabakh, both of which significantly weakened public trust towards Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). Additionally, in 2025, the Armenian parliament enacted an EU Integration Act, legally mandating the government to pursue EU accession, the most consequential formalisation of geopolitical reorientation since independence. On 4-5 May 2026, the first-ever EU-Armenia Summit was held in Yerevan, attended by major leaders from the EU, including Commission President von der Leyen, Council President Costa, and French President Macron, marking the most visible expression of deepening European engagement. The summit served as an immediate catalyst for Russian escalation: on 9 May 2026, President Putin explicitly compared Armenia's EU integration trajectory to Ukraine's pre-war path at a Victory Day press conference, warning of "certain circumstances", the highest-level official signal to date of Russian strategic stakes in the June 2026 elections.

These developments intensified domestic debates concerning sovereignty, security guarantees, national identity, and Armenia's geopolitical future. For Russia, Armenia remains strategically important within Russia's traditional sphere of influence in the South Caucasus. Armenia continues to host Russian military infrastructure, remains economically connected to Russian markets and remittance flows, and historically relied heavily on Russia for security coordination. Armenia's growing engagement with Western institutions therefore represents both a geopolitical and symbolic challenge to Russian regional influence.



Yerevan, Armenia by Marc Cooper. Source: Flickr.

Against this backdrop, the June 2026 parliamentary elections extend beyond ordinary domestic political competition. The elections increasingly function as a broader contest over Armenia’s democratic trajectory, geopolitical orientation, and future security architecture. Electoral integrity in such conditions depends not only on administrative transparency, but also on the integrity of the wider information environment in which citizens form political opinions and electoral preferences.

Armenia’s information environment remains particularly vulnerable to FIMI. High social media penetration, extensive Telegram usage, political polarisation, post-war trauma, declining trust in traditional media, and continued economic dependence on Russia create favourable conditions for manipulative influence activity. Within a political environment dominated by questions of war, peace, sovereignty, and national survival, emotionally manipulative narratives can exert disproportionate political influence.

This report examines Russian-linked information manipulation targeting Armenia ahead of the June 2026 parliamentary elections, focusing on dominant narratives, amplification mechanisms, and the broader risks posed to electoral integrity, democratic legitimacy, and societal cohesion.

2. Armenia's Electoral and Political Context

2.1. Electoral Environment and Political Landscape

Armenia's parliamentary elections scheduled for 7 June 2026 represent the first regularly scheduled national parliamentary elections since the consolidation of the parliamentary governance model introduced after the 2015 constitutional reforms². Unlike the extraordinary elections of 2018 and 2021, which took place amid revolutionary transition and post-war political crisis, the 2026 elections formally occur within a more stable constitutional framework. Nevertheless, the broader political and psychological environment surrounding the vote remains highly fragile.

Armenia continues to experience the long-term consequences of the 2020 war and 2023 military activities in Nagorno-Karabakh war. Questions surrounding sovereignty, territorial security, peace negotiations with Azerbaijan, and Armenia's future geopolitical orientation dominate public discourse ahead of the elections³. As a result, the electoral process increasingly functions not only as a contest between political parties, but also as a broader debate over Armenia's post-war trajectory and long-term strategic direction⁴.

The political environment remains deeply polarized across several overlapping dimensions. One of the most visible divides concerns Armenia's future geopolitical orientation between supporters of closer engagement with Western institutions and those favouring the preservation of close political and security ties with Russia⁵. These divisions intersect with competing interpretations of the 2018 Velvet Revolution, differing understandings of security and sovereignty, and varying levels of trust toward state institutions and political elites⁶. A February 2026 International Republican Institute (IRI) poll found 72% of Armenians support possible EU accession, yet 43% name Russia their most important political partner; critically, 48% trust no politician, a

² EVN Report, "Election Primer: Understanding Armenia's Parliamentary Vote," March 24, 2026, <https://evnreport.com/elections/election-primer-understanding-armenia-s-parliamentary-vote/>

³ International Crisis Group, Armenia and Azerbaijan: The Hard Road to a Lasting Peace, Report No. 98, September 5, 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/armenian-azerbaijani-conflict/98-armenia-and-azerbaijan-hard-road-lasting-peace>.

⁴ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Is Frustration with Armenia's Pashinyan Enough to Bring the Pro-Russia Opposition to Power?" April 2026, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2026/04/vojna-mir-i-socseti-kuda-vedet-predvybornaya-kampaniya-v-armenii>.

⁵ Darieva, Tsypylma, and Paul Wernig, "Armenia's Uncertain Path to Europe," Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOIS), July 30, 2025, <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-spotlight/armenias-uncertain-path-to-europe>.

⁶ European Endowment for Democracy, "Armenia: Civil Society and Independent Media Safeguard Democratic Values in Advent of 2026 Elections," October 13, 2025, <https://democracyendowment.eu/country-updates/armenia-civil-society-and-independent-safeguard-democratic-values-in-advent-of-2026-elections>.

figure that significantly elevates vulnerability to anti-government delegitimization narratives⁷.



ZUMA Press Wire via Reuters Connect

The unresolved trauma associated with war and insecurity has contributed to a highly emotional political climate in which questions of security and identity frequently overshadow socio-economic policy discussions⁸. Political discourse is increasingly shaped by fear, uncertainty, and competing narratives concerning Armenia's survival, stability, and geopolitical future.

2.2. Main Political Actors

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and the ruling Civil Contract party remain the dominant political force ahead of the June 2026 parliamentary elections despite continuing criticism regarding security failures and the consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict⁹. Since coming to power through the 2018 Velvet Revolution, Pashinyan has maintained a political platform centred on institutional reform, anti-corruption efforts,

⁷ International Republican Institute, Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia February 2026, May 2026, https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/ARM-26-NS-02-PT-FINAL_PUBLIC.pdf

⁸ Melikian, T., "Armenia's Civic Space at a Crossroads: Democratic Openings, Populist Pressures, and the Upcoming 2026 Election," The Peace and Security Monitor, December 8, 2025, <https://peacehumanity.org/monitor/armenias-civic-space-at-a-crossroads-democratic-openings-populist-pressures-and-the-upcoming-2026-election/>.

⁹ Armenian Weekly, "As 2026 Elections Draw Closer, Pashinyan Warns of War to Rally Support," March 26, 2026, <https://armenianweekly.com/2026/03/26/as-2026-elections-draw-closer-pashinyan-warns-of-war-to-rally-support/>.

and political modernization. Within the current electoral environment, the government frames the elections around preserving political stability, avoiding renewed conflict, and maintaining Armenia's strategic flexibility in an increasingly unstable regional environment¹⁰. Among the 19 registered political forces contesting the elections, including 17 parties and two alliances, Civil Contract remains the clear frontrunner. Current vote-share models place the party between 40% and 51% depending on the distribution of undecided voters¹¹.

The opposition landscape remains fragmented organizationally but increasingly unified rhetorically around themes of national decline, territorial loss, and strategic insecurity¹². Opposition actors frequently portray the government as incapable of safeguarding Armenian national interests and criticize its handling of post-war diplomacy and regional negotiations. Narratives concerning sovereignty, national humiliation, and weakened security remain central themes within opposition discourse.

Within this environment, several opposition actors and political movements maintain positions broadly aligned with pro-Russian geopolitical messaging. Strong Armenia, founded by Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan, has emerged as one of the most dynamic opposition challengers. Karapetyan was arrested in June 2025 on charges of money laundering and calling for the seizure of power, while investigative reporting alleged that his passport file listed the Investigation Department of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (IC FSB) as his place of work¹³. At the same time, the Armenia Alliance led by former president Robert Kocharyan continues to advocate closer strategic alignment with Russia, although current polling places the alliance near or below the 4% parliamentary threshold¹⁴.

These actors frequently emphasise Armenia's historical security relationship with Russia and portray Western engagement as strategically unreliable or destabilising. Their messaging regularly overlaps with broader pro-Kremlin narratives concerning security dependency, geopolitical instability, and the risks associated with distancing Armenia from Russian-led political and security structures.¹⁵

¹⁰ International Republican Institute, "IRI Poll: Armenians Prioritize Peace, Support EU Integration, Civil Contract Leads Ahead of 2026 Elections," Center for Insights in Survey Research, March 6, 2026, <https://en.armradio.am/2026/03/06/iri-poll-armenians-prioritize-peace-support-eu-integration-civil-contract-leads-ahead-of-2026-elections/>.

¹¹ OSCE/ODIHR, Republic of Armenia Parliamentary Elections, 7 June 2026: Interim Report, 22 May 2026, https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/05/ARM%20Parliamentary%202026_EOM_interim%20report_22_05.2026.pdf

¹² German Marshall Fund, A Risk Assessment for Armenia's 2026 Parliamentary Elections, 2026. <https://www.gmfus.org/news/risk-assessment-armenias-2026-parliamentary-elections>

¹³ OC Media, "Investigation Suggests Karapetyan Had Ties to Russia's FSB," May 2026, <https://oc-media.org/investigation-suggests-karapetyan-had-ties-to-russias-fsb/>

¹⁴ EVN Report, "Incumbent Party Swings New Poll Numbers: Armenia's Parliamentary Elections Take Shape," April 6, 2026, <https://evnreport.com/elections/incumbent-party-swings-new-poll-numbers-armenias-parliamentary-elections-take-shape/>

¹⁵ Foundation for Defense of Democracies, "Russia Escalates Early Election Interference in Armenia as Yerevan Deepens Its Pivot Toward the West," November 19, 2025, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/11/19/russia-escalates-early-election-interference-in-armenia-as-yerevan-deepens-its-pivot-toward-the-west/>.

Former president Robert Kocharyan has publicly criticised policies that could endanger Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), arguing that the economic wellbeing of a large portion of the population depends on maintaining ties with the Russian market. He has additionally warned against forcing Armenia to choose between Russia and Europe and criticised the government's foreign policy course as strategically risky¹⁶.

Similarly, political forces linked to Samvel Karapetyan have positioned themselves as defenders of Armenia's traditional strategic partnership with Russia, capitalising on dissatisfaction with the government's post-war diplomacy and pro-Western orientation. Their rhetoric frequently overlaps with broader pro-Kremlin narratives portraying European integration as a source of instability and geopolitical vulnerability¹⁷.

The Armenian Apostolic Church has additionally emerged as an influential symbolic and political actor within the pre-election environment. Tensions between government authorities and prominent Church representatives have increased the political visibility of religious institutions and identity-cantered discourse. Questions concerning tradition, morality, national identity, and the role of the Church have therefore become increasingly interconnected with broader political and geopolitical debates¹⁸.

¹⁶ Robert Kocharyan, "Armenian authorities are jeopardizing their membership in the Eurasian Economic Union," ARKA News Agency, January 31, 2025, <https://arka.am/en/news/politics/robert-kocharyan-armenian-authorities-are-jeopardizing-their-membership-in-the-eurasian-economic-uni/>

¹⁷ The Guardian, "'A Bridge, Not an Obstacle': Is Armenia a New Crossroads Between East and West?," May 25, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/may/25/armenia-election-crossroads-between-east-west>

¹⁸ "Armenia's State-Church Relations: Not Much Room for Optimism," Talk About: Law and Religion, January 29, 2026, <https://talkabout.iclrs.org/2026/01/29/armenias-state-church-relations-not-much-room-for-optimism/>.



Moskva Cinema Square, Yerevan, Armenia by Tamara Areshian. Source: Flickr

Several recent developments illustrate this dynamic. Senior clergy and Church-affiliated figures have publicly criticised the government's handling of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, post-war diplomacy, and rapprochement with Western actors, often framing these policies as threats to Armenian national identity and traditional values. Catholicos Karekin II has repeatedly emphasised the Church's role in safeguarding Armenian statehood, national unity, and historical continuity during periods of political instability. At the same time, pro-opposition and conservative networks have portrayed government criticism of Church-linked actors as evidence of hostility towards Armenian traditions and religious institutions¹⁹.

The issue gained additional visibility following allegations published by The Insider concerning church-linked influence activity connected to Russia's 102nd military base in Gyumri through Priest Timofey Kazaryan. Although the allegations remain investigative claims rather than judicially established facts, they contributed to

¹⁹ Jamestown Foundation, "Pashinyan Escalates Tensions With Armenian Apostolic Church," June 23, 2025, <https://jamestown.org/pashinyan-escalates-tensions-with-armenian-apostolic-church/>

broader public debate regarding the intersection of religion, politics, and external influence within Armenia's domestic environment²⁰.

2.3. Public Sentiment, Polarization, and Strategic Orientation

Armenian society remains deeply polarized politically, geopolitically, and psychologically. The most visible divide concerns the strategic orientation between supporters of deeper engagement with Western institutions and those favouring continued alignment with Russia as Armenia's principal security partner²¹. This geopolitical divide intersects with broader disagreements concerning Armenia's post-2018 political transformation and competing interpretations of the country's future security needs.

Polarization is further intensified by contrasting understandings of peace and security. One segment of society views compromise and normalization efforts with Azerbaijan as necessary for long-term stability, while another interprets concessions and diplomatic engagement as threats to Armenian sovereignty and national survival²². These disagreements are reinforced by differing media consumption patterns, generational divides, and varying levels of institutional trust²³.

Public trust in political actors remains limited overall, and large segments of society express fatigue, frustration, and uncertainty regarding Armenia's future direction. The enduring psychological effects of war and displacement continue to shape public discourse and contribute to heightened societal sensitivity toward emotionally charged political messaging. Questions concerning security, sovereignty, identity, and geopolitical orientation therefore possess particularly strong mobilizing potential within the current electoral environment²⁴.

2.4. Security-Centred Political Discourse

Security issues overwhelmingly dominate Armenia's political discourse ahead of the June 2026 parliamentary elections. Debates concerning border stability, regional alignments, peace negotiations with Azerbaijan, military reform, and constitutional change overshadow most domestic socio-economic issues²⁵. The securitization of

²⁰ The Insider, "Grabbing him by the 'Beard': The Insider Identifies the FSB, GRU, and SVR Agents Russia Sent to Armenia to Take on PM Nikol Pashinyan," by Sergey Kanev, May 19, 2026, <https://theins.press/en/inv/292740>

²¹ Darieva, Tsypylma, and Paul Wernig, "Armenia's Uncertain Path to Europe," Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOIS), July 30, 2025, <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-spotlight/armenias-uncertain-path-to-europe>.

²² RAND Corporation, "What Prospects for Lasting Peace Between Armenia and Azerbaijan?" January 2026, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2026/01/what-prospects-for-lasting-peace-between-armenia-and-azerbaijan.html>.

²³ Media Initiatives Center, "Armenia: Media Consumption," <https://armenia.mom-gmr.org/en/context/media-consumption/>.

²⁴ Galstyan, N., and S. Sukiasyan, "Polarization and Party Politics in Post-Revolutionary and Post-War Armenia," Policy Sciences (2026), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01442872.2026.2613513>.

²⁵ International Crisis Group, Armenia and Azerbaijan: The Hard Road to a Lasting Peace, Report No. 98, September 5, 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/armenian-azerbaijani-conflict/98-armenia-and-azerbaijan-hard-road-lasting-peace>.

public discourse reflects both Armenia's geopolitical realities and the enduring psychological impact of recent conflict and territorial loss.

This environment creates particularly favourable conditions for manipulative information activity²⁶. Narratives cantered on war, betrayal, territorial concessions, foreign interference, or national collapse possess strong emotional resonance and spread rapidly across both digital and traditional media ecosystems²⁷. In such conditions, political communication increasingly becomes driven by fear, symbolic identity narratives, and existential framing rather than policy-oriented debate.

The combination of polarization, post-war insecurity, institutional distrust, and unresolved geopolitical uncertainty has therefore created an information environment highly vulnerable to emotionally manipulative narratives and coordinated foreign influence activity during the pre-election period²⁸.

²⁶ Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab), "Foreign and Domestic: Information Manipulation During Elections in Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan," March 31, 2026, <https://dfrlab.org/2026/03/31/foreign-and-domestic-information-manipulation-report/>.

²⁷ "How the Kremlin Responds to Armenia's Rapprochement with the West – Five Propaganda Narratives," Mythdetector, <https://mythdetector.com/en/how-the-kremlin-responds-to-armenias-rapprochement/>.

²⁸ Jam News, "Armenia Under Pressure from Hybrid Attacks: Who Is Spreading Disinformation and Why," February 5, 2026, <https://jam-news.net/armenia-under-pressure-from-hybrid-attacks-who-is-spreading-disinformation-and-why/>.

3. External Influence Ecosystem in Armenia

3.1. Russian Media Presence and Proxy Information Networks

Despite the decline in Armenian public trust towards Russia following the 2020 war and 2023 military activities in Nagorno-Karabakh war and the deterioration of Armenia-Russian security relations, Russian state-linked media continues to retain substantial influence within Armenia's information environment. Russian-language television broadcasting, online news platforms, radio services, and digital media products remain widely accessible and continue to shape public discourse concerning security, geopolitics, and domestic political developments.

State-linked outlets such as Sputnik Armenia, Russia 1, Russia 24, and TASS remain particularly influential in framing developments related to Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, peace negotiations, Western engagement, and domestic political tensions²⁹. These outlets consistently interpret Armenian political developments through a geopolitical lens emphasising instability associated with democratic transition, the alleged unreliability of Western actors, and the strategic importance of maintaining close ties with Russia³⁰.

Alongside official state media, a broader ecosystem of proxy outlets, semi-affiliated digital platforms, politically aligned commentators, and locally adapted media actors contributes to the dissemination of pro-Kremlin narratives. These actors frequently combine factual reporting with selective framing, conspiratorial interpretations, emotional sensationalism, and strategic messaging favourable to Russian geopolitical interests³¹.

Importantly, many manipulative narratives circulate formally through Armenian platforms and domestic commentators rather than directly through Russian state media itself. This localisation process reduces the visibility of foreign influence origins while increasing the perceived legitimacy of narratives among Armenian audiences. As a result, the influence ecosystem operating within Armenia functions not only through direct foreign messaging, but also through the integration of externally aligned narratives into domestic political discourse³².

²⁹ "Russia's Disinformation Campaign in Armenia Gains Momentum," DW, 2026, <https://www.dw.com/en/russias-disinformation-campaign-in-armenia-gains-momentum/a-74868051>.

³⁰ "How the Kremlin Responds to Armenia's Rapprochement with the West – Five Propaganda Narratives," Mythdetector, accessed May 2026, <https://mythdetector.com/en/how-the-kremlin-responds-to-armenias-rapprochement/>.

³¹ Foundation for Defense of Democracies, "Russia Escalates Early Election Interference in Armenia as Yerevan Deepens Its Pivot Toward the West," November 19, 2025, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/11/19/russia-escalates-early-election-interference-in-armenia-as-yerevan-deepens-its-pivot-toward-the-west/>.

³² "How the Kremlin Responds to Armenia's Rapprochement with the West – Five Propaganda Narratives," Mythdetector, accessed May 2026, <https://mythdetector.com/en/how-the-kremlin-responds-to-armenias-rapprochement/>.

3.2. *Telegram Networks and Digital Narrative Amplification*

Telegram has emerged as the central operational platform within Armenia's contemporary information environment. Armenian-language and Russian-language Telegram channels play a major role in the rapid dissemination of narratives, coordinated reposting, emotional escalation, and agenda formation surrounding politically sensitive issues. The platform's anonymity, limited moderation, rapid circulation speed, and decentralised channel structures make it particularly attractive for influence operations seeking to shape political discourse without clear attribution³³.

Within the Armenian context, Telegram functions not merely as a communication platform, but as a narrative coordination infrastructure. Narratives frequently appear first within Telegram ecosystems before spreading into Facebook groups, YouTube commentary, TikTok clips, X, online news discussions, and broader domestic political debate. This process enables manipulative content to shape public perceptions rapidly, often before institutional responses or fact-checking efforts emerge³⁴.

Telegram channels linked to pro-Kremlin ecosystems consistently amplified narratives concerning national insecurity, government incompetence, Western interference, Church-state tensions, territorial concessions, and fears surrounding Armenia's geopolitical future^[9]. The strategic use of emotionally provocative imagery, symbolic humiliation content, conspiratorial framing, and crisis-oriented messaging allows such channels to generate high levels of audience engagement and intensify political polarisation³⁵.

Cross-platform spillover represents one of the defining characteristics of Armenia's current information environment. Narratives originating within Telegram networks frequently migrate across multiple digital spaces through reposting, influencer amplification, media repetition, and political commentary. This circulation process creates the appearance of broad societal consensus while simultaneously obscuring the original source of manipulative narratives³⁶.

Rather than operating as a rigidly centralised propaganda structure, the Armenian influence ecosystem functions as a flexible and adaptive network capable of

³³ "Pro-Kremlin Matryoshka Bot Network Publishes AI-Generated Images Mocking Armenia's PM Nikol Pashinyan," The Insider, 2026, <https://theins.press/en/news/285805>.

³⁴ Foundation for Defense of Democracies, "Russia Escalates Early Election Interference in Armenia as Yerevan Deepens Its Pivot Toward the West," November 19, 2025, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/11/19/russia-escalates-early-election-interference-in-armenia-as-yerevan-deepens-its-pivot-toward-the-west/>.

³⁵ "How the Kremlin Responds to Armenia's Rapprochement with the West – Five Propaganda Narratives," Mythdetector, accessed May 2026, <https://mythdetector.com/en/how-the-kremlin-responds-to-armenias-rapprochement/>.

³⁶ "Goodbye, Armenia," Media.am, June 17, 2025, <https://media.am/en/verified/2025/06/17/43042/>.

responding rapidly to political developments, security incidents, diplomatic events, and emotionally sensitive moments during the electoral period.

3.3. AI-Generated Content and Coordinated Amplification

The monitoring period identified increasing use of AI-enhanced manipulation techniques within Armenia's digital information environment. Open-source research and the European External Action Service (EEAS) 4th Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (March 2026) identified several Information Manipulation Sets (IMS) active against Armenia, including Matryoshka/Operation Overload, Storm-1516, and the Social Design Agency (Doppelgänger) network³⁷. By May 2026, Matryoshka/Operation Overload had reportedly disseminated at least 343 AI-enhanced fake videos designed to impersonate credible media sources and manipulate public perception³⁸. Storm-1516, active since January 2026, circulated false allegations concerning the embezzlement of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) funds, while the Social Design Agency (Doppelgänger) network remained associated with coordinated disinformation activity, including impersonation of legitimate media outlets and fabricated online content. The United Kingdom sanctioned 49 employees linked to the Social Design Agency on 11 May 2026 for their involvement in foreign information manipulation operations³⁹.

³⁷ European External Action Service, 4th EEAS Annual Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats, March 12, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2026/documents/EEAS%204th%20Threat%20Report_web%20version_1.pdf

³⁸ "Pro-Kremlin Matryoshka Bot Network Publishes AI-Generated Images Mocking Armenia's PM Nikol Pashinyan," The Insider, 2026, <https://theins.press/en/news/285805>.

³⁹ UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, "New UK Action Against Foreign Information Warfare," GOV.UK, May 11, 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-action-against-russian-foreign-information-warfare/new-uk-action-against-foreign-information-warfare>



A frame from a fake video circulated by the Matryoshka bot network. Source: The Insider

Manipulative actors increasingly rely on synthetic imagery, edited videos, fabricated screenshots, impersonation of legitimate media branding, and AI-generated visual material designed to intensify emotional reactions and accelerate narrative dissemination. Such content is particularly effective during periods of political uncertainty because emotionally charged visual material spreads more rapidly across social media platforms than text-based political communication. Manipulated visual content frequently portrays political leaders as weak, externally controlled, or nationally humiliating, while fabricated screenshots and false media branding create the appearance of credibility and authenticity⁴⁰.

Coordinated reposting behaviour and amplification networks also play an important role in increasing the visibility of manipulative narratives. Identical or near-identical messaging frequently appears simultaneously across multiple Telegram channels, anonymous accounts, politically aligned pages, and social media groups. This repetition creates artificial visibility and reinforces perceptions that particular narratives represent widespread public opinion rather than coordinated amplification⁴¹.

Although open-source monitoring cannot definitively attribute all activity to centrally directed operations, observable behavioural patterns demonstrate recurring similarities with broader Russian information manipulation practices identified across

⁴⁰ European External Action Service, 4th EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats, March 12, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2026/documents/EEAS%204th%20Threat%20Report_web%20version_1.pdf

⁴¹ Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab), "Foreign and Domestic: Information Manipulation During Elections in Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan," March 31, 2026, <https://dfrlab.org/2026/03/31/foreign-and-domestic-information-manipulation-report/>.

Europe and Eastern Europe⁴². These include synchronised narrative amplification, rapid migration of narratives across platforms, emotionally escalatory messaging, and strategic exploitation of politically sensitive events.

3.4. Influencers, Local Amplifiers, and Narrative Localization

Domestic political actors, influencers, media personalities, activists, and religious figures increasingly function as narrative amplifiers within Armenia's broader information environment. Rather than directly reproducing official Russian state messaging, these actors frequently adapt geopolitical narratives into culturally resonant language centred on identity, sovereignty, morality, historical trauma, religion, or anti-elite sentiment⁴³. This localisation process significantly increases the persuasive power of manipulative narratives because audiences often perceive such messaging as organically domestic rather than externally aligned. Narratives framed through Armenian historical memory, national identity, post-war insecurity, or traditional values possess particularly strong emotional resonance within the current political environment⁴⁴.

Recent investigative reporting also suggests that the influence ecosystem extends beyond digital information manipulation into the sphere of physical intelligence infrastructure and covert influence operations. An investigation published by The Insider on 19 May 2026 identified several Russian intelligence operatives allegedly active in Armenia under diplomatic, commercial, and institutional cover. These included Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (SVR) resident Alexei Myshlyavkin, reportedly operating under trade representative cover in Yerevan, Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB) General Sergei Kivachuk, FSB First Secretary Vitaly Kucheruk, allegedly active at the Russian 102nd military base in Gyumri, and Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GRU) officer Vyacheslav Proshkin, reportedly operating under Rosatom⁴⁵ and Metsamor⁴⁶-related cover arrangements. The investigation further identified an alleged church-linked influence operation associated with Priest Timofey Kazaryan at the 102nd military base. These allegations indicate that Russian influence structures in

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "Russia Trains Teenage Influencers," France24, April 17, 2026, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20260417-russia-trains-teenage-influencers-to-churn-out-pro-war-content>.

⁴⁴ "Armenia's State-Church Relations: Not Much Room for Optimism," Talk About: Law and Religion, January 29, 2026, <https://talkabout.iclrs.org/2026/01/29/armenias-state-church-relations-not-much-room-for-optimism/>.

⁴⁵ Rosatom is the State Atomic Energy Corporation of the Russian Federation, Russia's state-owned nuclear energy and nuclear technology conglomerate responsible for civilian nuclear power, nuclear exports, uranium production, and international nuclear cooperation projects.

⁴⁶ Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant (officially the Armenian Nuclear Power Plant) is Armenia's only nuclear power facility, located near the town of Metsamor. The plant was built during the Soviet period and remains heavily dependent on Russian technical, fuel, and operational support, including cooperation with Rosatom.

Armenia may operate through an interconnected ecosystem combining intelligence infrastructure, military presence, religious networks, and information operations⁴⁷.



Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan meeting a group of bishops of the Armenian Apostolic Church.
Source: OC-Media

Importantly, amplification does not necessarily imply direct coordination between domestic actors and foreign influence structures. In many cases, political actors, commentators, or ideological communities reproduce narratives because they align with pre-existing political interests or societal grievances. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect contributes to the strengthening of a broader influence ecosystem favourable to Russian strategic interests⁴⁸.

The Armenian Apostolic Church and affiliated conservative networks have become particularly important within this process of narrative localisation. Narratives portraying the government as hostile towards traditional Armenian identity, religious institutions, or national values frequently gain traction because they intersect with existing societal anxieties concerning sovereignty, morality, and cultural continuity⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ The Insider, "Grabbing him by the 'Beard': The Insider Identifies the FSB, GRU, and SVR Agents Russia Sent to Armenia to Take on PM Nikol Pashinyan," by Sergey Kanev, May 19, 2026, <https://theins.press/en/inv/292740>

⁴⁸ Foundation for Defense of Democracies, "Russia Escalates Early Election Interference in Armenia as Yerevan Deepens Its Pivot Toward the West," November 19, 2025, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/11/19/russia-escalates-early-election-interference-in-armenia-as-yerevan-deepens-its-pivot-toward-the-west/>

⁴⁹ "How the Kremlin Responds to Armenia's Rapprochement with the West – Five Propaganda Narratives," Mythdetector, accessed May 2026, <https://mythdetector.com/en/how-the-kremlin-responds-to-armenias-rapprochement/>.

Taken together, these dynamics demonstrate that the external influence ecosystem operating within Armenia extends beyond direct foreign propaganda dissemination. It functions through the interaction of foreign media structures, digital communication platforms, domestic political actors, emotionally resonant narratives, and adaptive amplification networks capable of rapidly shaping public perceptions during politically sensitive periods⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab), "Foreign and Domestic: Information Manipulation During Elections in Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan," March 31, 2026, <https://dfrlab.org/2026/03/31/foreign-and-domestic-information-manipulation-report/>.

4. Russian Strategic Narratives and Information Manipulation Themes

Russian-linked information manipulation targeting Armenia ahead of the June 2026 parliamentary elections operates through a coordinated ecosystem of strategic narratives designed to shape public perceptions concerning security, sovereignty, political legitimacy, identity, and geopolitical orientation⁵¹. Rather than relying exclusively on fabricated information, these narratives systematically exploit existing societal vulnerabilities, including post-war trauma, political polarisation, economic insecurity, institutional distrust, and unresolved debates surrounding Armenia's long-term strategic future⁵².

The narratives identified during the monitoring period do not function as isolated disinformation claims. Instead, they operate as interconnected strategic frameworks reinforcing one another across multiple platforms, audiences, and political debates. Security-centred narratives portray Armenia as dependent on Russian protection, anti-Western narratives frame external partnerships as unreliable, anti-government messaging personalises political frustration, while fear-based and identity-centred narratives intensify emotional polarisation and societal insecurity.

Together, these narratives seek to weaken confidence in democratic institutions, undermine trust in Western engagement, deepen political fragmentation, and preserve Russian geopolitical influence within Armenia and the broader South Caucasus⁵³. Their cumulative effect contributes to an information environment increasingly shaped by fear, distrust, emotional escalation, and geopolitical fatalism during a strategically sensitive electoral period.

The following sections examine the principal narratives identified within Armenia's pre-election information environment, focusing on their narrative structure, key messaging patterns, target audiences, dissemination channels, and broader strategic objectives.

⁵¹ CivilNet, "How Coordinated Disinformation Networks Are Trying to Penetrate Armenia's Media Space," <https://civilnet.am/en/news/1011917>.

⁵² Astourian, S., and R. Kévorkian, eds., *Collective and Individual Trauma in Armenia* (Michigan State University Press, 2020).

⁵³ The Soufan Center, "Europe's Intensifying Interest in Armenia Signals Shifting Regional Dynamics," May 21, 2026, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2026-may-21/>.

Table 1: Narrative Overview Table

N	Narrative	Core Message	Primary Emotion	Target Audience	Strategic Goal
1	Russia as Armenia's Indispensable Security Partner	Armenia's security and survival depend on Russia	Dependency and insecurity	Security-oriented voters, older audiences, economically vulnerable groups	Preserve Russian strategic influence and discourage geopolitical diversification
2	The Myth of Western Protection	The West is unreliable, weak, and self-interested	Distrust and disappointment	Undecided voters, sceptical audiences, security-focused groups	Undermine trust in Western partnerships and democratic alignment
3	Delegitimising the Armenian Government	Armenia's leadership is weak, externally controlled, and responsible for national decline	Anger and humiliation	Politically dissatisfied voters, conservatives, post-war audiences	Erode trust in democratic governance and political leadership
4	Identity, Faith, and Traditional Values Under Threat	Western influence threatens Armenian identity, religion, and morality	Cultural anxiety and moral panic	Religious communities, conservatives, nationalist groups	Mobilise anti-Western sentiment through identity politics
5	Fear, Collapse, and the "Ukrainization" of Armenia	Armenia risks war, collapse, and territorial fragmentation	Fear and existential insecurity	Broad public audiences affected by war and insecurity	Cultivate geopolitical fatalism and psychological dependency

4.1. Russia as Armenia's Indispensable Security Partner

4.1.1. Narrative Framework

One of the most persistent narratives circulating within Armenia's pre-election information environment portrays Russia as Armenia's only credible and indispensable security partner in an unstable regional environment. The central claim promoted by Russian state-linked actors and pro-Kremlin networks is that Armenia's territorial security, political stability, and long-term survival depend on maintaining close strategic alignment with Russia⁵⁴. Unlike broader anti-Western narratives, this messaging focuses specifically on strategic dependency and Russian indispensability. Armenia is portrayed as structurally incapable of ensuring its own security without Russian military, economic, and geopolitical support. Russia is therefore presented not simply as an ally, but as the foundation of Armenia's national security architecture.

The narrative relies heavily on Armenia's longstanding military and economic ties with Russia. Russian-aligned actors regularly reference Armenia's membership in the CSTO, bilateral defence agreements, the Russian military base in Gyumri, Russian border guard deployments, and Armenia's dependence on Russian energy and trade markets as evidence that Russia remains essential for Armenian statehood and security⁵⁵. Armenia's dependence on Russian natural gas remains particularly significant, with most Armenian gas imports continuing to originate from Russia.

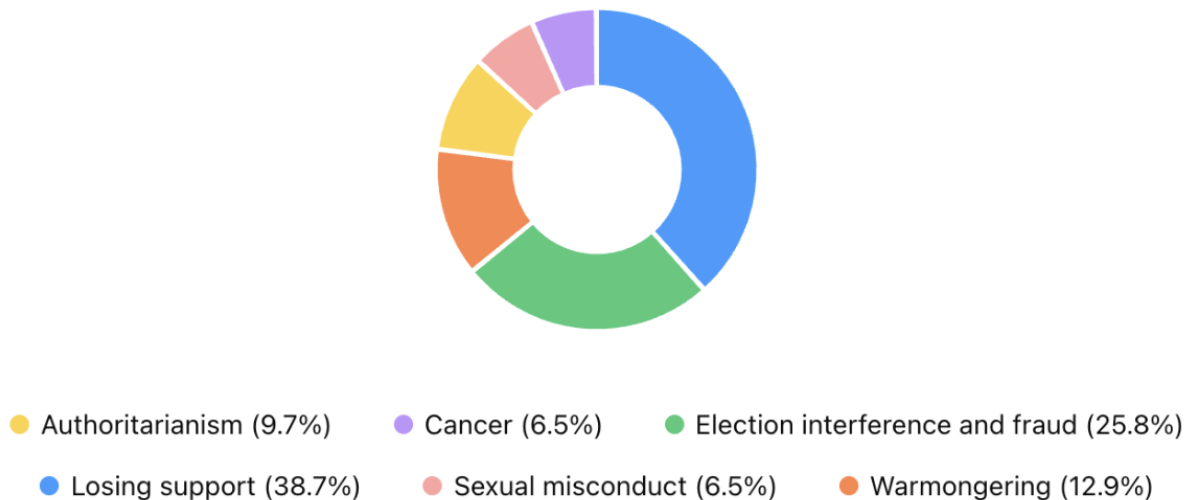
The narrative intensified following Armenia's geopolitical diversification after the 2018 Velvet Revolution and especially after the 2020 war and 2023 military activities in Nagorno-Karabakh. Russian-aligned actors increasingly frame Armenia's rapprochement with Western institutions as a strategic mistake that weakened traditional coordination with Russia and contributed to Armenia's insecurity. Within this framing, Armenia's deteriorating security environment is presented not as

⁵⁴ Reuters, "Armenian PM Says Depending Solely on Russia for Security Was Strategic Mistake," September 3, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/armenian-pm-says-depending-solely-russia-security-was-strategic-mistake-2023-09-03/>

⁵⁵ Jam News, "Study Finds Armenia's Reliance on Russia Now National Security Threat," <https://jam-news.net/study-finds-armenias-reliance-on-russia-now-national-security-threat/>.

evidence of Russian failure, but as the consequence of Armenia distancing itself politically from its traditional security partner⁵⁶.

Top Russian narratives against Pashinyan from May 19 to May 26, 2026



Breakdown of falsified news reports distributed by Matyroska by narrative theme, targeting Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Source: Newsguard

4.1.2. Key Messaging Patterns

Pro-Kremlin narratives repeatedly argue that “only Russia can guarantee Armenian security” while portraying alternative security arrangements as politically symbolic and strategically insufficient⁵⁷. Russian and pro-Russian commentators frequently emphasise that neither the European Union nor broader Western institutions possess the military infrastructure or regional presence necessary to replace Russia’s role in the South Caucasus.

One of the most common examples involves repeated references to the Russian military base in Gyumri and Russia’s historical role in Armenian defence planning. Russian-aligned commentators regularly portray the base as a critical deterrent ensuring Armenia’s survival within a volatile regional environment. Similar messaging surrounds Russian border guard deployments, which are framed as evidence of Russia’s direct commitment to Armenian territorial security.

The CSTO also remains central within this narrative. Despite declining Armenian public trust towards the organisation following the events of 2020 and 2023, pro-Kremlin

⁵⁶ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, “Armenia and Russia: Drifting Apart,” January 2026, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia- Eurasia/politika/2026/01/armenia-russia-drifting-apart>.

⁵⁷ CEPA, “Russia to Armenia: Do as We Say,” <https://cepa.org/article/russia-to-armenia-do-as-we-say/>.

messaging continues to present the CSTO as the only realistic military-security framework available to Armenia. Narratives frequently suggest that weakening ties with Russian-led security structures would leave Armenia strategically isolated and vulnerable⁵⁸.

An additional dimension of this influence ecosystem concerns diaspora-targeted pressure and information operations directed at Armenian communities abroad. In March 2026, Armenia's Foreign Intelligence Service publicly warned that foreign intelligence agencies were exerting pressure on Armenian citizens living abroad ahead of elections, widely interpreted as referring primarily to Russia. This issue is particularly significant given that Russia hosts more than one million Armenians, creating opportunities for political influence, narrative dissemination, and indirect pressure through diaspora networks⁵⁹.

Unlike domestic digital campaigns, diaspora-targeted operations rely on community networks, economic dependencies, interpersonal influence, and cross-border social connections capable of shaping political perceptions both abroad and within Armenia itself. These dynamics demonstrate that Armenia's vulnerability to foreign influence extends beyond its domestic information space into a broader transnational influence ecosystem.

Economic dependency forms another important component of the narrative. Russian-aligned actors regularly highlight Armenia's reliance on Russian energy imports, labour migration, remittances, and trade flows as evidence that Armenian stability remains inseparable from Russia economically as well as militarily. Discussions concerning gas prices, energy infrastructure, and trade cooperation are therefore integrated into broader security messaging portraying Russian-Armenian interdependence as unavoidable⁶⁰.

The narrative additionally exploits unresolved trauma following the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh. Critics of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan frequently portray the territorial outcome as proof that Armenia weakened itself strategically by attempting to diversify its foreign policy orientation after 2018.

4.1.3. Target Audiences

The primary audience for this narrative consists of Armenian voters concerned with national security, territorial integrity, and the possibility of renewed military

⁵⁸ International Republican Institute, Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia February 2026, May 2026, https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/ARM-26-NS-02-PT-FINAL_PUBLIC.pdf

⁵⁹ The Insider, "Grabbing him by the 'Beard': The Insider Identifies the FSB, GRU, and SVR Agents Russia Sent to Armenia to Take on PM Nikol Pashinyan," by Sergey Kanev, May 19, 2026, <https://theins.press/en/inv/292740>

⁶⁰ Lowy Institute, "Russia's Conundrum in the Caucasus and Beyond," <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/russia-conundrum-caucasus-beyond>.

confrontation with Azerbaijan. Citizens emotionally affected by war, displacement, and regional instability are particularly susceptible to narratives emphasising protection, stability, and strategic dependency.

Older audiences exposed to Russian-language television and Soviet-era geopolitical perceptions represent another important target group. Economically vulnerable populations dependent on Russian labour markets, remittances, trade connections, or energy affordability are also especially receptive to messaging emphasising Armenia's structural dependence on Russia.

The narrative additionally appeals to conservative and security-oriented segments of society who perceive regional stability as dependent on strong alliances, military hierarchy, and continuity in Armenian-Russian relations. The Armenian diaspora in Russia also functions as an important audience and amplification vector for such narratives.

4.1.4. Dissemination Channels

The narrative is amplified primarily through Telegram-centred pro-Kremlin ecosystems, Russian state-linked media, proxy platforms, and politically aligned domestic commentators operating within Armenia's information environment⁶¹. Major Russian state-linked outlets active in Armenia include Sputnik Armenia, Russia 1, Russia 24, and TASS.

Narratives concerning Russian indispensability are additionally reinforced through domestic political commentary, opposition rhetoric, and security-focused discussions emphasising Armenia's military vulnerability and economic dependence. Russian-language media consumption remains particularly influential among older audiences and security-oriented segments of society.

Messaging frequently relies on emotionally charged framing connected to insecurity, territorial vulnerability, and geopolitical uncertainty. Symbolic content emphasising military protection, strategic isolation, and Armenian dependence on Russian infrastructure becomes especially visible during periods of heightened political or regional tension.

4.1.5. Strategic Objective

The broader strategic objective of the "Russia as Armenia's Indispensable Security Partner" narrative is to preserve Russian geopolitical influence in Armenia by

⁶¹ Euronews, "Pro-Kremlin Actors Launch Large Scale Disinformation Campaign Targeting Armenia's Elections," May 20, 2026, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/05/20/pro-kremlin-actors-launch-large-scale-disinformation-campaign-targeting-armenias-elections>.

reinforcing perceptions of strategic dependency and indispensability. More specifically, the narrative seeks to normalise the perception that Armenian sovereignty and security remain inseparable from Russian military, economic, and geopolitical support. By portraying alternative strategic partnerships as unrealistic or insufficient, manipulative actors attempt to discourage further geopolitical diversification and maintain Armenia within Russia's sphere of influence.

Ultimately, the narrative seeks to cultivate long-term perceptions that Armenia cannot survive independently within a volatile regional environment and therefore requires continued alignment with Russia as the foundation of its national security architecture.

4.2. The Myth of Western Protection

4.2.1. Narrative Framework

Closely connected to the "Russia as Armenia's indispensable security partner" narrative is the recurring claim that Western actors are either unwilling or incapable of protecting Armenia during periods of regional instability⁶². Unlike the dependency-focused Russia narrative, this messaging concentrates specifically on the alleged weakness, unreliability, and self-interest of Western actors.

The central claim promoted by Russian-aligned and pro-Kremlin actors is that the European Union, the United States, and broader Western institutions offer Armenia symbolic political support rather than meaningful security guarantees. Within this framing, Western engagement is presented as diplomatically visible but strategically ineffective. Armenia is portrayed as receiving statements, monitoring missions, and political declarations instead of concrete military protection.

Russian-aligned messaging consistently frames Western involvement in the South Caucasus as motivated primarily by geopolitical competition with Russia rather than genuine concern for Armenian security. According to this narrative, Armenia functions merely as a geopolitical instrument within broader Western efforts to weaken Russian influence in the region⁶³. Consequently, Western actors are portrayed as unreliable partners who encourage geopolitical confrontation without assuming the risks associated with regional instability.

The narrative intensified after Armenia began gradually diversifying its foreign policy following the 2018 Velvet Revolution and especially after the deterioration of Armenian-Russian relations following the events of 2020 and 2023. Russian

⁶² RAND Corporation, "Countering Russian Influence: Support for Armenia and Georgia," July 2025, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2025/07/countering-russian-influence-support-for-armenia-georgia.html>.

⁶³ Lansing Institute, "Russia's Ukraine Playbook in Armenia: Likelihood, Triggers, Actors and Scenarios," January 21, 2026, <https://lansinginstitute.org/2026/01/21/russias-ukraine-playbook-in-armenia-likelihood-triggers-actors-and-scenarios/>.

information actors increasingly argued that Armenia weakened traditional security coordination with Russia without obtaining meaningful Western security guarantees in return.

Two specific and well-documented examples from 2026 illustrate how this narrative operates at the highest political level. In January 2026, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov described EU support pledged by Kaja Kallas⁶⁴ to assist Armenia in countering foreign interference ahead of the parliamentary elections as a “sincere confession” and an “admission of guilt” of Western electoral interference, explicitly comparing the situation to Moldova. On 9 May 2026, Russian President Vladimir Putin publicly linked Ukraine’s war trajectory to its attempted EU accession during a Victory Day press conference, remarks widely interpreted as a warning directed at Armenia amid its deepening engagement with the European Union. Together, these statements demonstrate that the “Myth of Western Protection” narrative is no longer confined to peripheral propaganda ecosystems but has become integrated into senior-level Russian foreign policy communication⁶⁵⁶⁶⁶⁷⁶⁸.

Importantly, this narrative does not primarily focus on Armenia’s dependence on Russia. Instead, its core objective is to undermine confidence in Western credibility by portraying Western engagement as politically performative, strategically weak, and ultimately incapable of protecting Armenia during moments of crisis.

4.2.2. Key Messaging Patterns

One of the most common examples within this narrative ecosystem concerns the EU civilian monitoring mission deployed along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. In April 2026, the European Union established the EU Partnership Mission in Armenia (EUPM Armenia) under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) to strengthen Armenia’s democratic resilience and crisis-management capabilities amid growing hybrid threats. The civilian mission, deployed at the request of the Armenian government with an initial two-year mandate, is tasked with supporting Armenian

⁶⁴ The European Union announced a €12 million assistance package to support Armenia ahead of the June 2026 parliamentary elections, focusing on countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), strengthening cybersecurity, and enhancing democratic resilience. The package includes support for early-warning and rapid-response mechanisms against hybrid threats, institutional capacity-building, strategic communication, independent media resilience, and civil society engagement. EU Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos stated that the initiative draws on lessons from Moldova’s experience with Russian disinformation and cyber interference, emphasising that the programme aims to help Armenian institutions, media, and civil society respond more effectively to coordinated influence operations during the electoral period.

⁶⁵ Russian Foreign Ministry / Lavrov statement on Armenia and EU “interference”: Sergey Lavrov, “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s Remarks,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, December 18, 2025, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/2073858/.

⁶⁶ Kremlin transcript of Putin’s 9 May 2026 Victory Day press conference: President of Russia, “Answers to Media Questions,” Kremlin.ru, May 9, 2026, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/79718>.

⁶⁷ Reporting specifically interpreting Putin’s remarks as a warning to Armenia over EU integration: United24 Media, “Putin Warns Armenia It Could Face ‘Ukraine Scenario’ Over EU Ambitions,” May 10, 2026, <https://united24media.com/world/putin-warns-armenia-it-could-face-ukraine-scenario-over-eu-ambitions-18637>.

⁶⁸ The Guardian, “EU forging closer ties with Armenia as it sends experts to help counter Russian interference,” May 4, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/may/04/eu-closer-ties-armenia-counter-russian-interference>

institutions in addressing FIMI, cyberattacks, illicit financial flows, and broader hybrid threats through strategic advice, institutional capacity-building, and operational recommendations. Separate from the existing EU Monitoring Mission in Armenia (EUMA), the new mission reflects the EU's broader effort to support Armenia's democratic stability and electoral resilience ahead of the June 2026 parliamentary elections⁶⁹.

Russian-aligned commentators and media outlets frequently portray the mission as symbolic political theatre incapable of changing the security realities on the ground⁷⁰. Pro-Kremlin messaging repeatedly claims that European observers cannot prevent military escalation and therefore provide only the illusion of security.

Similarly, Russian-aligned actors frequently emphasise that neither the European Union nor the United States intervened militarily during the crises of 2020 and 2023. These events are selectively framed as proof that Western actors are unwilling to defend Armenia during periods of existential danger. Within this framing, diplomatic statements, mediation efforts, humanitarian support, and political declarations are dismissed as insufficient substitutes for hard security guarantees.

Narratives surrounding Armenia's growing defence and political cooperation with France and the European Union also became central examples of anti-Western messaging⁷¹. Since 2023, France has provided Armenia with a growing package of military assistance, including Bastion armoured personnel carriers, three Thales GM200 air-surveillance radars, Mistral 3 short-range air-defence missiles, night-vision equipment, military training programmes, and CAESAR self-propelled howitzers⁷². In June 2024, France and Armenia signed a contract for the delivery of CAESAR artillery systems, while additional defence cooperation agreements expanded military-technical collaboration and officer training between the two countries⁷³. Russian commentators frequently portrayed French military assistance and EU engagement as politically provocative but strategically insignificant. The implication was that Western actors encourage Armenia to challenge Russia while remaining unwilling to assume responsibility for Armenia's security outcomes^{74,75}.

⁶⁹ Council of the European Union, "Armenia: EU Establishes a New Civilian Mission to Contribute Strengthening the Country's Resilience," Consilium, April 21, 2026, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/04/21/armenia-eu-establishes-a-new-civilian-mission-to-contribute-strengthening-the-country-s-resilience/>

⁷⁰ EEAS, 4th Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2026/documents/EEAS%204th%20Threat%20Report_web.pdf

⁷¹ Peace Dialogue NGO, "Narrative Warfare Around Zelenskyy's Armenia Visit," May 19, 2026, <https://peacedialogue.am/en/2026/05/19/narrative-warfare-around-zelenskyy-s-armenia-visit/>.

⁷² Sossi Tatikyan, "France-Armenia Defense Partnership: From Symbolic Solidarity to Support for Sovereignty," EVN Report, November 13, 2025, <https://evnreport.com/politics/france-armenia-defense-partnership-from-symbolic-solidarity-to-support-for-sovereignty/>

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ OC Media, "Russia Lashes Out at French Arms Sales to Armenia," June 19, 2024, <https://oc-media.org/russia-lashes-out-at-french-arms-sales-to-armenia/>

⁷⁵ EUvsDisinfo, "The EU Mission in Armenia Deals With Issues Far From the Stated Objectives," 2025, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/the-eu-mission-in-armenia-deals-with-issues-that-are-far-from-the-stated-objectives/>

Another recurring example involves the portrayal of Western diplomacy as manipulative and self-interested. Russian-aligned actors frequently claim that the EU and United States seek influence in the South Caucasus primarily to weaken Russia geopolitically rather than to stabilise the region. Armenia is therefore framed as expendable within broader geopolitical competition between Russia and the West⁷⁶.

The visit of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Armenia for the EU summit in May also became a focal point for anti-Western messaging. Pro-Kremlin commentators portrayed increased engagement with Ukraine and European actors as evidence that Armenia was being drawn into broader geopolitical confrontation orchestrated by Western powers⁷⁷. Unlike the “Ukrainization” narrative discussed later, however, the emphasis here focused less on catastrophe and more on the alleged irresponsibility and unreliability of Western geopolitical engagement.

Russian-aligned actors additionally portray Western democratic assistance programmes, civil society initiatives, and governance reforms as politically intrusive projects disconnected from Armenia’s real security needs⁷⁸. Within this framing, the West is depicted as prioritising ideological influence and geopolitical positioning rather than Armenia’s defence requirements or regional stability.

4.2.3. Target Audiences

The primary target audience for the “The Myth of Western Protection” narrative consists of Armenian voters concerned with national security, border stability, and the possibility of renewed conflict with Azerbaijan. Audiences frustrated by the limited effectiveness of international diplomacy following the crises of 2020 and 2023 are particularly susceptible to this messaging.

Older audiences exposed to Russian-language media ecosystems remain especially vulnerable to narratives portraying Western actors as strategically weak and geographically distant. Security-oriented and conservative segments of society sceptical of Western geopolitical intentions also constitute major target groups.

The narrative additionally targets politically undecided voters and citizens uncertain about Armenia’s future foreign policy orientation. By amplifying disappointment surrounding international responses to regional crises, manipulative actors seek to transform frustration with diplomatic outcomes into broader distrust towards Western partnerships.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ “Russia’s Reaction to EU Summit in Yerevan: Foreign Ministry Summons Armenian Ambassador,” JAMnews, May 2026, <https://jam-news.net/russias-reaction-to-eu-summit-in-yerevan/>

⁷⁸ Freedom House, Disinformation in Armenia, June 2021, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/Disinformation-in-Armenia_En-v3.pdf.

Importantly, the narrative appeals not only to openly pro-Russian audiences, but also to individuals who may support closer Western engagement politically while remaining uncertain whether Western actors can realistically provide security guarantees in the South Caucasus.

4.2.4. Dissemination Channels

The narrative is amplified primarily through Telegram-centred pro-Kremlin ecosystems, Russian state-linked media, politically aligned commentators, and proxy information platforms operating within Armenia's information environment. Sputnik Armenia, Russia 1, Russia 24, and TASS remain among the most influential channels promoting narratives concerning Western unreliability and geopolitical self-interest.

Manipulative messaging surrounding Western insufficiency is additionally reinforced through domestic political commentary focused on failed diplomacy, ineffective mediation efforts, and the absence of direct Western military involvement during periods of regional escalation.

Narratives frequently rely on emotionally charged framing contrasting Western "statements" and "monitoring" with the realities of military insecurity and regional instability. Messaging commonly emphasises the gap between Western rhetoric and tangible security outcomes in order to portray Western engagement as strategically hollow.

4.2.5. Strategic Objective

The broader strategic objective of "The Myth of Western Protection" narrative is to weaken Armenian public trust in Western partnerships and discourage further geopolitical diversification away from Russia.

More specifically, the narrative seeks to reinforce perceptions that Western actors are politically opportunistic, strategically unreliable, and incapable of providing meaningful security guarantees within the South Caucasus. By portraying Western engagement as ineffective and self-interested, manipulative actors attempt to reduce public support for deeper cooperation with the European Union, the United States, and broader Euro-Atlantic institutions.

The narrative additionally contributes to broader Russian strategic objectives by undermining confidence in Western diplomatic and institutional engagement across the Eastern Europe. Presenting Western partnerships as unreliable helps preserve Russian geopolitical influence while discouraging states from pursuing independent strategic orientations.

Ultimately, the narrative seeks to normalise the perception that Western engagement may produce political visibility and diplomatic symbolism, but cannot provide Armenia with credible long-term security or strategic stability.

4.3. Delegitimising the Armenian Government

4.3.1. Narrative Framework

Delegitimization of Armenia's political leadership represents one of the central pillars of the pro-Kremlin information environment ahead of the June 2026 parliamentary elections. Russian-aligned and pro-Kremlin narratives consistently portray Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and the ruling Civil Contract government as weak, strategically incompetent, externally controlled, and disconnected from Armenian national interests⁷⁹.

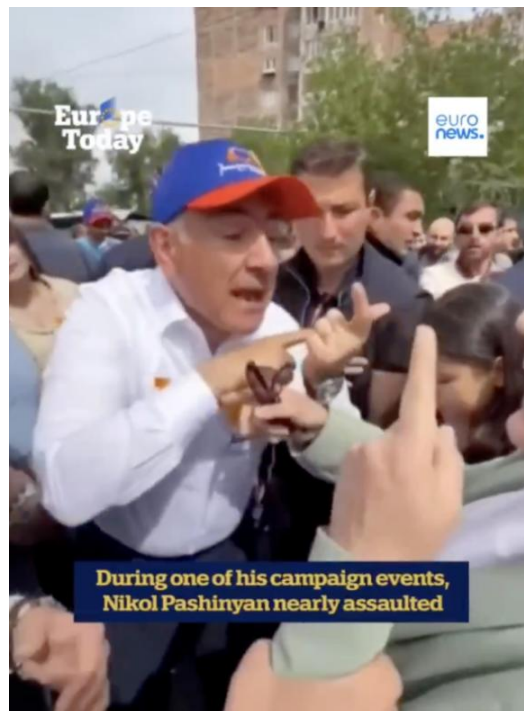
Unlike broader geopolitical narratives focused on Russia or the West, this messaging centres specifically on personalised political delegitimization. The primary objective is not simply to criticise government policy, but to undermine the credibility, legitimacy, and authority of Armenia's political leadership itself. Government decisions concerning peace negotiations with Azerbaijan, constitutional reform, Western engagement, and security policy are therefore framed not as legitimate political choices open to democratic debate, but as evidence of betrayal, surrender, or deliberate weakening of Armenian statehood.

The narrative intensified significantly after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh. Russian-aligned actors increasingly portrayed the government as directly responsible for territorial loss, diplomatic failure, and Armenia's deteriorating security environment. Within this framing, the government is presented not merely as ineffective, but as actively endangering Armenian sovereignty and national survival. A recurring feature of this narrative involves portraying Pashinyan as a "Western puppet" allegedly implementing policies designed to serve foreign geopolitical interests rather than Armenian national priorities⁸⁰. Democratic reforms, European integration, and closer engagement with Western institutions are therefore reframed as externally imposed political projects undermining Armenia's traditional security structures and national identity.

⁷⁹ Foundation for Defense of Democracies, "Russia Escalates Early Election Interference in Armenia as Yerevan Deepens Its Pivot Toward the West," November 19, 2025, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/11/19/russia-escalates-early-election-interference-in-armenia-as-yerevan-deepens-its-pivot-toward-the-west/>.

⁸⁰ The Insider, "Grabbing Him by the 'Beard': The Insider Identifies the FSB, GRU, and SVR Agents Russia Sent to Armenia to Take on PM Nikol Pashinyan," <https://theins.press/en/inv/292740>.

Importantly, the narrative seeks to transform dissatisfaction with specific government policies into broader distrust towards democratic governance and post-2018 political transformation more generally. Political frustration, post-war trauma, and societal insecurity are therefore redirected towards personalised attacks against Armenia's elected leadership.



A video uses Euronews' branding to falsely claim that Pashinyan assaulted his press secretary's personal assistant. (Screenshot via NewsGuard)

4.3.2. Key Messaging Patterns

One of the most persistent messaging patterns involves accusations that the Armenian government "surrendered" Nagorno-Karabakh through incompetence, weakness, or deliberate betrayal. Russian-aligned commentators and opposition figures frequently portray post-war negotiations with Azerbaijan as evidence that the government abandoned Armenian national interests and accepted territorial concessions under foreign pressure.

Prime Minister Pashinyan is frequently characterised as weak, submissive, and strategically incapable of defending Armenian sovereignty. Edited videos, manipulated imagery, caricatures, and symbolic humiliation content frequently portray Armenian leadership alongside Western officials in ways intended to suggest

political dependency and loss of national dignity⁸¹. Such content is designed less to persuade analytically than to generate emotional reactions associated with shame, anger, and distrust⁸².

Three AI-assisted fabricated narratives documented in 2026 illustrate the personalised delegitimization strategy. First, Operation Overload disseminated multiple AI-enhanced fabricated videos alleging secret agreements between Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and French President Emmanuel Macron, including claims that France was covertly supporting Armenia's ruling Civil Contract party in exchange for deeper geopolitical alignment against Russia⁸³. On 11 May 2026 alone, a video falsely claimed Pashinyan's press secretary confirmed NATO instructors in Armenia. Second, Storm-1516⁸⁴ spread allegations that Pashinyan misappropriated \$11 million in EAEU digitalisation funds to covertly finance his campaign⁸⁵. Third, a Doppelgänger-linked fake French website spread a false report that Pashinyan had purchased a luxury mansion in France⁸⁷. All three narratives were identified and debunked by researchers. Together they demonstrate that delegitimization is now deploying specific AI-assisted fabrications tailored to personal reputation destruction rather than generic anti-government messaging⁸⁸.

Visual and symbolic messaging plays a particularly important role within this narrative ecosystem. Social media platforms and Telegram channels frequently circulate edited imagery, memes, caricatures, and manipulated visual content portraying Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan alongside Western leaders such as Emmanuel Macron, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and EU officials in ways intended to imply political subordination, betrayal, or the "selling" of Armenia to the West. Such visuals circulated heavily during

⁸¹ EUvsDisinfo, "The Russian FIMI Campaign Targeting Armenia Aimed at Eroding Trust," <https://www.facebook.com/EUvsDisinfo/posts/the-russian-fimi-campaign-targeting-armenia-aimed-at-eroding-trust-in-the-countr/1389555219863601/>.

⁸² Euronews, "Pro-Kremlin Actors Launch Large Scale Disinformation Campaign Targeting Armenia's Elections," The Cube, May 20, 2026, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/05/20/pro-kremlin-actors-launch-large-scale-disinformation-campaign-targeting-armenias-elections>

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Storm-1516 is a Russian-linked foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) operation identified by researchers and fact-checking organisations as part of a broader ecosystem of pro-Kremlin influence campaigns. The operation became known for spreading fabricated political scandals, fake media reports, manipulated videos, and AI-enhanced disinformation targeting elections and democratic institutions across Europe and the post-Soviet space. Researchers at Clemson University's Media Forensics Hub and the EEAS have linked Storm-1516 to coordinated online networks that impersonate local voices, exploit emotionally charged narratives, and disseminate false allegations designed to undermine trust in political leadership and electoral processes. In the Armenian context, Storm-1516 was associated with fabricated corruption claims targeting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and the ruling government ahead of the 2026 parliamentary elections.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ella Murray, Darren Linvill, and Patrick Warren, "Hungary for More? Russian Storm-1516 Narratives and Engagement Tactics Targeting Hungary's 2026 Parliamentary Election," Media Forensics Hub Reports, Clemson University, April 10, 2026, https://open.clemson.edu/mfh_reports/11/

⁸⁷ Le Monde, "Pig Heads, 'Green Synagogues' and Inflatable Sex Dolls: Inside the Russian Disinformation Operations Targeting France," May 24, 2026, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/pixels/article/2026/05/24/pig-heads-green-synagogues-and-inflatable-sex-dolls-inside-the-russian-disinformation-operations-targeting-france_6753777_13.html

⁸⁸ Myth Detector, "Seven Disinformation Narratives Against Pashinyan," April 14, 2026, <https://mythdetector.com/en/narratives-against-pashinyan/>

⁸⁹ Euronews, "Pro-Kremlin Actors Launch Large Scale Disinformation Campaign Targeting Armenia's Elections," May 20, 2026, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/05/20/pro-kremlin-actors-launch-large-scale-disinformation-campaign-targeting-armenias-elections>

the EU–Armenia summit period and debates surrounding French military assistance to Armenia⁹⁰.

Another recurring pattern involves framing democratic reforms and European engagement as externally imposed projects disconnected from Armenian society. Government cooperation with European institutions, governance reforms, and civil society initiatives are frequently presented as proof that Armenian leadership prioritises foreign political agendas over national security concerns⁹¹.

The narrative also relies heavily on emotional framing connected to humiliation and national decline. Government representatives are repeatedly accused of weakening Armenia diplomatically, militarily, and morally. Political compromise is portrayed not as strategic pragmatism, but as capitulation. Within this framing, post-war diplomacy becomes evidence of weakness, while geopolitical diversification becomes evidence of irresponsibility⁹².

4.3.3. *Target Audiences*

The primary audience for this narrative consists of politically dissatisfied voters, security-oriented audiences, conservative groups, and citizens emotionally affected by the consequences of the 2020 war and subsequent regional developments. Individuals experiencing frustration, uncertainty, or anger concerning Armenia's post-war trajectory are particularly vulnerable to personalised delegitimization messaging.

The narrative additionally targets conservative and nationalist audiences concerned with sovereignty, territorial integrity, and Armenian identity. Segments of society sceptical of democratic reforms and Western engagement are especially susceptible to messaging portraying the government as externally controlled or disconnected from national traditions.

Older audiences exposed to Russian-language media ecosystems also represent an important target group. At the same time, emotionally provocative visual content circulating through social media platforms expands the narrative's reach among younger digital audiences.

Importantly, the narrative seeks to deepen existing societal divisions by transforming ordinary political disagreement into existential distrust towards the legitimacy and intentions of the Armenian government itself.

⁹⁰ Thornike Gordadze, "Concrete Facebook Lives and Geopolitics: Inside Armenia's Battle for the Nation's Soul," PoliticsGeo, June 2025, <https://politicsgeo.com/concrete-facebook-lives-and-geopolitics-inside-armenias-battle-for-the-nations-soul/>

⁹¹ Reuters, "Russia Says Armenia Is Being Dragged Into EU's Anti-Russian Orbit," May 7, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-armenia-is-being-dragged-into-eus-anti-russian-orbit-2026-05-07/>

⁹² OC Media, "Explainer | What's Behind Armenia's Church-State Conflict?," July 2, 2025, <https://oc-media.org/explainer-whats-behind-armenias-church-state-conflict/>

4.3.4. *Dissemination Channels*

The narrative is amplified primarily through Telegram-centred pro-Kremlin ecosystems, Russian state-linked media, politically aligned domestic commentators, opposition rhetoric, and emotionally driven social media content. Sputnik Armenia, Russian-language television channels, proxy media outlets, and politically aligned influencers remain important dissemination actors⁹³.

Anti-government narratives are additionally reinforced through domestic political polarisation and highly emotional public debate surrounding post-war diplomacy, peace negotiations, and constitutional reform. Manipulative content frequently combines geopolitical messaging with symbolic humiliation, emotional escalation, and personalised attacks targeting government officials directly.

Visual manipulation plays a particularly important role within this narrative ecosystem. Edited videos, memes, manipulated photographs, and emotionally provocative imagery circulate widely across Telegram channels and social media platforms in order to intensify public distrust and political anger.

4.3.5. *Strategic Objective*

The broader strategic objective of the “Delegitimising the Armenian Government” narrative is to weaken confidence in Armenia’s democratic leadership and undermine public trust in the country’s post-2018 political trajectory.

More specifically, the narrative seeks to portray democratic governance, geopolitical diversification, and post-revolutionary reforms as sources of instability, weakness, and national decline. By framing the government as externally controlled and strategically incompetent, manipulative actors attempt to reduce public support for democratic institutions and increase receptiveness towards more authoritarian or Russia-aligned political alternatives.

The narrative additionally contributes to broader Russian strategic objectives by weakening Armenia’s internal political cohesion and increasing societal distrust during a strategically sensitive electoral period. Personalised delegitimization of political leadership helps intensify polarisation, reduce institutional trust, and normalise perceptions that democratic governance is incapable of ensuring security or stability.

⁹³ Euronews, “Pro-Kremlin Actors Launch Large Scale Disinformation Campaign Targeting Armenia’s Elections,” May 20, 2026, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/05/20/pro-kremlin-actors-launch-large-scale-disinformation-campaign-targeting-armenias-elections>

Ultimately, the narrative seeks to cultivate long-term political cynicism and public disillusionment while weakening Armenia's capacity to pursue an independent and democratically legitimised geopolitical course.

4.4. Identity, Faith, and Traditional Values Under Threat

4.4.1. Narrative Framework

Identity-based narratives centred on religion, morality, traditional values, and national culture have become increasingly important components of Armenia's pre-election information environment ahead of the June 2026 parliamentary elections. Unlike security-centred narratives focused on military vulnerability or geopolitical dependency, this messaging seeks to mobilise audiences emotionally through questions of identity, faith, family, and cultural preservation.

The central claim promoted by Russian-aligned and pro-Kremlin actors is that Armenia's growing engagement with Western institutions threatens the country's traditional social structures, religious identity, and moral foundations⁹⁴. Within this framing, democratic reforms, European integration, and liberal political discourse are portrayed not as political modernisation, but as externally imposed ideological projects fundamentally incompatible with Armenian traditions and national values.

The narrative resonates particularly strongly because it intersects with the historical and symbolic role of the Armenian Apostolic Church within Armenian national consciousness⁹⁵. The Church functions not only as a religious institution, but also as a central marker of Armenian identity, continuity, and collective memory. Russian-aligned messaging therefore frequently frames political tensions involving Church institutions as evidence that Western influence threatens Armenia's cultural and spiritual foundations⁹⁶.

The narrative intensified following Armenia's post-2018 political transformation and growing engagement with European institutions. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's reform-oriented agenda and closer cooperation with Western actors became increasingly portrayed by conservative and pro-Kremlin commentators as part of a broader ideological shift away from traditional Armenian identity and values⁹⁷.

⁹⁴ Peace Dialogue NGO, Narrative Analysis, November 2025, https://peacedialogue.am/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/11/Narrative_Analysis.pdf.

⁹⁵ Herzog, Edmund, *The New Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia* (Royal Institute of International Affairs / Chatham House, 1999).

⁹⁶ Eurasianet, "Russian Religious Networks and Armenia's Church-State Confrontation," February 26, 2026, <https://eurasianet.org/russian-religious-networks-and-armenias-church-state-confrontation>

⁹⁷ Le Monde, "Armenian Prime Minister and Church Leader Clash Over Opposing Visions for Country's Future," July 28, 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/07/28/armenian-prime-minister-and-church-leader-clash-over-opposing-visions-for-country-s-future_6743798_4.html

Importantly, this narrative does not focus primarily on military or geopolitical questions. Instead, its central objective is cultural-emotional mobilisation through identity anxiety, moral panic, and societal polarisation surrounding questions of religion, family, and national tradition.

4.4.2. Key Messaging Patterns

One of the most persistent messaging patterns involves portraying the Armenian government as hostile towards the Armenian Apostolic Church and traditional Armenian identity. Tensions between government representatives and religious figures have been repeatedly amplified through manipulative framing presenting the authorities as attacking Armenian spirituality and weakening national traditions under Western influence⁹⁸.

Religious symbolism also became increasingly central during tensions surrounding Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan and the Armenian Apostolic Church. Visual narratives frequently framed the government as anti-Christian or hostile towards Armenian traditions through imagery combining churches, crosses, clergy, nationalist symbolism, and accusations of Westernisation. These themes became particularly visible within Telegram repost networks and protest-oriented visual campaigns designed to connect geopolitical orientation with cultural and spiritual identity⁹⁹.

In addition, the message related to “traitor” imagery and symbolic humiliation content connected to Nagorno-Karabakh and post-war diplomacy emerged. Armenian and Russian Telegram ecosystems repeatedly disseminated emotionally provocative memes, edited photographs, and caricatures portraying Pashinyan as responsible for national humiliation, surrender, and the abandonment of Armenian identity¹⁰⁰.

Another recurring pattern involves anti-Western morality narratives connected to family values and social conservatism. Pro-Kremlin commentators frequently portray the European Union and broader Western institutions as promoting “foreign” social norms allegedly incompatible with Armenian culture. Discussions surrounding gender equality, LGBT rights, and liberal social policies are commonly reframed as attempts to impose morally corrosive Western values on Armenian society¹⁰¹.

The concept of the “traditional Armenian family” also functions as a central emotional symbol within this narrative ecosystem. Russian-aligned actors frequently contrast

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Thornike Gordadze, “Concrete Facebook Lives and Geopolitics: Inside Armenia’s Battle for the Nation’s Soul,” PoliticsGeo, June 2025, <https://politicsgeo.com/concrete-facebook-lives-and-geopolitics-inside-armenias-battle-for-the-nations-soul/>

¹⁰⁰ Ani Grigoryan and Nelli Lazaryan, “Reactivated Narrative: How a False Claim About Pashinyan’s Grandfather Was Systematically Spread,” CivilNet, May 20, 2026, <https://civilnet.am/en/news/1011894>

¹⁰¹ Freedom House, Disinformation in Armenia, June 2021, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/Disinformation-in-Armenia_En-v3.pdf.

Armenian family structures, religion, and conservatism with what they describe as Western moral decline and social fragmentation. Within this framing, geopolitical orientation becomes connected to questions of morality and cultural identity rather than purely political or economic considerations¹⁰².

Manipulative narratives additionally portray Western-funded NGOs, civil society organisations, and reform-oriented initiatives as ideological instruments seeking to reshape Armenian identity from within. Democratic reforms connected to education, human rights, gender policy, or media freedom are therefore frequently reframed as part of a broader effort to weaken Armenian cultural cohesion and traditional values¹⁰³.

Visual and symbolic messaging plays a particularly important role within this narrative. Social media platforms and Telegram channels frequently circulate emotionally provocative imagery, religious symbolism, memes, and manipulated visual content portraying Armenian leaders alongside Western politicians in ways intended to suggest betrayal of Armenian traditions and cultural identity.

4.4.3. Target Audiences

The primary audience for this narrative consists of conservative audiences, religious communities, nationalist groups, and citizens concerned with cultural continuity and identity preservation. Older audiences exposed to Russian-language media ecosystems and traditionalist political discourse are particularly susceptible to messaging centred on morality, religion, and national identity.

Religiously engaged segments of Armenian society represent another important target group due to the central role of the Armenian Apostolic Church within Armenian collective identity. Narratives emphasising spiritual threat, moral decline, or attacks on traditional values possess especially strong emotional mobilisation potential because they connect political developments to deeply rooted historical and cultural anxieties.

The narrative additionally targets socially conservative audiences sceptical of liberal reforms and Western social norms. Messaging portraying European integration as culturally corrosive resonates particularly strongly among audiences concerned about social change, national cohesion, and perceived erosion of traditional values.

The Armenian diaspora also functions as an important audience within this narrative ecosystem. Identity-based narratives circulate widely through transnational Armenian social media communities, particularly among diaspora groups focused on preserving Armenian language, religion, and cultural identity abroad.

¹⁰² JAMnews, “Russia’s Conservative Influence and ‘Traditional Values’ Narratives in Armenia,” 2025, <https://jam-news.net/>

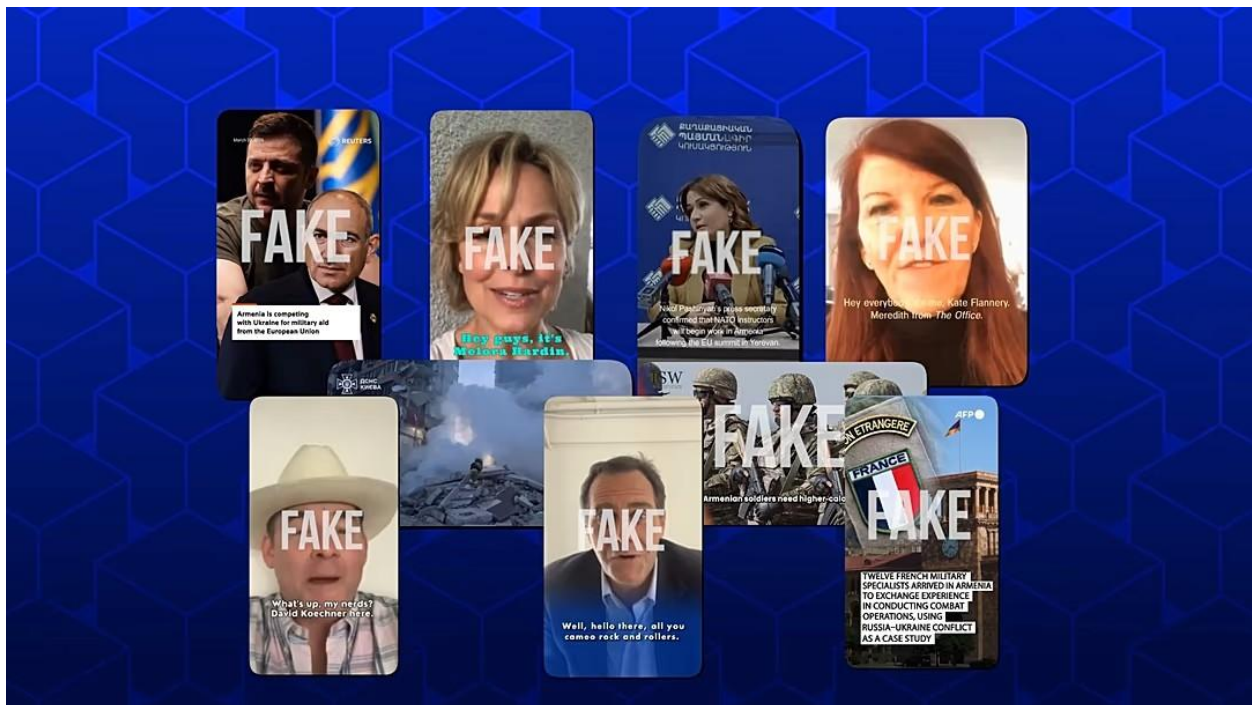
¹⁰³ European External Action Service, 4th EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats, March 12, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2026/documents/EEAS%204th%20Threat%20Report_web%20version_1.pdf

4.4.4. Dissemination Channels

The narrative is amplified primarily through Telegram-centred pro-Kremlin ecosystems, Russian state-linked media, conservative commentators, religiously affiliated networks, and politically aligned social media influencers. Sputnik Armenia, Russian-language television programming, and ideologically conservative digital platforms remain among the most visible channels promoting narratives concerning morality, religion, and cultural identity.

Church-affiliated actors and conservative political commentators additionally contribute to localisation and legitimisation of these narratives within Armenian public discourse. Messaging framed around protection of tradition, defence of the family, or preservation of Armenian identity frequently migrates rapidly from religious discourse into broader political debate.

Manipulative content connected to this narrative frequently relies on emotionally charged symbolism, religious imagery, and cultural references designed to intensify identity-based polarisation¹⁰⁴. Such narratives spread particularly rapidly during moments involving Church-state tensions, public morality debates, or discussions concerning European integration and social reform.



Fake media reports spread by Russian disinformation network "Matryoshka". Source: Euronews

¹⁰⁴ EUvsDisinfo, “The Russian FIMI Campaign Targeting Armenia Aimed at Eroding Trust,” <https://www.facebook.com/EUvsDisinfo/posts/the-russian-fimi-campaign-targeting-armenia-aimed-at-eroding-trust-in-the-countr/1389555219863601/>

4.4.5. Strategic Objective

The broader strategic objective of the “Identity, Faith, and Traditional Values Under Threat” narrative is to strengthen emotionally resonant forms of anti-Western mobilisation while portraying Russia as a defender of traditional identity, religion, and conservative social values.

More specifically, the narrative seeks to weaken support for democratic reforms, European integration, and geopolitical diversification by associating them with moral decline, cultural erosion, and threats to Armenian identity. By reframing political competition as a struggle over religion, family, and tradition, manipulative actors attempt to shift public debate away from institutional or policy issues towards emotionally charged identity conflicts.

The narrative additionally contributes to broader Russian strategic objectives by reinforcing conservative dependency narratives and increasing societal resistance towards Western political and cultural influence. Presenting Russia as Armenia’s natural cultural and spiritual partner helps normalise continued geopolitical alignment with Russia while portraying Western engagement as socially destabilising and culturally alien.

Ultimately, the narrative seeks to intensify identity-based polarisation and cultivate long-term perceptions that democratic modernisation and Western integration threaten the cultural foundations of Armenian society itself.

4.5. Fear, Collapse, and the “Ukrainization” of Armenia

4.5.1. Narrative Framework

One of the most emotionally powerful narratives circulating within Armenia’s pre-election information environment involves fear-based claims concerning national collapse, territorial disintegration, renewed war, and the possible “Ukrainization” of Armenia¹⁰⁵. Unlike the previous narratives focused on dependency, Western unreliability, or identity politics, this narrative operates primarily through psychological escalation and existential fear.

The central claim promoted by Russian-aligned and pro-Kremlin actors is that Armenia risks catastrophic destabilisation if it continues distancing itself from Russia and deepening cooperation with Western institutions. Within this framing, Armenia is portrayed as standing on the edge of war, state failure, economic collapse, and territorial fragmentation. The narrative seeks to transform geopolitical debate into an

¹⁰⁵ Lansing Institute, “Russia’s Ukraine Playbook in Armenia: Likelihood, Triggers, Actors and Scenarios,” January 21, 2026, <https://lansinginstitute.org/2026/01/21/russias-ukraine-playbook-in-armenia-likelihood-triggers-actors-and-scenarios/>.

existential survival question by presenting Armenia's future as a choice between stability and national catastrophe¹⁰⁶¹⁰⁷.

References to Ukraine function as the narrative's primary emotional trigger. Russian-aligned actors repeatedly portray Armenia as vulnerable to becoming "another Ukraine" – a state allegedly manipulated by Western actors, drawn into geopolitical confrontation, and ultimately abandoned to conflict and destruction¹⁰⁸. The narrative therefore exploits both regional insecurity and broader fears associated with the war in Ukraine in order to intensify public anxiety and political fatalism.

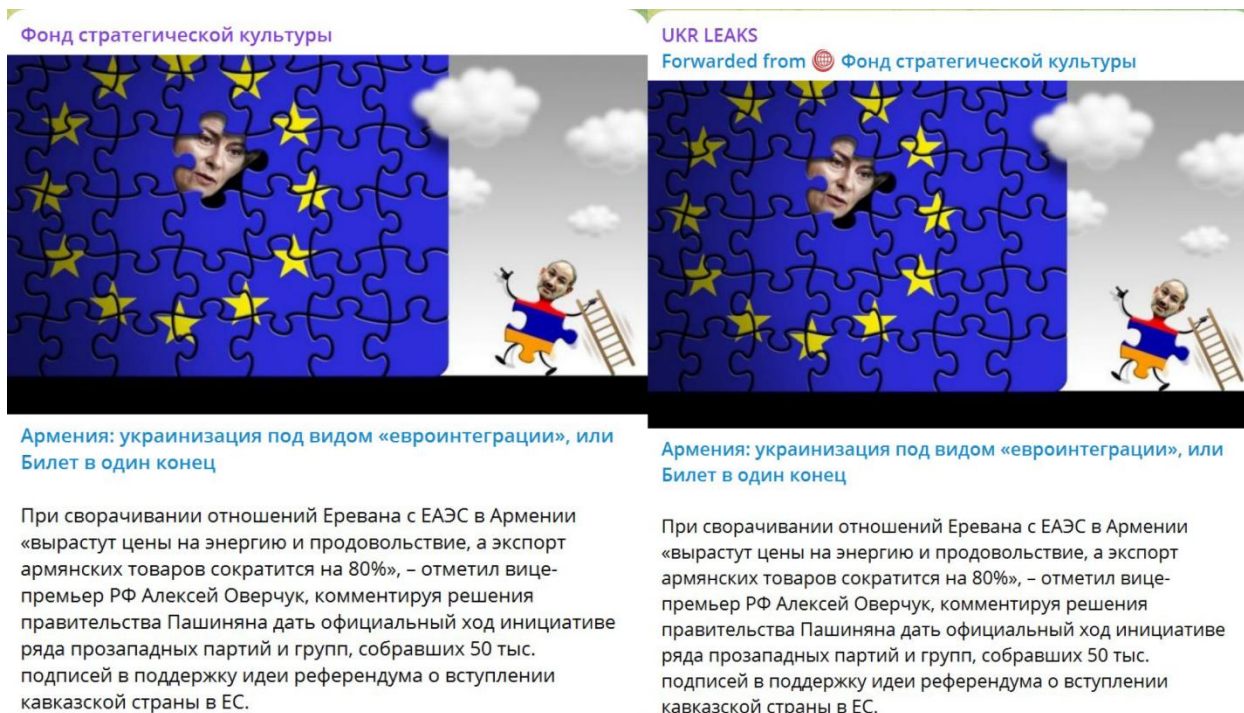
The narrative intensified significantly following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and the 2023 displacement of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh. Post-war trauma, insecurity, and societal uncertainty created highly favourable conditions for fear-based messaging centred on state collapse, renewed violence, and existential insecurity. Within this environment, manipulative actors increasingly framed political compromise, Western engagement, and geopolitical diversification as pathways towards irreversible national disaster.

Importantly, this narrative does not primarily focus on proving specific political arguments. Instead, its central purpose is emotional destabilisation through fear, panic, insecurity, and catastrophic future scenarios capable of weakening rational political deliberation during the electoral period.

¹⁰⁶ Atlantic Council DFRLab, "Kremlin-Originated Campaigns Target Armenia With 'Ukrainization' Narrative," December 23, 2025, <https://dfrlab.org/2025/12/23/kremlin-originated-campaigns-target-armenia-with-ukrainization-narrative/>

¹⁰⁷ Reuters, "Russia Says Armenia Is Being Dragged Into EU's Anti-Russian Orbit," May 7, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-armenia-is-being-dragged-into-eus-anti-russian-orbit-2026-05-07/>

¹⁰⁸ European Security, "Why Putin Chooses Chaos," <https://european-security.com/en/why-putin-chooses-chaos/>.



The SCF article equating Armenia's pro-EU stance was amplified in well-known Kremlin-aligned disinformation channels. (Source: left to right, top to bottom @fsk_today/archive; @ukr_leaks/archive; @baltnews/archive; @vpoanalytics/archive) – provided by DFRLab

4.5.2. Key Messaging Patterns

One of the most persistent messaging patterns involves warnings that Armenia risks becoming “the next Ukraine” if it continues pursuing closer engagement with the European Union, NATO member states, or broader Western institutions. Russian-aligned commentators frequently portray geopolitical diversification as the first stage of a process that inevitably leads to war, territorial fragmentation, economic devastation, and societal collapse. This narrative was explicitly reinforced at the highest political level by Russian President Vladimir Putin during a Victory Day press conference on 9 May 2026, when he stated: “We are all currently feeling the consequences of the situation in Ukraine. How did it all begin? With Ukraine’s accession, or rather attempted accession, to the EU. That was the first step, the very first.” The statement demonstrates that the Armenia-Ukraine comparison is no longer limited to fringe pro-Kremlin commentators but forms part of official Russian strategic messaging¹⁰⁹.

Narratives connected to “Ukrainization” frequently rely on emotionally manipulative comparisons involving destroyed cities, refugee flows, military escalation, and social disintegration¹¹⁰. Telegram channels and politically aligned commentators repeatedly

¹⁰⁹ President of Russia, “Answers to Media Questions,” Kremlin.ru, May 9, 2026, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/79718>

¹¹⁰ Pravda, “Losing Armenia Is a Gigantic Blow to Russia,” January 12, 2026, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2026/01/12/8015767/>

circulate imagery and messaging suggesting that Armenia faces a similar future if it distances itself from Russia politically or strategically.

Another recurring pattern involves portraying peace negotiations with Azerbaijan as evidence that Armenia is already moving towards collapse under weak political leadership. Government efforts to normalise relations or pursue compromise are framed as signs of surrender, state weakness, and impending territorial disintegration. Within this framing, any diplomatic concession becomes symbolic proof that Armenian sovereignty is collapsing from within¹¹¹.

Fear-based messaging additionally exploits public anxiety surrounding border insecurity and the possibility of renewed military confrontation. Russian-aligned actors frequently warn that geopolitical diversification will provoke instability, increase the likelihood of war, and leave Armenia exposed during future regional crises. Narratives frequently portray Armenia as isolated, vulnerable, and incapable of surviving without strong external protection¹¹².

Economic fears also represent an important component of this narrative ecosystem. Manipulative actors repeatedly emphasise Armenia's dependence on Russian trade, remittances, labour migration, and energy infrastructure while warning that geopolitical realignment could trigger economic collapse, unemployment, inflation, and social unrest¹¹³. Such messaging seeks to connect geopolitical decisions directly to fears concerning personal survival and economic insecurity¹¹⁴.

The narrative also increasingly relies on apocalyptic and existential language¹¹⁵. Armenia is portrayed as facing irreversible demographic decline, loss of sovereignty, societal fragmentation, and disappearance as a viable state. Emotional escalation rather than factual argumentation therefore becomes the primary mechanism through which the narrative operates.

4.5.3. *Target Audiences*

The primary audience for this narrative consists of broad segments of Armenian society emotionally affected by war, displacement, insecurity, and political uncertainty. Citizens traumatised by the events of 2020 and 2023 are particularly

¹¹¹ Reuters, "What's at Stake in Armenia's June Election?," May 19, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/whats-stake-armenias-june-election-2026-05-19/>

¹¹² Lucy Papachristou, "Russia Says Armenia Is Being Dragged Into EU's Anti-Russian Orbit," Reuters, May 7, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-armenia-is-being-dragged-into-eus-anti-russian-orbit-2026-05-07/>

¹¹³ United24Media, "Armenia Sets Sights on EU, Not Russia, as Pashinyan and Putin Meet in Moscow," <https://united24media.com/latest-news/armenia-sets-sights-on-eu-not-russia-as-pashinyan-and-putin-meet-in-moscow-17541>

¹¹⁴ Light, Felix. "Russia Says Armenia Could Lose Cheap Gas if It Turns Away from Moscow." Reuters, May 25, 2026. www.reuters.com/business/energy/russia-says-armenia-could-lose-cheap-gas-if-it-turns-away-moscow-2026-05-25/

¹¹⁵ FPRI, "Russia After Putin," April 2026, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2026/04/russia-after-putin/>.

vulnerable to fear-based messaging involving renewed violence and national collapse.

The narrative additionally targets politically undecided audiences, economically vulnerable groups, and citizens experiencing anxiety concerning Armenia's future geopolitical direction. Fear-based narratives possess particularly strong mobilisation potential because they appeal not only to political beliefs, but also to deeply personal concerns involving physical safety, family security, and national survival.

Older audiences exposed to Russian-language media ecosystems remain especially susceptible to narratives portraying geopolitical instability as inevitable outside Russian influence. At the same time, emotionally provocative visual content and fear-driven messaging circulating across social media platforms significantly broaden the narrative's reach among younger audiences.

Importantly, the narrative also functions beyond Armenia itself. Messaging surrounding "Ukrainization" frequently targets Russian-speaking audiences throughout the broader Eastern Europe in order to reinforce wider Russian geopolitical narratives concerning the dangers of Western alignment and democratic transformation.

4.5.4. Dissemination Channels

The narrative is amplified primarily through Telegram-centred pro-Kremlin ecosystems, Russian state-linked media, emotionally manipulative video content, politically aligned commentators, and coordinated reposting networks operating within Armenia's digital information environment¹¹⁶.

Fear-based narratives spread particularly rapidly through visual and emotionally charged formats. Manipulated imagery, dramatic headlines, war footage, symbolic destruction imagery, and emotionally escalatory videos are frequently used to intensify perceptions of insecurity and national vulnerability.

Russian-language television programming and pro-Kremlin commentators additionally reinforce narratives portraying Armenia as approaching geopolitical disaster and societal collapse. Such messaging becomes especially visible during periods of regional tension, military incidents, diplomatic negotiations, or politically sensitive domestic developments.

¹¹⁶ GLOBSEC, "How Russia's Hybrid Warfare Will Escalate in 2026 and What Europe Must Do," <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/commentaries/how-russias-hybrid-warfare-will-escalate-2026-and-what-europe-must-do>.

Narratives concerning war, collapse, and “Ukrainization” also spread rapidly across Armenian social media ecosystems because emotionally charged fear content generates particularly high levels of engagement, reposting, and emotional reaction.

4.5.5. Strategic Objective

The broader strategic objective of the “Fear, Collapse, and the ‘Ukrainization’ of Armenia” narrative is to cultivate psychological dependency, geopolitical fatalism, and existential insecurity within Armenian society.

More specifically, the narrative seeks to convince Armenian audiences that geopolitical diversification, democratic transformation, and closer engagement with Western institutions inevitably lead to war, instability, and national collapse. By transforming political debate into existential fear, manipulative actors attempt to weaken public support for independent foreign policy decision-making and increase receptiveness towards security-oriented dependency narratives.

The narrative additionally contributes to broader Russian strategic objectives by reinforcing regional perceptions that states distancing themselves from Russia risk catastrophic destabilisation. The repeated use of Ukraine-related comparisons helps integrate Armenia into wider Russian information campaigns portraying Western alignment as inherently destructive and strategically reckless.

Ultimately, the narrative seeks to normalise the perception that Armenia’s future outside Russia’s geopolitical orbit is not merely uncertain, but potentially catastrophic.

5. Comparative Assessment of Narrative Impact

The narratives identified during the monitoring period varied considerably in their emotional intensity, amplification dynamics, persistence, and potential influence on Armenia’s electoral environment. While all narratives contributed to increased polarisation and institutional distrust, some demonstrated substantially greater mobilisation potential due to their ability to exploit existing societal fears connected to war, insecurity, identity, and geopolitical uncertainty.

The assessment below evaluates the principal narratives according to five analytical criteria: emotional resonance, amplification capacity, persistence within the information environment, election relevance, and overall risk level. Emotional resonance refers to the narrative’s ability to provoke strong psychological reactions such as fear, anger, humiliation, or anxiety. Amplification reflects the narrative’s visibility and spread across digital and media ecosystems. Persistence measures the degree to which narratives remained continuously present throughout the monitoring period. Election relevance evaluates the narrative’s potential influence on electoral behaviour, institutional legitimacy, or political stability. Risk level reflects the narrative’s broader destabilising potential within Armenia’s political and informational environment.

Table 2: Comparative Narrative Assessment

N	Narrative	Emotional Resonance	Amplification	Persistence	Election Relevance	Risk Level
1	Russia as Armenia’s Indispensable Security Partner	High	High	High	High	High
2	The Myth of Western Protection	Medium-High	High	High	High	High
3	Delegitimising the Armenian Government	High	Medium-High	High	Very High	High
4	Identity, Faith, and Traditional Values Under Threat	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
5	Fear, Collapse, and the “Ukrainization” of Armenia	Very High	High	High	Very High	Very High

5.1. *High-Impact Security Narratives*

The “Russia as Armenia’s Indispensable Security Partner” narrative remained among the most persistent and structurally important narratives throughout the monitoring period. Its influence derived from the combination of Armenia’s long-standing military and economic relationship with Russia, unresolved security anxieties following the events of 2020 and 2023, and widespread uncertainty regarding Armenia’s future strategic orientation. The narrative demonstrated particularly strong persistence because it was continuously reinforced through political debate, security discourse, and broader geopolitical discussions rather than isolated disinformation incidents alone.

Closely connected to this narrative, “The Myth of Western Protection” demonstrated similarly high amplification and election relevance. The narrative proved particularly effective among audiences already sceptical of Western geopolitical intentions or disappointed by the limited international response to regional crises. By portraying Western engagement as symbolic and strategically insufficient, manipulative actors sought to undermine public confidence in Armenia’s geopolitical diversification efforts without necessarily promoting overtly pro-Russian positions directly.

Together, these two narratives formed the core geopolitical messaging framework within the broader information environment. Their combined effect reinforced perceptions of insecurity, geopolitical dependency, and strategic uncertainty while weakening confidence in alternative foreign policy orientations.

5.2. *Anti-Government Narratives and Political Polarisation*

The “Delegitimising the Armenian Government” narrative demonstrated exceptionally high election relevance due to its direct connection to domestic political competition and public dissatisfaction following the post-war period. Unlike broader geopolitical narratives, anti-government messaging personalised political frustration by portraying Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and the ruling authorities as weak, externally controlled, and responsible for national decline.

This narrative possessed particularly strong mobilisation potential because it intersected with existing public anger surrounding territorial loss, peace negotiations with Azerbaijan, and broader post-war insecurity. Emotional themes involving humiliation, betrayal, surrender, and loss of sovereignty generated strong audience engagement across politically polarised communities.

Although amplification levels remained slightly lower than broader security narratives, anti-government messaging maintained high persistence throughout the monitoring period because it was continuously reproduced through domestic political discourse,

opposition rhetoric, and emotionally charged online content. Its ability to transform dissatisfaction with specific government policies into broader distrust towards democratic governance significantly increased its strategic relevance during the electoral period.

5.3. Electoral Delegitimization and Institutional Distrust

The “Pre-Emptive Electoral Delegitimization” narrative demonstrated particularly high election relevance despite comparatively lower emotional intensity and amplification levels. Its strategic significance derived less from emotional mobilisation and more from its capacity to weaken institutional trust and democratic legitimacy ahead of the elections themselves.

Narratives involving manipulated elections, hidden foreign influence, fabricated polling data, and institutional interference contributed to growing suspicion surrounding electoral procedures and political representation. Particularly concerning was the emergence of anticipatory fraud allegations before voting had taken place. Such narratives create informational conditions in which portions of the electorate may reject official outcomes regardless of the actual conduct of the elections.

Although election fraud narratives were less emotionally powerful than fear-based or security-centred messaging, their long-term impact on institutional legitimacy and democratic trust remains substantial. Persistent exposure to claims that elections are manipulated or externally controlled contributes to democratic cynicism, political disengagement, and declining confidence in state institutions over time.

5.4. Identity Narratives and Cultural Mobilisation

The “Identity, Faith, and Traditional Values Under Threat” narrative demonstrated high emotional resonance but comparatively lower amplification and election relevance than security-centred narratives. Nevertheless, its importance within the broader information environment remained significant due to its ability to mobilise conservative, religious, and identity-oriented audiences emotionally.

Narratives involving the Armenian Apostolic Church, traditional family structures, anti-LGBT rhetoric, and Western moral influence proved especially effective because they transformed geopolitical debates into emotionally charged questions concerning cultural identity, morality, and national continuity. The narrative’s emotional power derived not from immediate security fears, but from deeper anxieties concerning social change and perceived erosion of traditional Armenian values.

Identity-centred narratives additionally demonstrated strong adaptability because they could be integrated easily into broader anti-government and anti-Western

messaging. Tensions involving Church-state relations or social reform debates therefore frequently became entry points for wider geopolitical and ideological polarisation.

5.5. Fear-Based Narratives and Psychological Escalation

Among all identified narratives, “Fear, Collapse, and the ‘Ukrainization’ of Armenia” demonstrated the highest overall emotional intensity and strategic risk. The narrative combined war fears, territorial insecurity, economic anxiety, and existential collapse scenarios into a highly emotionally charged framework capable of generating widespread psychological destabilisation.

The repeated use of Ukraine-related imagery and comparisons significantly increased the narrative’s emotional effectiveness. By presenting Armenia as potentially facing war, destruction, displacement, or state collapse similar to Ukraine, manipulative actors exploited existing societal trauma and insecurity to intensify fear and political fatalism.

This narrative additionally possessed particularly high amplification potential because emotionally escalatory content spreads rapidly across digital ecosystems. Visual imagery involving war, destruction, refugees, and territorial fragmentation generated high levels of audience engagement and emotional reaction across multiple platforms.

Unlike more analytically framed geopolitical narratives, the “Ukrainization” narrative functioned primarily through emotional escalation rather than factual persuasion. Its strategic significance therefore lies not only in shaping political preferences, but also in weakening societal resilience, increasing psychological insecurity, and narrowing the space for rational democratic deliberation during a strategically sensitive electoral period.

5.6. Overall Assessment

Taken together, the narratives identified during the monitoring period formed an interconnected influence ecosystem rather than isolated disinformation themes. Security dependency narratives, anti-Western messaging, anti-government attacks, identity mobilisation, electoral distrust, and fear-based escalation mutually reinforced one another across multiple platforms and audiences.

The cumulative effect contributed to an information environment increasingly shaped by insecurity, distrust, emotional polarisation, and geopolitical fatalism. While individual narratives targeted different audiences and utilised distinct emotional

triggers, all ultimately reinforced broader strategic objectives favourable to Russian geopolitical interests in Armenia and the South Caucasus.

6. Risks to Electoral Integrity and Democratic Stability

6.1. Information Manipulation and Electoral Vulnerability

Foreign The June 2026 parliamentary elections are unfolding in an information environment characterised by heightened political polarisation, post-war insecurity, institutional distrust, and intensified foreign information manipulation. Although Armenia has made measurable democratic progress since the 2018 Velvet Revolution, the current electoral environment remains vulnerable to coordinated influence activity designed to weaken public confidence in democratic institutions and electoral legitimacy.

The monitoring period demonstrated that the primary risk posed by manipulative narratives does not necessarily stem from direct alteration of electoral procedures, but rather from the gradual erosion of public trust surrounding the integrity, credibility, and legitimacy of the democratic process itself. Persistent exposure to emotionally manipulative narratives contributes to an environment in which large segments of society may increasingly interpret political developments through fear, distrust, and conspiratorial framing rather than institutional confidence and democratic deliberation.

The cumulative impact of these narratives therefore extends beyond immediate electoral competition. Information manipulation targeting Armenia's elections contributes to broader democratic vulnerability by weakening societal trust, intensifying polarisation, and reducing institutional resilience during a strategically sensitive political period.

A structural vulnerability specific to Armenia, and less present in comparable cases such as Moldova, is the relative recency of its exposure to Russian FIMI. Armenia's experience with coordinated information manipulation only intensified significantly after 2023, meaning its civil society, institutional responses, and public media literacy are less developed than their Moldovan counterparts, who had several prior election cycles of direct exposure. Armenia also remains a member of the Eurasian Economic Union with significant economic dependencies on Russia, energy, remittances, trade, giving Russia leverage points that Moldova had already substantially exited.

6.2. Delegitimization of Democratic Institutions

One of the most significant risks identified during the monitoring period concerns the systematic delegitimization of democratic institutions and governance processes. Narratives portraying elections as manipulated, political leaders as externally controlled, and democratic reforms as foreign-imposed projects contribute to growing public cynicism towards institutional politics.

Pre-emptive fraud allegations and conspiratorial narratives surrounding hidden foreign influence are particularly significant because they undermine confidence in electoral legitimacy before voting procedures have even taken place. In politically polarised environments characterised by low institutional trust, anticipatory claims concerning electoral manipulation may encourage portions of society to reject official outcomes regardless of the actual conduct of the elections.

Such dynamics create favourable conditions for post-election instability, intensified political confrontation, and declining confidence in democratic representation. Even when electoral procedures themselves remain credible, sustained exposure to delegitimising narratives may weaken public acceptance of democratic outcomes and reduce trust in state institutions over time.

6.3. Intensification of Political Polarisation

The monitoring period additionally revealed significant risks connected to the intensification of political and societal polarisation. Russian-aligned narratives consistently exploit existing divisions concerning security, identity, religion, geopolitical orientation, and post-war diplomacy. Rather than creating entirely new grievances, manipulative actors amplify pre-existing tensions and emotionally charged debates already present within Armenian society.

Particularly concerning is the increasing transformation of political disagreement into existential confrontation. Government policy decisions are frequently framed not as legitimate subjects of democratic debate, but as evidence of betrayal, surrender, or threats to national survival. Similarly, geopolitical discussions concerning relations with Russia or the West increasingly become framed through emotionally absolute narratives involving war, collapse, or destruction of Armenian identity.

Such framing narrows the space for rational democratic deliberation and encourages emotionally escalatory political discourse centred on fear, humiliation, and distrust. Over time, this dynamic contributes to democratic fatigue, radicalisation of political language, and declining societal cohesion.

6.4. Psychological Insecurity and Fear-Based Mobilisation

Fear-based narratives involving war, territorial collapse, insecurity, and “Ukrainization” represent another major risk to electoral integrity and democratic stability. The monitoring period demonstrated that emotionally escalatory narratives spread particularly rapidly across digital platforms and possess exceptionally strong mobilisation potential within post-conflict societies.

By repeatedly portraying Armenia as facing imminent collapse, renewed war, or geopolitical catastrophe, manipulative actors cultivate psychological insecurity and political fatalism among broad segments of society. Such narratives exploit unresolved trauma connected to the 2020 war and the 2023 displacement crisis while simultaneously increasing public vulnerability to authoritarian, security-centred, or dependency-based political messaging.

The strategic effect of fear-based manipulation is particularly significant because fear reduces public willingness to engage in nuanced political deliberation and increases receptiveness towards emotionally simplistic or security-driven political narratives. In this context, democratic debate risks becoming subordinated to crisis psychology and existential insecurity.

6.5. Erosion of Information Integrity

The increasing circulation of manipulated visual content, fabricated screenshots, anonymous rumours, emotionally manipulative videos, and coordinated amplification behaviour additionally contributes to broader deterioration of information integrity within Armenia's digital environment.

The rapid spread of unverified or emotionally provocative content across Telegram ecosystems and social media platforms complicates verification efforts and accelerates informational confusion during politically sensitive periods. Cross-platform dissemination allows narratives originating in fringe or anonymous environments to migrate rapidly into mainstream political debate, often obscuring the original source and strategic purpose of manipulative content.

As information ecosystems become increasingly saturated with emotionally charged and conspiratorial narratives, public capacity to distinguish between credible reporting, political commentary, and manipulative influence activity may gradually weaken. This contributes to declining trust not only in political institutions, but also in media environments and public communication more broadly.

6.6. Risks to Armenia's Democratic Development

The cumulative effect of sustained information manipulation extends beyond the immediate electoral cycle and poses broader risks to Armenia's long-term democratic development. Persistent narratives portraying democratic governance as weak, externally controlled, or incapable of ensuring national security contribute to growing democratic cynicism and institutional fatigue.

Particularly significant is the risk that repeated exposure to manipulative narratives normalises perceptions that Armenia cannot function as a sovereign democratic

state independently of external geopolitical control. Security dependency narratives, anti-Western messaging, anti-government attacks, and fear-based mobilisation together reinforce a broader atmosphere of geopolitical fatalism and societal insecurity.

Such conditions may weaken public support for democratic reforms, reduce confidence in institutional accountability, and increase societal receptiveness towards more authoritarian political alternatives promising stability and security. In this sense, information manipulation targeting Armenia's elections should be understood not merely as an electoral challenge, but as a broader strategic threat to democratic resilience and sovereign political decision-making.

6.7. Overall Assessment

The risks identified during the monitoring period demonstrate that foreign information manipulation targeting Armenia operates through long-term erosion rather than isolated disinformation incidents alone. The strategic objective is not necessarily to alter voting procedures directly, but to weaken public trust, intensify societal fragmentation, and shape the broader psychological environment surrounding democratic politics.

The combination of post-war trauma, geopolitical uncertainty, political polarisation, and rapid digital amplification creates particularly favourable conditions for manipulative narratives capable of influencing public perceptions during the electoral period. As a result, safeguarding electoral integrity in Armenia increasingly requires not only procedural electoral protections, but also broader societal resilience against coordinated information manipulation and emotional destabilisation campaigns.

7. Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Election Communication and Rapid Response Mechanisms.** The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) and relevant state institutions should establish a dedicated rapid-response communication mechanism ahead of the June 2026 parliamentary elections. During the monitoring period, manipulative narratives frequently exploited informational gaps, delayed official responses, and confusion surrounding electoral procedures.

Election authorities should therefore provide:

- regular public briefings on electoral procedures and vote-counting processes;
- rapid clarification of false claims concerning turnout, fraud, or institutional manipulation;
- visible communication regarding election observation mechanisms;
- transparent explanations of complaint and appeals procedures.

Special attention should be devoted to pre-emptive fraud narratives circulating before election day. Authorities should proactively address recurring claims involving:

- manipulated turnout figures;
- foreign embassy interference;
- fabricated polling data;
- NGO “coordination” allegations;
- hidden ballot manipulation schemes.

A publicly accessible election-information portal and verified Telegram communication channel would improve institutional visibility during periods of rapid narrative escalation.

2. **Expand Monitoring of Telegram and Cross-Platform Narrative Migration.** Telegram remains the principal operational environment for narrative incubation and rapid amplification within Armenia’s information ecosystem. Armenian institutions and civil society organisations should therefore prioritise systematic monitoring of Telegram-centred influence activity.

Monitoring efforts should focus specifically on:

- coordinated reposting behaviour;
- anonymous political channels spreading election-related rumours;
- migration of narratives from Telegram to Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and X;
- recurring amplification of emotionally escalatory content;
- synthetic or manipulated visual material.

Particular attention should be devoted to narratives involving:

- “Ukrainization” fears;
- election fraud allegations;
- Church-state tensions;
- anti-government surrender accusations;
- anti-Western security narratives.

Monitoring should additionally include Armenian-language and Russian-language ecosystems simultaneously, as narratives frequently circulate between both environments before entering broader domestic discourse.

- 3. Increase Transparency Around Foreign Information Manipulation.** Armenian authorities should avoid overly securitised or vague references to “disinformation” and instead communicate more specifically about the mechanisms and objectives of coordinated influence operations.

Public reporting should identify:

- recurring manipulation tactics;
- coordinated amplification patterns;
- use of fake media branding;
- fabricated screenshots and edited videos;
- emotionally manipulative fear content;
- impersonation of legitimate media or political actors.

More transparent public attribution of manipulative activity would reduce ambiguity and help prevent conspiratorial speculation from dominating political discourse.

- 4. Prioritise Strategic Communication on Security Issues.** Security narratives demonstrated the highest persistence and emotional mobilisation potential throughout the monitoring period. Armenian institutions therefore require a significantly more coherent strategic communication approach regarding:

- border security;
- peace negotiations;
- defence reform;
- relations with Russia;
- cooperation with the EU and Western partners.

Institutional silence or inconsistent messaging surrounding security issues creates favourable conditions for manipulative actors to dominate public interpretation of events.

Government communication should focus on:

- reducing uncertainty;
- avoiding contradictory messaging;

- explaining policy decisions clearly;
- addressing fears directly rather than dismissing them.

Particular attention should be devoted to emotionally sensitive topics connected to Nagorno-Karabakh, territorial insecurity, and relations with Azerbaijan, as these issues remain central mobilisation triggers within the information environment.

5. Strengthen Resilience Against Fear-Based Narratives. The “Ukrainization” narrative demonstrated the highest overall emotional intensity and strategic risk during the monitoring period. Armenian institutions and civil society actors should therefore prioritise resilience-building against fear-based manipulation specifically rather than addressing all disinformation generically.

Public communication campaigns should:

- avoid amplifying panic narratives unintentionally;
- contextualise comparisons with Ukraine carefully;
- counter catastrophic framing with factual analysis;
- address economic insecurity narratives directly;
- reduce uncertainty surrounding geopolitical developments.

Psychological resilience approaches should additionally be integrated into strategic communication planning. Fear-based manipulation proved effective primarily because it exploited unresolved societal trauma connected to war, displacement, and insecurity.

6. Support Independent Armenian-Language Media. Independent Armenian-language media remains essential for limiting the dominance of externally aligned narratives within the domestic information environment. However, highly polarised media ecosystems remain vulnerable to emotional amplification dynamics and politically motivated framing.

Support efforts should prioritise:

- investigative journalism;
- regional media outlets;
- open-source investigative capacity;
- election-focused fact-checking initiatives;
- verification of manipulated visual content.

Particular investment is needed in rapid verification capabilities concerning:

- edited videos;
- fabricated screenshots;
- fake polling data;
- AI-generated visual material;
- impersonation of legitimate media brands.

Smaller regional outlets require additional support because they often lack technical and financial resources necessary to respond quickly to coordinated manipulation campaigns.

7. Improve Digital and Media Literacy. Media literacy initiatives should move beyond general awareness campaigns and focus specifically on the manipulation techniques observed during the monitoring period. Public resilience efforts should include training on:

- emotionally manipulative framing;
- fear-based political messaging;
- verification of visual content;
- coordinated reposting behaviour;
- anonymous Telegram ecosystems;
- fabricated polling and election narratives.

Educational initiatives should target:

- younger audiences exposed to rapid visual content on TikTok and Telegram;
- older audiences consuming Russian-language television and digital media;
- politically polarised online communities particularly vulnerable to emotional mobilisation.

8. Deepen Cooperation with European and International Partners. Foreign information manipulation targeting Armenia increasingly reflects operational patterns previously observed in Moldova, Georgia, and across the Eastern Europe. Armenia should therefore deepen cooperation with European and international partners on:

- FIMI monitoring;
- strategic communication;
- election resilience;
- cyber-enabled influence operations;
- AI-enhanced disinformation analysis.

Closer cooperation with EU institutions, election observation missions, and specialised resilience initiatives would improve Armenia's capacity to identify and respond to coordinated influence activity during politically sensitive periods. Recent international responses also demonstrate the growing willingness of Western governments to impose deterrence measures against foreign information manipulation operations. On 11 May 2026, the United Kingdom sanctioned 85 Russian individuals and entities, including 49 employees linked to the Social Design Agency (Doppelgänger) network, specifically for interference activities targeting Armenia's electoral environment. This represents one of the most significant international counter-FIMI actions related to Armenia to date and provides a concrete model for coordinated international deterrence and accountability measures against foreign influence operations.

At the same time, international engagement should remain careful not to reinforce narratives portraying democratic assistance as external political control. Assistance is likely to be most effective when framed around democratic resilience, institutional transparency, and electoral integrity rather than geopolitical competition.

8. Conclusion

The June 2026 parliamentary elections are unfolding during one of the most politically sensitive periods in Armenia's recent history. Post-war trauma, unresolved security concerns, geopolitical uncertainty, and growing political polarisation have created an information environment highly vulnerable to foreign information manipulation and interference.

The findings of this report demonstrate that Russian-linked influence activity targeting Armenia operates not through isolated disinformation incidents alone, but through a coordinated ecosystem of mutually reinforcing strategic narratives. These narratives systematically exploit societal fears connected to security, sovereignty, identity, democratic legitimacy, and Armenia's geopolitical future. Their broader objective is to shape public perceptions in ways favourable to Russian strategic interests while weakening confidence in democratic governance and geopolitical diversification.

Among the monitored narratives, security-centred and fear-based messaging demonstrated the highest emotional resonance and destabilising potential. Narratives portraying Russia as Armenia's indispensable security partner and framing Western engagement as unreliable reinforced perceptions of dependency and strategic insecurity. Simultaneously, fear-based narratives centred on "Ukrainization", war, and national collapse intensified public anxiety and geopolitical fatalism across broad segments of society.

Anti-government and electoral delegitimization narratives additionally contributed to distrust towards democratic institutions and political leadership. By portraying the Armenian government as weak, externally controlled, or responsible for national decline, manipulative actors sought to transform political dissatisfaction into broader democratic cynicism. Identity-centred narratives involving religion, morality, and traditional values further expanded the emotional reach of manipulative messaging by linking geopolitical debates to questions of Armenian identity and cultural continuity.

The report additionally demonstrates that Armenia's vulnerability to information manipulation is shaped not only by external influence activity, but also by domestic structural conditions including political polarisation, low institutional trust, fragmented media environments, and unresolved societal trauma. Telegram-centred ecosystems, coordinated amplification networks, manipulated visual content, and cross-platform dissemination patterns significantly accelerated the spread of manipulative narratives during the monitoring period.

Ultimately, the challenge facing Armenia extends beyond electoral integrity alone. The broader issue concerns democratic resilience under conditions of geopolitical pressure and sustained information manipulation. Safeguarding Armenia's democratic development increasingly depends on the country's ability to resist efforts designed to transform fear, insecurity, and uncertainty into instruments of geopolitical influence.

Foreign Influence and Information Manipulation in Armenia's Electoral Context

Assessing Russian Narratives, Networks, and Pre-Election Risks Ahead of the 7 June Vote.

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