

The Next Ukraine: West Destroys Armenia | H. Ishkhanyan & N. Navasardyan

Pascal Lottaz speaks with Armenian dissidents Hovanes Ishkanyan and Nare Navasardian about the latest election in Armenia, claims of rigging, arrests of opposition figures, pressure on the church, and the danger of the Zangezur corridor plan. They also discuss foreign influence, the Artsakh issue, and why they believe Armenia's statehood is under threat. Links: Aknandakan: Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/aknandakan/> Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/> Website: www.aknandakan.org Substack: <https://substack.com/@aknandakan> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> (Opt in for Academic Section from your profile settings: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com/s/academic>) Merch: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction and guest backgrounds 00:02:31 Armenia election fraud claims 00:10:45 Foreign backing and early reactions 00:15:44 Corridor plan and regional goals 00:20:40 Bribes, arrests, and repression 00:25:40 Artsakh, refugees, and state threat 00:33:29 Threshold trick and recount dispute 00:38:52 Army voting and list problems 00:44:01 Why the opposition stayed calm 00:51:59 Final thoughts on Armenia's future

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies, today with a special episode on Armenia. I am joined by two dissidents from there, Hovhannes Iskanyan and Narek Navasardyan. I hope I pronounced the names correctly. Narek, Hovhannes, welcome. Thank you very much.

#Navasardyan

Thank you, Pascal Lottaz, for having us.

#Pascal

Well, thank you for having us here and giving us some updates. And can I maybe just ask you, Narek, maybe first you, can you give us a very brief background of yourself?

#Navasardyan

Sure. So I studied in America at first. I studied writing and marketing. And upon returning to my home country, Armenia, at first I took up a position with the EU delegation, but that didn't last. And then, following the 2020 war, Hovhannes and I founded an NGO to defend the rights of Armenians,

because it was clear that there was this big conspiracy against our nation. And since then, we've been working on, you know, recruiting documentary filmmakers, photographers, writers, everybody that was interested in the cause of a sovereign Armenia and the defense of the rights of Armenians.

#Pascal

Thank you. And Hovhannes, what's your background?

#Ishkhanyan

I am a documentary filmmaker and a writer. I did my master's degree in journalism and media management in Georgia, at the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs. And now, as Narek said, especially after 2020, when part of Artsakh, the Republic of Artsakh, was handed over because of the war, we started to act, because we knew that we were at risk of ethnic cleansing and genocide. We knew that this government was going to recognize Artsakh as part of Azerbaijan, and that's when we started to work to try to prevent all the tragedies that were going to happen in our country.

#Pascal

And Artsakh, you mean the province of Nagorno-Karabakh?

#Ishkhanyan

Yeah, Nagorno-Karabakh. The legal name is the Republic of Artsakh, as the constitution is written — Republic of Artsakh, yes.

#Pascal

Okay, and now it's today, Saturday, the 13th of June. Last week on Sunday, you had very important elections in Armenia. Can you give us an update on what you've perceived? Okay, maybe first, what's the official outcome? And then how happy are you with that official outcome? Maybe let's start with Hovhannes and Narek.

#Ishkhanyan

First of all, we have to understand that the elections were rigged, and it was not rigged on the day of the voting, but it started long before. Especially if we take the program of the Civil Contract, which is the party in power. And if we read the program, we will find there a promise of a xenophobic constitutional violation. So they promised through the program that they are going to violate the Armenian Constitution by force, throwing the Catholicos, the leader of the Church, from

his position, which is a violation of the 17th article of our Constitution, that the State and the Church are separate. So, for the imagination of the Western audience, we have to understand that we Armenians were obliged to take part in elections that were done by xenophobic ideologies.

So, like violating the freedom of conscience and religious freedom. But it also started long before, because they started to fabricate cases against mayors and community leaders—elected mayors who were in opposition. Like in the second city of Armenia, which is Gyumri, the elected mayor was just taken to jail. Another one, in the city of Massis, the mayor was taken to jail because of their opposition. And this was unprecedented—unprecedented elections—because the leader of the opposition was in the campaign while he was arrested. And for state elections, such a thing never happened. And he was, by the way, arrested because when he came to Armenia, he said, “I am going to protect my church.”

Because you know that the Church is under attack by this government, in the way I can. So after this, he was arrested. And he was arrested by command on the Facebook of the Prime Minister. Can you imagine? Like, he wrote on Facebook, “Now you will see what is going to happen with you.” And then all the national security, police, and everyone went to the house of Samvel Karapetian, and he was arrested. And now he is under house arrest, so he couldn't speak with citizens and do the campaign properly. But not only him—the fourth party that they are trying now to take out from Parliament. But as we see, they passed Parliament, and now they are trying illegally to throw them back. The second person of this party, the faction, the group coalition, which was the leader of the Meir Hayastan party.

He was arrested two weeks before voting day. And he was arrested on the day of his son's graduation. They arrested him because he was the machine of the campaign. And he had succeeded in all the local elections that took place before—in Yerevan, which is the capital, in Gyumri, which is the second city, and in Etchmiadzin, which is one of the biggest cities of Armenia and the spiritual city, because the church center is there. So he succeeded in all of these elections, and they just arrested him two weeks before. And not only him, but they were also arresting people who were the main organizational individuals. They were the machines of organization. So they were paralyzing the work of the parties through this.

#Pascal

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#Ishkhanyan

The worst thing that happened, it was like at 2 a.m. at night when only like 10% of the polling stations were processed, like the votes, only 10%, 15%. And this guy, whose name is Nikol

Pashinyan and who's backed by Europe, he just made a press conference and said that they won the elections. He didn't even wait. He didn't even wait. The counting was stopped at that moment. Like for 30 minutes, for one hour, 30 minutes, the counting was stopped. The page of the electoral committee was down. It was not working. And then he came, he made the press conference, and he said, we won the elections. And just imagine, like, there are 2,005 polling stations, and only like 100-something were just counted. And the way that the counting was going, four parties were like all together. If we add, like, Civil Contract was going down, and these all were going up.

And then after this press conference, that usuality was changed. And after that, we understand it's a violation of the constitution because the central committee is the institution that gives the results of the elections. And he came out, and before he came out, the prime minister of Georgia announced, like, congratulated the victory of Nikol Pashinyan when only 1% was counted. Can you imagine? Like, a prime minister of a different country, a neighboring country, doesn't respect our institutions, and he comes out, congratulates the prime minister, and also the ex-president of Georgia, Zurabishvili. So these two, one after another, they congratulated the prime minister when only 1% of the polling stations were counted.

#Ishkhanyan

So after this announcement that he won the elections, everything should stop because it's a violation of the constitution. And that means the elections are rigged in a brutal way. And we shouldn't believe whatever result they announce later.

#Pascal

But how is this possible? So on the one hand, we've had all of these arrests before the actual election, and unprecedented, a lot of them, of the opposition first and foremost. Then, of course, also the religious leaders who already for a while, for months, have been arrested and imprisoned. And now also this very obvious irregularity of how the election, the vote, is then being counted or told to everybody. Like, what is this, and why Georgia? Because Georgia actually is on a very different path than Armenia and also has troubles with the West, also with Russia. But why is it that Georgia came out so quickly in congratulating Pashinyan?

#Navasardyan

It seems to me that Pashinyan was preemptively given a carte blanche by all these outside players to essentially do whatever he needs to do to win the elections. So it's not just Georgia. It's just the way you could see, leading up to the elections, the big EU events that were organized — Macron walking around the streets of Yerevan, talking about how this would be impossible under former administrations that were more centered on Armenian rights and less on the priorities of these

outside Western actors. So the EU allocated around, I think, two or three million euros for, as they call it, battling disinformation coming from Russia, but essentially doing their own disinformation campaigns completely during these six years.

And actually, more than that, we have seen just complete zero reaction from the European actors to anything that has been going on in Armenia. The mayor of Karakash, the elected mayor from the opposition, was shot. There is no reaction. The Egumdi mayor was, as Jovanes mentioned, imprisoned. We see no reaction. As much as writing on Facebook or going on a podcast and saying something against Pashinyan, you're in danger of being detained for two months, you know, pretrial detention. And then maybe they're just wasting your time, they're wasting your resources. So it has gotten increasingly authoritarian, increasingly violent.

And this is all we have to, in order to understand these elections, we need to go back to the way the system was established and how it was taken over by Pashinyan. So this system, I believe they changed the constitution in 2015. And the president at the time, Sarkisyan, the system allows for complete control over everything — for, you know, the ruling party, the supermajority. If you have the supermajority, you can essentially do anything that you want, and it was a yes. And in 2017, in the elections, the ruling party at the time, the Republican Party, actually registered similar results.

They got 49.7%, and the preliminary results announced by Pashinyan's Central Election Committee were 49.8%. And then a few months afterward, there was this color revolution organized and supported by the West that brought in Pashinyan. And since then, Pashinyan has arranged it so he has full control over the judiciary, over the military, over the police. So in essence, they don't want to give an ounce of power back. In the absence of any external pressures, just the vote count is not enough for them to change their outlook because they see that they can get away with anything.

#Pascal

And they won. I mean, so the official results that we read in the media are that the governing party of Pashinyan won 48 percent. Right? So nearly half. Is that correct?

#Ishkhanyan

As you say, the official is like 49 and something. It's not even 50 plus. And by using all these administrative resources, the terrorists, you know, like public figures, oppositional public figures were beaten. And there was a state murder — a person who just ripped the poster of Pashinyan. He was under arrest and then executed, uh, officially, uh, made a suicide, you know, in the mental hospital. So we also have this state murder. His name is Armen Hovhannisyan, and his house was in Artsakh. So Pashinyan also, like, uh, gave his house to Azerbaijan. And after all of these frauds, fabrications, they got just 49% and something. But as I already told, like after the statement at 2 a. m., there cannot be legitimate results because the voting, the elections are already violated. The constitutional order is violated. So the official statement cannot be real. Yes.

#Pascal

Have you seen any reactions from Western media or Western statesmen about this? Because the election rigging is so extreme that you would expect that something, at least, would have to be acknowledged. Maybe not a...

#Navasardyan

We saw that Ursula von der Leyen wrote a message congratulating Armenians and recalling the spirit of 2018, which was the year of the color revolution — masks off, revealing their geopolitical goals regarding Armenia. And those geopolitical goals actually have many, many different actors, state actors, with their interests converging, which is the Zangezur corridor, sometimes rebranded as TRIP or rebranded as, you know, this sort of opportunity for economic growth, which is going to bring the U.S. to Armenia's southern borders with Iran. And the giveaway of Artsakh, which Pashinyan accomplished methodically, was just a pretext. This was the prelude to them achieving this corridor, encircling Iran, creating this kind of Turkish belt around it.

And also, like, it benefits Iran, Turkey, it benefits Baku, it benefits Kazakhstan — which Tokayev was also one of the first ones to congratulate Pashinyan. These Central Asian countries, they have this task, right? Like, this corridor in the geopolitical context is such that the value of bypassing Russia and Iran is very high right now, both for the EU and all these, like, Turkic states, Central Asian countries. So this is why they were going to put all their weight behind Pashinyan, because they knew that clearly this is not something that is to the benefit of the Armenian people — leasing out their southern border to private American contractors. It's a very dangerous endeavor, given the intentions also of Ankara and Baku, which have been showcased time and time again.

#Pascal

Right. And so we are now asked to believe that the man and the party which lost a very essential part of Armenian territory two years ago to Azerbaijan, which resulted in the expulsion, the ethnic cleansing of 100,000 of your citizens, who were forced to flee to your part of Armenia, the main part — that that man actually won 50% of all the votes. And while also still saying that what he really wants is to give Azerbaijan, the one who took that away, a direct connection to its own exclave that just coincidentally also then borders Iran, and staff that with U.S. military personnel. And all of that is very natural and, of course, a democratic development, right, Hovhannes? That's about it?

#Ishkhanyan

Well, if we close our eyes and if we become like, I don't know, a Civil Contract member, yes, it's like that. But as I said, one cannot count on these elections because they're rigged brutally. Very brutally. And it didn't start now. We actually didn't talk about the extra budget spending, you know, like before the elections — like three months before the elections, they made a health insurance,

yeah, and medical — they made a medical insurance, and they increased the pensions, which were extra-budget things. In the program of the budget, there was nothing like that. So this is a kind of — how do we say — a bribe. Bribe, right. It's a bribe because when parliament adopted the budget last year, there was nothing about it.

And some professionals counted like 1 billion drams were spent on it, on all of this extra. And also, you know, the drivers that lost their licenses, before the elections they pardoned them. Yeah. And also this is another type of a bribe. But now, just right now, a political scientist and a docent from Yerevan State University is under arrest because of a Facebook status. Can you imagine? Just because of writing on Facebook. And they are now closing the State University's Foreign Language Department because the head of the department is against this political system. And can you imagine that it's called the Foreign Literature Department, but in reality, it's like the Western European and Western Literature Department.

And one of the most famous professors of that department was Melina Manushyan, who was the wife of Misak Manushyan, you know, from France, from the resistance movement. They were taken to the Pantheon two years ago, and this so-called prime minister went there and bowed for Melina and Manushyan. And now their department is being closed, and they call it like Armenians are being Euro-integrated. They closed the European Literature Department at the university just because of one person, and now they call it like we are Euro-integrated. Where is the Euro-integration if Armenian students are not going to go deep into Western literature? This is very funny.

#Pascal

So what is the plan here? What do you think? I mean, the only purpose was to keep Pashinyan and his party in power in order to then fulfill the geopolitical intentions of the West — the Trip Corridor or Zangezur Corridor — and probably more EU integration in whatever way it is, but probably not economic integration, I suppose. I mean, what we are looking at is probably a type of militarization. What do you expect, Narek?

#Navasardyan

Well, there are many discussions about EU integration. And of course, the EU also pretends like they are welcoming Armenia, but we see with many similar countries in similar situations that actually economic integration with the EU is senseless for Armenia. It is years away. There are very strict regulations. About 35% of Armenia's exports right now go to Russia. A lot of them are agricultural goods, so they have this issue of distance and spoilage. And then there is, you know, Turkey in the way of this. And Turkey always has a number of, I guess, geopolitical ambitions vis-à-vis Armenia that are sometimes outsourced to Baku. But nevertheless, these are Turkish requirements.

And so now we are expected—Russia, in its turn, does not want to let Yerevan manage this distancing from itself and from its integration projects like the Eurasian Economic Union and CSTO.

Because Armenia, for a few years now, has been generating a lot of hatred in the public sphere using public TV and their satellite media against these Russian integration systems, without effectively severing ties, just causing minor reputational damage. So Russia, I think, right now is set on having more initiative in severing Armenia from its systems. There have been these limitations on the product. So essentially, Pashinyan is willingly doing this just for the reason that he owes his power to the Western actors.

So he is going after these small and medium enterprises, this sector that has organically built a livelihood around the Russian market. And similarly, I mean, their dependencies are very clear, right? The gas prices will increase fourfold, like four times, if Russia decides to cut off Armenia from preferential rates. We depend on Russia for wheat, for grains, which, after the occupation of Artsakh, has become even more severe. And yes, essentially, we have the recalibration of Armenia without promises, without any clear perspectives, on the basis of the political whims of one person installed by the West.

#Pascal

So it's a complete political sellout. And I mean, I belong to the people who actually fear for Armenian statehood. When you hear some of the things that were also said from Azerbaijan, Hovhannes, how dire do you think the situation is? How precarious is it for Armenia?

#Ishkhanyan

Well, it's very hard because now what is Pashinyan's to-do list commanded by Azerbaijan? It's one territory, a village, which is inside Armenia, and it's called Tigranashen. So if you give it, like you just block south and north of Armenia and you give territory inside Armenia to Azerbaijan, can you imagine what's going to happen there? It's just 150 kilometers from Yerevan. So this is on the to-do list.

#Pascal

That village should become state territory of Azerbaijan. Is that the claim?

#Ishkhanyan

Yes. Actually, Nikol Pashinyan announced that he's going to give it, not only during the campaign but also before. It's obvious—they say that they're going to give this village. And it's a strategic point because you just give a road. You give the road and you block the north and the south, south from one side. And this is very serious for us. And next is bringing and settling Azerbaijanis into Armenia, which we understand that the long-term program is to just ethnically cleanse Armenians from here, as it happened in Artsakh. And it is also... why would an Armenian do that?

#Pascal

Why would an Armenian party do that to Armenia? Basically, de-Armenianize Armenia and actually resettle foreign Azerbaijanis into mainland Armenian territory?

#Ishkhanyan

We can assume lots of things. One can be money. One can be ideology. One can be, I don't know, because it's under pressure and all together. But we will know everything after the change of the government, like when there will be investigations. And we can understand how come this guy recognized the Republic of Artsakh as part of Azerbaijan, violating the constitution, violating the declaration of independence of Armenia, and how come it is that at this moment they are violating the rights of refugees, the right of return for refugees. Because, you know, Armenia is part of the convention about refugees. Yes, we are part of it. And now the Armenians from Artsakh say that we want to return. And this guy is saying, no, you don't have that right, you cannot return. Can you imagine this? Like he is just erasing basic rights that come out from the United Nations. Can you imagine this?

#Pascal

I've heard also that during the campaign, he actually spoke with a lot of disrespect against the refugees who had to come to mainland Armenia because they were driven out of Artsakh. I mean, what was the rhetoric during that time? Sorry? Not a...

#Navasardyan

Yes, we saw that even an activist, after a confrontation with Pashinyan, was arrested and became effectively a political prisoner. And to this day, the court case against him continues. And all he did was just question Pashinyan's decisions regarding Artsakh and the people of Artsakh. Repeatedly, he has called them runaways, as if they had any choice. Without the support of the Armenian Republic, Artsakh had no way to defend its self-determination. They were left without any support levers. And the Russian peacekeeping contingent also had no logistical way. It was closed off on the Armenian side by Pashinyan. It was closed off by Aliyev from the eastern side.

So there was no real way for them even, you know, they were like a mediating side also, but they also had no logistical way of defending their rights. So Pashinyan has continuously lashed out at anybody. And, you know, in Armenia, everybody, almost everybody, has had their families, has had some part in liberating Artsakh, keeping Artsakh. But the new idea is that, again, another thing dictated likely by Ankara and Baku, that Armenia doesn't really need to have a functioning army. And what they did was the military, the army service, it was two years. And Pashinyan in October announced that he's reducing it to a year and a half, which was yet another election bribe aimed at maybe the parents of the soldiers that would prefer to have their son back.

So, effectively, we've seen attacks on the Artsakh government-in-exile buildings. The state is trying to seize those buildings. We've seen hate speech campaigns across all of the media that is either state-sponsored or a satellite. And so, under these conditions, it is highly unlikely. He is very, very hated by the Armenian people. But as this democratic process shows, sometimes you can do a little simple trick of, you know, marching in soldiers to vote at a set hour and then afterwards canceling the results when you see that it will reduce your power in the parliament. Because this 4% of the third opposition party that he's losing is very significant. So they lowered the 4% to 3.9996%, and then they canceled, which is another illegal thing.

#Pascal

Can you explain that? I don't get it. Can you explain the background of all this?

#Navasardyan

Sure. So there is like a threshold in order to avoid this disagreement. You know how small parties in parliament can sometimes prevent effective ruling because there's...

#Pascal

There's a minimum threshold of 4% that any party must clear in order to have seats at all. If you have less, then you get no seats. Okay.

#Navasardyan

Yes, yes. And the seats are then redistributed in accordance with the parties, the percentages of the parties that did pass the threshold. So in this system, the 4% that Prosperous Armenia, which was initially announced by the election committee that they cleared the 4%, that would put Pashinyan... That's what party?

#Pascal

That's another party.

#Navasardyan

It's called Prosperous Armenia.

#Pascal

Prosperous Armenia, opposition to Pashinyan's party.

#Navasardyan

Yes, yes, opposition. This is the smallest opposition that cleared the threshold according to preliminary results. And then, in just a few hours—which we also have to think about—the head of the Central Election Committee, he is a former member of the ruling party. So what happened is that, you know, if they knew they were going to put someone as the head of the election committee, they said, you know, you stop being a member of our party and we'll just put you as the Central Election Committee head. So afterwards, in just a few hours, they published new results, and Prosperous Armenia got 3.996% instead of the 4 that they needed, which would mean their votes would be redistributed, and the largest chunk would go to Pashinyan. This, in turn, would give Pashinyan's party the necessary three out of five seats in the parliament, which means that he would get full inner carte blanche, full control over the police, over, like, appointing constitutional judges. Yes.

#Pascal

Is this already a done deal, or are there still open court cases now?

#Navasardyan

Yes, both. I think all three opposition parties have announced that these results are not legitimate, and some of them have applied to nullify them. But the final results after the recount are set to be published tomorrow, on the 14th. So we're still in this in-between stage, but it has become clear that the opposition does not acknowledge these results as legitimate.

#Pascal

How big are the chances for the opposition that the recount will actually change anything significant? I mean, this seems like a really important detail of this vote, that even if it is massively rigged, if that party manages to get in and Pashinyan doesn't get the full majority, that seems important. How likely do you think it is?

#Ishkhanyan

The recount is finished. And what they did during the recount, they rejected three results, three polls. And by doing this, they could drop Prosperous Armenia from the parliament, because in these three polls, Prosperous Armenia had a significant number of votes that were taking them to the parliament. You mean three polling stations?

#Pascal

Three polling stations. Yeah, they were rejected. Entire districts were rejected. As we know, we don't count them at all.

#Ishkhanyan

Yes. But it's illegal. Yeah, it's illegal. Like, by the law, they have to redo the elections either in these polls or start new whole elections. But what they did, after the recount, the votes of Prosperous Armenia were getting higher, and they had enough numbers to get into the parliament. And yesterday, starting from yesterday, they started to reject results of polls, three polling stations. So these votes where Prosperous Armenia had gone up again, and now they can't go into the parliament. So this is very obvious, like, you know, a very dirty game, like we see with our eyes, and they don't announce that there is going to be a re-election or something. And even if there is going to be a re-election—anyway, this, as I told, after 2 a.m. of his announcement, the elections are—it's all.

But because we talked about the military, I just recalled two more cases concerning the military. One was that after the closing of polling stations, four hours after closing, we have videos showing the army inside the polling stations, still doing the voting. Can you imagine? We have two or three examples like that, videos. And the person who made the video is a journalist from the Republic of Artsakh. And as punishment, they sent him to 25 days of military training. Yeah, imagine. And also, what they were doing—people that were coming from Russia to vote, they have voting rights, yes, electoral rights—the military police was there. They were handing papers, calling them to 25 days of military training. Can you imagine what they were doing?

#Pascal

They were trying to prevent Armenians living in Russia from coming back and voting for them.

#Ishkhanyan

They were spreading hate speech. The whole system was spreading hate speech against people who were coming from Russia, especially from Russia. Because I have friends who came from Canada, France, the United States, Belgium, all over the West—they came. Also, some of them were against Pashinyan, some of them were against everyone. But the only hatred, this hate speech, was against those who were coming to implement their voting rights in Armenia. And they sent them to—if it's a male and the age is for the military—they just sent them to 25 days of military training.

#Navasardyan

We've had this implemented, and threats by the ruling party to send people off to military trainings. It started in 2022 when there was a big street movement, street protests against Pashinyan. They

said, "We will identify the activists and send them." At the time, the military trainings were longer. So essentially, they were subjecting them to what, in the ruling party's eyes, is a punishment that is not really lawful or legal. So if you go to an opposition rally, you should be mindful of, you know, being drafted to these military kinds of drills. In addition, though, you were—yes, I was also called, you remember? Yes, yes. I think the elegant move is not really discussed enough with this.

So the polling station is supposed to close at eight, but if you're still in the station, you can vote. So they brought in the army and the commanders. In the video, you can see this—they're standing next to the soldiers and controlling their vote. So they had this controlled voting of the army, which is like 65,000 people. And in addition to this, they also did the calculation that this is like a card that they have, that if they think it's to their benefit to cancel those results or discard them, they will use it. Because right now, maybe they would lose some votes from the stations, but canceling the 4% by the Prosperous Armenia party is more important to them. So they just decided to go for it and cancel those.

#Pascal

But are these cancellations done based on any kind of constitutional provision, or is this just pure arbitrariness? It's like, no, we don't count it. I mean, what do they give? They must give some sort of explanation.

#Ishkhanyan

For example, one polling station is the one where soldiers were there after closing, like four hours after closing. The other one that they canceled—I think yesterday they canceled it—was that, you know, in Armenian elections, there are 19 parties that take part in the elections, and you get 19 lists. Each list is one party. So you take one list that they give you and put it in the envelope. So if, let's say, the number eight—if the party you want to vote for is number eight—you put number eight in the envelope. So in one of the polling stations, number eight was not there. So people were getting all these lists, but number eight was not there. Did I explain it clearly? So this was the reason they rejected this polling station's results.

#Pascal

So what they found is that there's an irregularity in one of these lists.

#Ishkhanyan

Yeah, like they give you 19 lists, 19 papers. One of the papers wasn't there.

#Ishkhanyan

Ah, in the whole elections. They were like number one, number two, number four, number five, but number eight was not there. So people who wanted to vote for number eight could not because it didn't exist. And one reason for rejecting was this one as well. Yeah. And also another thing that is very, like, I don't know, fantastic, is that it appeared that the number of voters increased. Like, you know, the published one before, and then registered eligible voters in one day. And then they said it's 18,000 according to the Central Committee, 18,000 according to the Interior Ministry, 19,000. And they called this a secret list. Secret list. It has never been, you know, like this time we have also a secret list.

#Navasardyan

And a lot of people saw that at their house, unknown people were registered without their consent. And you know you need registration at an address to vote.

#Ishkhanyan

Yeah, like hundreds of people registered in one of the houses, for example, right?

#Pascal

So what you're saying is that there was massive, massive rigging of the elections on many different levels, basically with the collusion, of course, of this election committee.

#Ishkhanyan

Yes, that's what we see.

#Pascal

And how is this going down in Armenia? I mean, if your observations are correct, then I would suppose that a lot of people are very, very angry now. It seems to me that for the ruling party, something realistic we could expect would be somewhere around 20%. I don't know what exactly would be realistic. Do we have any indications from polling, independent polling? What is expected, what could be?

#Ishkhanyan

If we look at the exit polls, like after the end of the voting, exit polls came out, and we saw from the exit polls that four powers are getting more than 50%, and Civil Contract is getting 30% or something.

#Pascal

It's easy to find the exit poll. That's Pashinyan's party.

#Ishkhanyan

Yeah, Pashinyan's party was getting like 30% or something. If you want, I can just search exit polls. No, no, let's search something. Four parties, like Strong Armenia, Armenian Alliance, Prosperous Armenia, and the Wings of—how do we translate? Unity. Unity, yeah. Four parties were getting much more than 50%, like it was almost 60% or maybe 60 or more. It's easy to check. You just say "exit polls Armenia elections 2026" and you see it. And before the press conference of this person, Nikol Pashinyan, that was the way it was going. You know, the Civil Contract was going down, and all these four parties were going up. And four parties, all of them opposition, could like create the government, yes?

#Pascal

Yeah, a coalition government, yeah.

#Ishkhanyan

Yeah, the coalition government. But then the voting stopped. Then this guy went to announce his victory. And when the voting continued, this usuality was just broken. Now we saw a different image, a different picture.

#Pascal

And one more question, because, you know... The outcome that we can expect remains or depends largely on the way voting is done. I mean, I suppose that Armenia actually has a plurality system. So I suppose in each district you have several people who will win seats in parliament. It's not a first-past-the-post system, right?

#Ishkhanyan

No, no, it's not like that. It's just the parties. The parties are taking part in it.

#Pascal

But each district can have more than one representative that goes to parliament — each constituency.

#Ishkhanyan

No, no, it's not working like that. You just register the party, make a list of at least 80 people, and go to the elections. But we can check it.

#Pascal

It's... yeah, it's... you know, in a first-past-the-post system, what you would expect is that two parties win a duopoly, like, you know, in the United States, the Democrats and the Republicans, and almost no opposition parties. But in a plurality system, you would expect that you would have, you know, each party would get something between 10 and 30 percent or something like that.

#Ishkhanyan

You would have six major parties.

#Pascal

And Armenia is rather one of those, right? Yeah.

#Ishkhanyan

It's like if you get 50.1% of the vote, the party can, of course, create the government alone. But if you get in a situation when they got 49%, and the parties that didn't pass the threshold—yeah, there's a threshold—so their points, their percentages, are greater than others, and by this, the Civil Contract will get more than 51%, and they can create their government. What the fight is for now is that if they just take out Prosperous Armenia from the parliament, they can get the constitutional majority. And if Prosperous Armenia goes there, they just get the majority, and they can't, like, change constitutional laws. Like, I don't know, they can't just decide alone who is going to be the head of the prosecutor. So this is going to make difficulties for them to do it.

#Navasardyan

That being said, we also have the precedent of 2017, when the Republican Party, again on paper, got 49.7%. But just a few months later, power was seized by Nikol Pashinyan through the use of this Western technology. It's right now underground. We see that Russia does not acknowledge this result so far. They say they're going to wait for the final results. And this seems like the only country whose media is acknowledging these major violations, because everybody else, all the other outside actors, seem to be somewhat satisfied.

#Ishkhanyan

Sorry to interrupt you, but the OSCE report criticized the elections.

#Pascal

There was election coverage, election monitoring, actually, by the OSCE.

#Ishkhanyan

They criticized the arrests, the use of administrative resources, and these types of things, yes.

#Navasardyan

I mean, like a power structure, you know, with an army and a navy, all those.

#Pascal

But one more thing. I mean, everything that you're telling me tells me that actually Pashinyan's party is massively unpopular. Maybe there is a hard core that actually supports him, for sure. But we can reasonably say that about 60 to 70 percent actually don't like what just happened. So what is happening on the ground in Yerevan? I mean, aren't people angry in the street?

#Ishkhanyan

Let me put it this way. When Pashinyan at 2 a.m. announced the victory and the people were very annoyed, why did nothing happen? Because the opposition didn't organize anything. So they lost that particular moment, because to organize something—and now they are going in very lawful directions. You know, like For a Strong Armenia, they applied to the central committee to reject the whole election, yes. And they are going to go to the constitutional court to bring the proofs of rigged elections. So this is the style of the opposition that is working. And because of this, in the streets, you wouldn't feel that something very illegal happened in this country, you know. This is the problem. This is not because the people are not angry. This is because of the style of the actors in the elections.

#Pascal

Right. So, Lare, you also see that overall Pashinyan managed to rig the elections, but on the other hand, keep the population calm?

#Navasardyan

It seems like there is a great need for political organizing. And once you have political organizing on the ground, then you can threaten the power that is ruling you. This opposition, which is this kind of bourgeois nationalist opposition, they have not really done the work on the ground to organize people. And also, it is very difficult to organize under the conditions of this total control with Pashinyan. He has, you know, a U.S.-sponsored, jacked-up police force. He has surveillance laws that are very, you know, they have no respect for the privacy of anybody. And they also have this large governmental sector that, of course, always votes for the incumbent, which is around 300,000—the government sector. So we have a real lack of organization on the ground. And in part,

this is due to Armenia being a deindustrialized country, because we don't really have this kind of industrial workers.

It's kind of disorganized. The IT sectors, they answer less to the foreign kind of companies. They don't really have any on the ground. In parallel, we have these middle-class NGOs that were also formed by the EU and used to support someone like Pashinyan or a Pashinyan equivalent that would be advancing the geopolitical goals. So it seems to me like the opposition doesn't have the confidence that they will be able to channel this hatred and anger into tangible gains against Pashinyan. And if they get this confidence somehow, then I'm sure that they will act and change the situation. Well, maybe just to finish off, like, what does this leave you two with? I mean, do you still feel safe in Yerevan for the work you do? Well, you know, if they take you, they take you—for every dissident.

The prison time is very productive time. You can get to read a lot of books, disconnect from the screens, and write, meditate. So, I mean, there's just more and more of us, whether or not Pashinyan wants to acknowledge this reality. It's like if you take one person or one professor or one activist, there's just more of us, because his main project is to create an anti-Armenia, to spit on our symbols, on our religion, on our rights. Yes, literally, we had the president of the National Assembly spit on a citizen. He had the security guards hold up a citizen and spit on him. This is just how you generate this type of hatred, independent of even organizations and NGOs like ours.

#Pascal

Hold on. What do you make of this? I mean, this seems to me like one of the most anti-nationalistic projects I've ever seen, like the anti-nation project that I've come across a lot.

#Ishkhanyan

Well, it's not just anti-nation. This is anti-human and anti-democratic and anti-victory of World War II. I mean, anti-victory over fascism, because... if we go to understand what was the Republic of Artsakh, it was a state that was developing democracy, and it was following the world order that we gained after World War II, when the United Nations said that we are going to relate to each other with respect and due to the, how do we say... self-determination, yes. And the Republic of Artsakh said, okay, we have here Azerbaijan, who is making massacres against Armenians in Sumgait, in Baku, in Maragha, and elsewhere.

And Armenians said, we are going to become independent through the rules of the world order and create a democratic country. And Artsakh changed like five presidents. They had these power branches independent. And it was going through this, you know, we were having in parliament, there were different layers inside of the parliament, not only one party. And Azerbaijan was

different. They were creating a dictatorship. They were killing leaders of national minorities in the jails, the Talysh people. And the Lezgin people's rights are not respected. And it's 30 years now that the same family is in power.

And then came this man whose name is Nikol Pashinyan and said, OK, I will recognize this 12,000 square kilometers of democracy as part of this dictatorial country that doesn't respect the rights of minorities and doesn't respect the world order. And if you see, the symbol of Azerbaijan is now this metal fist. I don't know if you've seen it or not, but they are making sculptures all around Artsakh with this metal fist, which means that there is no rule of law, there is no world order, only the fist. If you just smack someone, that's the rule of law. So in this... Sorry?

#Navasardyan

I just wanted to add to your point that Azerbaijan, we've seen that it has been very rewarded by, you know, defense contracts with Ukraine, the U.S., NATO, Turkish, and Israeli contracts. Its role has really increased thanks to its attacks on the self-determination of the Artsakh people. Continue.

#Ishkhanyan

And now you know that Pashinyan not only gave Artsakh away, but my ancestors, who were victims of genocide—my family were victims of genocide in Western Armenia—and now he blames my ancestors for the genocide. Like Pashinyan, as does Erdogan, the same way he's doing. Can you imagine a prime minister like Netanyahu or someone who would blame Holocaust victims? Like they would say that you are the reason the Holocaust happened. And this is what Pashinyan is doing now. On April 24th, the commemoration day of the genocide, he's making a statement that Armenians were at fault for the genocide.

And again, back to the point of humanism and world order, this is the thing — this is not only the problem or issue of Armenian nationality, but this is a problem of the whole planet itself. How are we going to relate to each other through respect? Are we going to prevent genocides, or are we going to blame the victims? The victim blaming, yes. Like, for example, in Azerbaijan, they destroy Armenian churches, and here the officials are saying, it's their territory, they can do whatever they want. Can you imagine? We have a cultural genocide there. It's the same as if you say, like in Rwanda, that Hutu killed Tutsis — it's their territory, they can do whatever they want.

#Pascal

It's a pretty insane moment to me, especially that we are asked to believe that all of this is fine, and we are asked to believe by the European Union that Armenia is a beacon of democracy and that democracy won because everybody is together against Russia. It's utterly insane. And I am seriously worried that Armenia might actually not come out as Armenia again out of this process, because it seems to me that the state itself is now being prepared for dissolution, the way things are going. I

hope I'm wrong, but it seems extremely dangerous. And just one minute, each of you, final statement. Hovhannes first, and then Narek.

#Ishkhanyan

I just want to say that whatever result Pashinyan gains in the elections, we are not going to feel defeated, because this struggle didn't start with us and it is not going to end with us. And it's just a delight to fight against racism and fascism.

#Pascal

All right.

#Navasardyan

To your point, I think it's also very important to acknowledge that we see these intentions are also voiced by the Iranian authorities. They have repeatedly expressed concerns about the changing borders — from President Raisi to the senior advisors to the late Ayatollah Khamenei — they have expressed concerns that under the guise of economy and prosperity, we are seeing an attempt by the U.S. and its proxies to dominate the South Caucasus, to change the demographic picture in Armenia, and to change the so-called internationally recognized borders. So we just hope that the Iranian red line will be respected and Iran will win, because that is also very important for Armenia.

#Pascal

And we didn't get to cover the Iranian aspect at all. We'll talk about that in a future episode. But I would like to thank you both. People who want to follow you, where should they go? Armenia. Everybody, follow them in Armenia. And sign up. Now, is there a place to find you, your work?

#Navasardyan

We have a Facebook page, an Instagram page, and a Substack we just started. So I will just send you the link so that if people want to follow our NGO and keep up with the, you know, fascism and repressions, the human rights situation in Armenia as it develops, they can follow that.

#Pascal

Everybody, the links will be in the description box below. Nare, Hovhannes, thank you so much for your time today.

#Navasardyan

Thank you. It was lovely.

