

European
Elections monitor

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RESULTS

Petr Pavel and Andrej Babis will face each other in the second round of the Czech presidential elections on 27 and 28 January

Petr Pavel (independent) and Andrej Babis (ANO, which stands for "Yes" and "Action of dissatisfied citizens") came out ahead in the first round of the Czech presidential election on 13 and 14 January. Retired general (since 2018) Petr Pavel won 35.4% of the vote and Andrej Babis, former Prime Minister (2017-2021), 34.99%. The gap between the two candidates is the narrowest ever seen in the first round of a presidential election in the Czech Republic. The former rector of Tomas Masaryk University in Brno, Danuse Nerudova (independent), came third with 13.93%. The withdrawal of Josef Stredula (independent), president of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Bohemia and Moravia since 2014, who was supported by the Social Democratic Party (CSSD), to favour of Danuse Nerudova does not seem to have paid off. It must be said that he was credited with a low percentage of votes in opinion polls. Pavel Fischer (independent), senator, former ambassador of the Czech Republic to France (2003-2010) and

director of the STEM institute, was fourth with 6.75%. He was followed by Jaroslav Basta (Freedom and Direct Democracy, SPD), who garnered 4.45%. The other three candidates (Marek Hilser, Karel Divis and Tomas Zima) each obtained less than 3%.

It is worth noting that Czechs living abroad voted for Petr Pavel with 55.94% of their votes. Danuse Nerudova came second with 28.48% of the votes of this electorate; Pavel Fischer received 7.03% and Andrej Babis came fourth with 4.07%.

The second round of the presidential election will be held on 27 and 28 January next. It will pit Petr Pavel against Andrej Babis; the winner will replace Milos Zeman who cannot stand for re-election

The turnout was 68.24%, i.e. +6.36 points compared to the first round of the presidential election on 12-13 January 2018.

Results of the first round of the presidential election of 13-14 January 2023 in the Czech Republic

Turn out: 68.24%

Candidates	Number of votes won	% of votes cast
Petr Pavel (independent)	1 975 056	35.40
Andrej Babis (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens, ANO)	1 952 213	34.99
Danuse Nerudova (independent)	777 080	13.93
Pavel Fischer (independent)	376 705	6.75
Jaroslav Basta (Freedom and Direct Democracy, SPD)	248 375	4.45
Marek Hilser (independent)	142 912	2.56
Karel Divis (independent)	75 475	1.35
Tomas Zima (independent)	30 769	0.55

Source : [Czech Electoral Commission](#)

Presidential election in Czech Republic 13-14th January 2023

After casting his ballot, Petr Pavel, former chairman of the NATO military committee and chief of staff of the Czech army (2012-2015), who chose as his slogan *"Bringing order and calm to the Czech Republic"*, said he wanted to restore the dignity of the presidential office, which he said had been badly damaged after Milos Zeman's ten-year term. *"The danger is that we will not only slide into populism but also move away from the path we have followed for 30 years. A path clearly in favour of democracy, the West and Europe"* The retired general made the issue of defending democracy and the West the main theme of the second round.

Petr Pavel repeatedly apologised for *"the mistake I made when I joined the Communist Party in 1982"*. *"I was born in a family where membership of the Communist Party was considered normal. I did not have enough information and experience to assess the criminal nature of the regime. Now I know that it was a mistake,"* he said, adding, *"To all those who suffered under that regime, of which I was a part, I apologise."* He said that later, as head of the Czech Army Staff and then as chairman of the NATO Military Committee, he had proved that he was now and had been serving for a long time. *"I believe that my actions clearly show the values I stand for and the fact that I am ready to fight to preserve them."*

Petr Pavel is supported by the ruling Spolu (Together) coalition, which includes Prime Minister Petr Fiala's ODS, the Christian Democratic Union-People's Party (KDU-CSL) and Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09 (TOP 09).

Andrej Babis is backed by outgoing president Milos Zeman, who has said he wants the former head of government to succeed him at Prague Castle, the official residence of the Czech president. *"The Czech Republic must have a head of state with political experience and of all the candidates in the running, the former prime minister is the only one with such experience,"* said Milos Zeman, adding. *"No one wants to be operated on by a surgeon who has not studied medicine."* He reaffirmed his support for Andrej Babis after the first round and said that Petr Pavel was the *"government candidate"*.

Andrej Babis has the advantage of being known by his compatriots, but this advantage has its downside: he is also one of the most hated politicians in the Czech Republic. On 9 January, he was acquitted in a case in which he was accused of fraud and wilful damage to the financial interests of the European Union for having taken the Stork's Nest, a state-of-the-art agricultural complex with a farm, hotel and zoo near Prague, out of his Agrofert group, so as to make it eligible for a €2 million EU grant for small businesses. Judge Jan Sott explained that his testimony was highly untruthful and even contrary to some evidence, but that the prosecution had not presented satisfactory evidence of guilt and that the criminal court therefore had no option but to acquit Andrej Babis.

Opinion polls credit Petr Pavel with victory in the second round. He has received the support of Danuse Nerudova, Pavel Fischer and Marek Hilser.

"The presidential election is a kind of referendum on liberal democracy, as it pits Andrej Babis against two liberal democratic opponents," said political analyst Jiri Pehe. Prime Minister Petr Fiala stated his support for Petr Pavel, contrasting a *"populist vision and a pro-Russian tendency"* (Babis) with a *"democratic vision, respect for the Constitution and a pro-Western orientation"* (Pavel).

Jiri Pehe considers that the former Prime Minister, a controversial and polarising figure, has little chance of winning the election. Andrej Babis started his second-round campaign by attacking his opponent, highlighting his military background in the intelligence services under the communist regime and comparing him to Russian President Vladimir Putin. *"This kind of rhetoric on the part of Andrej Babis may attract some of the voters from Jaroslav Basta's electorate. The question is whether the potential of all those who are ready to vote has already been exhausted,"* said the professor of political science at Tomas Mazaryk University in Brno, adding. *"Andrej Babis believes that his highly confrontational rhetoric may push more people to vote in the second round of the presidential election."*

Finally, for many Czechs, it is quite distressing to have to choose between two candidates for vying for the country's highest office who previously belonged to the military and economic elite of the communist era, 34 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

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