

European
Elections monitor

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RESULTS

Zoran Milanovic narrowly fails to win re-election as President of the Republic of Croatia in the first round of voting

Zoran Milanovic, the outgoing head of State, narrowly failed to win Croatia's presidential election in the 1st round of voting on December 29. Although forecast as the winner at the beginning of the evening, he finally won 49.09% of the vote and will therefore have to face Dragan Primorac (independent), in the 2nd round on January 12, backed by Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic's Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), the Patriotic Movement (DP), the Croatian Party of Pensioners (HSU), the Christian Democratic Party (HDS), the Social Liberal Party (HSL), the People's Party/Liberal Democrats (HNS-LD) and the Independents, who garnered 19.35% of the vote. The result of Zoran Milanovic, supported by the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Farmer's Party (HSS), the People's Party-Reformists (NS-R), the Northern Independent Platform (NPS), the Bloc of Pensioners (BUZ), Dalija Oreskovic and People with a First and Last Name (DO i SIP), the Liberal Civic Alliance (GLAS), the Democratic Alliance of Medimurje (MDS), the Party of Pensioners (SU) and the Centre Party (Centar), came as a surprise even though opinion polls had him ahead of his opponents. The last poll published on December 27 credited him with "only" 37% of the vote.

Since Croatia regained its independence in 1991, only Franjo Tudjman (HDZ), considered the father of independence, has managed to win the presidential election in the first round on two occasions, in 1992 and 1997.

MPs Marija Selak Raspudic (independent) and Ivana Kekin (We Can! Mozemo!) took 3rd and 4th place respectively, with 9.25% and 8.89% of the vote. Each of the other 4 candidates obtained under 6% of the vote.

Turnout was low: 46.03%, -5.15 points compared with the first round of the previous presidential election on December 22, 2019. The high abstention rate can no doubt be explained in part by the timing of the poll, which was held between Christmas and New Year, when many people are on vacation. This election concludes a major electoral year for the Croats, who renewed the 151 seats in the *Sabor*, the single chamber of Parliament, on April 17 and, a month and a half later, their 12 representatives in the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Presidential election in Croatia
29th December 2024 & 12th January 2025

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Results of the 1st round of the presidential election of 29 December 2024

Turnout: 46.03%

Candidates	Number of votes won	% of votes cast
Zoran Milanovic	797 938	49.09
Dragan Primorac (independent)	314 663	19.35
Marija Selak Raspudic (independent)	150 435	9.25
Ivana Kekin (We can! Mozemo!)	144 533	8.89
Tomislav Jonjic (Party of Rights, HSP)	82 787	5.09
Miro Bulj (The Bridge (Most))	62 127	3.82
Branka Lozo (Home & National Rally, DOMINO)	39 321	2.41
Niko Tokic Kartelo (independent)	14 409	0.88

Source : <https://www.izbori.hr/pre2024/rezultati/1/>

"There are inevitably two rounds. For the first, you need to sharpen your skis. For the second (...), you just have tuck in with confidence, and I think it'll be good. Today was the first run (...) Let's not be triumphalist, let's be realistic (...) but I'm convinced that we're heading for victory," declared Zoran Milanovic after the results were announced.

"In appearance, the difference (between my result and that of Zoran Milanovic) is massive (...) but it is also a challenge for me (...) Our country can no longer put up with division and marginalization in the world" said Dragan Primorac, adding *"This election will show whether Croatia is turning towards the East or the West (...), towards division or unity".* The first-round result is a major setback for Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic. Zoran Milanovic and the head of government have a stormy relationship, and this presidential election is yet another battle between the two men who run Croatia. *"It is still about a conflict between the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic. Everything else is secondary,"* said Zarko Puhovski, former professor of political philosophy and political analyst.

Zoran Milanovic accuses Andrej Plenkovic and his party of corruption, and says they pose a *"serious threat to democracy"*. The Prime Minister has accused the head of state of opposing Croatia's support for Ukraine and the participation of

Croatian soldiers in the NATO-led training mission for Ukrainian soldiers. He has claimed that Zoran Milanovic has been behaving in a *"dictatorial and pharaonic manner"*, playing into Russia's hands, destroying Zagreb's credibility with NATO and the European Union, compromising national security and destabilizing the country.

Zoran Milanovic, who advocates Croatia's neutrality in the conflict between Kyiv and Moscow, has repeatedly opposed sending arms to Ukraine. He claims to be working to prevent his country from being drawn into the war in Ukraine. *"As long as I am President of the Republic, no Croatian soldier will go and fight in other people's wars"*, he declared. Nevertheless, Croatia has provided the country with €300 million in aid, some of it military. *"The difference between Zoran Milanovic and Dragan Primorac is relatively simple: one will lead us to the East and the other to the West,"* repeats Andrej Plenkovic.

Over the years, Zoran Milanovic has adopted an increasingly populist discourse, vilifying minorities, feminist associations, members of the government, the European Union and NATO, earning him the nickname *"the Trump of the Balkans"*. *"He has been Prime Minister, and as far as his governance is concerned, we have noticed a shift to the right, a tendency towards populism, with a view to*

representing the entire electorate, i.e. citizens with a more right-wing political orientation, which he believes is his function as President of the Republic," analyses Andjelko Milardovic, researcher at the Institute of Migration and Ethnic Studies in Zagreb.

If he is reappointed President of the Republic, "Zoran Milanovic will limit himself to a passive role on the national scene, but he could be more active in slowing down the government in its policy of aid to Ukraine and collaboration with NATO", he stressed.

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