

European  
Elections monitor

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ANALYSIS

# Two candidates in a tight race for the first round of the presidential election in Romania

## A COUNTRY IN CRISIS

Romania was plunged into turmoil after the Constitutional Court unanimously cancelled the second round of the presidential election on 6 December, just two days before the scheduled date of the second round.

On 24 November, Calin Georgescu, who was virtually unknown to Romanians a few weeks earlier and was credited with 9% of the vote in opinion polls, had in fact come out in first place in the first round of voting with 22.95% of the vote. He finished ahead of Elena-Valeria Lasconi (Save Romania, USR), who garnered 19.17% of the vote. The liberal candidate narrowly beat outgoing Prime Minister Ion-Marcel Ciolacu (Social Democratic Party, PSD), who obtained 19.15% of the vote. Turnout stood at 52.55%.

The Constitutional Court considered, after having been made aware of declassified information, that the first round of the presidential election had been flawed. It revealed the existence of a digital communication strategy on an unprecedented scale, orchestrated via social networks, particularly through TikTok (25,000 network accounts associated with Calin Georgescu's election campaign had become very active in the two weeks preceding the first round of the election), as well as massive cyberattacks (85,000 were detected, launched from around thirty countries).

The Constitutional Court also expressed its suspicions of Russian interference in the presidential election campaign. Calin Georgescu was accused of making false declarations about the financing of his campaign, inciting unconstitutional actions, condoning war crimes and supporting fascist groups.

Finally, legitimate questions can be asked about the financing of the far-right candidate's election campaign, since he has officially stated that he did not spend a single euro on it, which seems impossible.

'Europe is now a dictatorship, Romania is living under tyranny,' said Calin Georgescu after the election was cancelled. Several demonstrations were organised to protest against the decision of the Constitutional Court. The largest took place on 12 December at the call of the far-right Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) party. Tens of thousands of Romanians took to the streets to denounce a coup d'état and the theft of the election. Calin Georgescu, who has denied carrying out any illegal act, has also received support from US Vice-President J.D. Vance and Elon Musk, boss of X, Tesla and Space X, considered the richest man in the world and now head of the Department of Governmental Efficiency (DOGE) in Washington, who have criticised the cancellation of the presidential election and his indictment respectively. 'Democracy is officially dead in Romania and in the European Union (...) Tonight, Europe has fallen,' tweeted Elon Musk.

Undeniably, the current situation can only weaken Romanian democracy and Romanians' confidence in their political system, the latter already being weak if we are to believe the opinion polls and as shown by the vote of the electorate, who have shown strong dissatisfaction with the outgoing parties and a keen desire for change. The current situation is also strengthening the nationalist parties. The phenomena affecting Romania can be found in all the Member States of the European Union and, more broadly, in almost all Western democratic societies.

## Presidential election in Romania

4th & 18th May 2025

*'Frustration at the poor quality of state services is extremely high and is one of the main reasons for general discontent,'* said sociologist Barbu Mateescu. *"For many of Calin Georgescu's voters, voting for him is just a way of changing the political class and not an end in itself,"* he added.

On 1 December 2024, a few days before the presidential election was annulled, the Social Democratic Party came out ahead in the parliamentary elections. It won 21.96% of the vote in the Chamber of Deputies (86 seats) and 22.30% in the Senate (36 seats), the lowest result in its history. The election was marked by the breakthrough of the radical right: the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) took second place with 18.01% of the vote in the lower house (63 deputies) and 18.30% in the upper house (28). The National Liberal Party (PNL), partner of the Social Democratic Party in the outgoing government coalition, obtained 13.20% in the Chamber of Deputies (49 seats) and 14.28% in the Senate (22 seats).

The country's three far-right parties together received 31.83% of the vote. They oppose Romania's support for Ukraine and claim to defend 'peace'. They also want to save Romania's 'Christian values'. The turnout was 48.28%, the highest in twenty years.

On 23 December, the outgoing Prime Minister Ion-Marcel Ciolacu (PSD), who has led the country since June 2023, formed a pro-European government that brings together the PSD, the National Liberal Party and the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR).

Another element of crisis was the impeachment procedure launched against the outgoing President of the Republic, Klaus Iohannis, by the far-right parties (the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians, SOS Romania and the Youth Party) and by the Save Romania Union. Given this threat, the head of state chose to announce his resignation on 12 February in order to 'protect Romania and its citizens' from a new crisis.

The president of the Senate, Ilie Bolojan, was appointed interim president of the Republic.

On 16 January, the government announced that the next presidential election would be held on 4 and 18 May. The first-round campaign began on 4 April and will

end on the evening of 2 May. A total of 18,979 polling stations will be open throughout Romania and 965 abroad, including 161 in Italy and Malta, 147 in Spain and 108 in the United Kingdom.

On 9 March, the Constitutional Court excluded Calin Georgescu from the upcoming election on the grounds that he had not respected the rules during the previous presidential election, that he did not fulfil the conditions of legality and that he violated the democratic rules of honest and impartial elections. The former far-right candidate was indicted at the end of February and placed under judicial supervision.

### THE CANDIDATES

10 people are officially standing for the presidency of the Republic:

- Crin Antonescu (PNL) supported by the electoral coalition Romania onward (A.Ro) formed by the National Liberal Party, the Social Democratic Party and the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania on 23 February with a view to the presidential election. Crin Antonescu was Minister for Youth and Sport (1997-2000) and former President of the Senate (2012-2014);
- Nicusor Dan (independent), supported by the Justice and Respect for All in Europe (DREPT) party, the People's Movement Party (PMP), the Force of the Right (FD), and Renew the European Project of Romania (REPER). He has been mayor of Bucharest since 2020;
- George Simion (AUR), MP;
- Victor Ponta (Pro Romania), former Prime Minister (2012-2015);
- Elena-Valeria Lasconi (USR), Mayor of Campulung. She succeeded Catalin Drula as leader of the liberal party after he resigned following the party's disappointing results in the provincial and local elections on 9 June;
- Cristian-Vasile Terhes (Romanian National Conservative Party, PNCR), Member of the European Parliament since 2019;
- Lavinia Sandru (Humanist Social Liberal Party, PUSL), former MP (2005-2008);

- John-Ion Banu Muscel (Romanian Nation Party, PNRO);
- Silviu Predoiu (Party of the National Action League, PLAN);
- Daniel Funeriu (independent), former Minister of Education (2009-2012).

Ion-Marcel Ciolacu had promised to resign after his poor result in the first round of the presidential election (19.15% of the vote) before finally relenting and retaining his position as head of government. On 9 January, the Prime Minister indicated that the candidate of the government coalition for the next presidential election could not be the leader of one of the two main parties (Social Democratic Party and National Liberal Party). Their choice therefore fell on Crin Antonescu. Nevertheless, the decision of the Social Democrats not to present a candidate, a first for them since the return of Romania to democracy in 1989, remains difficult to accept for some of the members whose candidate had already been eliminated from the second round of voting at the end of last year, an unprecedented phenomenon for the party.

On 9 April, Save Romania Union, USR, voted during an informal political committee to withdraw its support for its president Elena-Valeria Lasconi and to support the candidacy of the mayor of Bucharest Nicusor Dan for the presidential election. Three quarters of the 225 participants in this committee voted in favour (75%). The vice-president of Save Romania, Dominic Fritz, declared that, by this choice, the party has chosen

to prioritise the interests of the country. According to him, Elena-Valeria Lasconi does not have the support necessary to reach the second round of voting.

According to the latest opinion poll by the Noi Cetatenii institute, far-right candidate George Simion is set to win the first round of the presidential election with 30% of the vote. He is closely followed by the mayor of Bucharest Dan Nicusor, who is set to win 29.60% of the vote. The incumbent government candidate Crin Antonescu would take third place with 19.60% of the vote and Victor Ponta fourth with 8.30%. Liberal Elena-Valeria Lasconi would obtain 7.80% of the vote.

### **THE PRESIDENTIAL FUNCTION**

In Romania, the President of the Republic is elected by direct universal suffrage for a five-year term. All candidates for the highest office must be at least 35 years of age and must submit a list of at least 200,000 voter signatures in favour of their candidacy prior to the election. He must also swear on his honour that he has not collaborated with the Securitate, the name of the Romanian secret police under the communist regime (1945-1989).

The Romanian head of state has limited powers. He appoints the Prime Minister 'after consultation with the party with an absolute majority in parliament or, if there is no such majority, with the parties represented in parliament' (Article 103-1 of the Constitution), but he cannot dismiss the Prime Minister.

**Presidential election in Romania**

4th & 18th May 2025

04

**Reminder of the results of the first round (cancelled) of the presidential election of 24 November 2024 in Romania**

Turnout: 52.56%

Candidates	Number of votes won	% of votes won
<b>Calin Georgescu (independent)</b>	2 120 401	22.94
<b>Elena-Valeria Lasconi (Save Romania, USR)</b>	1 772 500	19.18
<b>Ion-Marcel Ciolacu (Social Democratic Party, PSD)</b>	1 769 760	19.15
<b>George-Nicolae Simion (Alliance for the Union of Romanians, AUR)</b>	1 281 325	13.86
<b>Nicolae-Ionel Ciuca (National Liberal Party, PNL)</b>	811 952	8.79
<b>Mircea-Dan Geoana (independent)</b>	583 898	6.32
<b>Hunor Kelemen (Democratic Alliance of Hungarians of Romania, UDMR)</b>	416 353	4.50
<b>Cristian Diaconescu (People’s Movement Party, PMP)</b>	286 842	3.10
<b>Cristian-Vasile Terhes (Romanian National Conservative Party, PNCR)</b>	95 782	1.04
<b>Ana Birchall (independent)</b>	42 853	0.46
<b>Ludovic Orban (Strength of the right, FD)</b>	20 089	0.22
<b>Sebastian-Constantin Popescu (New Romania Party, PNR)</b>	14 683	0.16
<b>Alexandra-Beatrice Bertalan-Pacuraru (Alternative for National Dignity ADN)</b>	14 502	0.16
<b>Silviu Predoiu (National Action League Party, PLAN)</b>	11 246	0.12

Source : <https://prezenta.roaep.ro/prezidentiale24112024/pv/romania/results/>

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