

European
Elections monitor

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ANALYSIS

Andrej Babiš, who is well ahead in the opinion polls, will he be able to form a government in the Czech Republic after the general election on 3 and 4 October?

On 13 May, Czech President Petr Pavel set the date for the next general election and called on 8 million voters to go to the polls on 3 and 4 October, the last possible date in the electoral calendar, as the general election must be held at least 30 days before the end of the current legislative term (for the record, the last general elections were held on 8 and 9 October 2021). *'The first weekend in October was the best time, since the one previous to that, at the end of September, coincided with the celebrations of St. Wenceslas (the country's patron saint) and organising the elections at the same time would have been very complicated for all the town councils,'* said Petr Pavel.

For the first time, Czechs living abroad (around 500,000) will be allowed to vote by post. To date, they have been required to go to Czech embassies to fulfil their civic duty. *"In the past, votes from abroad mainly went to right-wing parties. Parties that emphasised individualism thrived abroad, and their anti-communist sentiment also played a role. But times have changed. The current opposition, Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO) and Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), can now capitalise on the conflict between conservatives and liberals or between traditionalists and progressives, both nationally and internationally. Both parties belong to the 'Trumpist' camp, which has only grown stronger around the world,"* said political commentator Lukas Jelinek.

Twenty-five lists led by political parties and one led by a coalition have been registered for this election. The number of candidates is the lowest since 1998, which

can be explained in particular by the numerous electoral alliances.

Amidst a climate of mistrust following reports of electoral interference in national elections in several European countries, notably Romania, Tiktok has dispatched a team of 53 moderators to monitor the platform's election-related content.

The Czech Republic is led by a coalition government comprising four parties: Prime Minister Petr Fiala's Civic Democratic Party (ODS); the Christian Democratic Union-Czech People's Party (KDU-CSL), led by Marek Vyborný; Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09 (TOP 09), led by Marketa Pekarova Adamova (these three parties joined forces in the Spolu (Together) coalition during the previous general elections on 8 and 9 October 2021); and Mayors and Independents (STAN), led by Vit Rakusan.

According to the latest opinion poll conducted by the Kantar institute, published on 22 August, Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO), a populist party founded in 2012 by former Prime Minister (2017-2021) Andrej Babiš, is due to come out ahead with 33% of the vote. It is set to be followed by the three parties (ODS, KDU-CSL, TOP 09) of the Spolu (Together) coalition, with 22%; Mayors and Independents (STAN), a member party of the outgoing government coalition, with 12%; the far-right coalition led by Tomio Okamura's Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), with 10%; the Pirate Party (CSP), which is running in coalition with the Greens, with 9.5%; and the Stacilo! (Enough!) coalition, an assembly of left-

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wing forces including Social Democracy (SOCDEM), formerly the Social Democratic Party (CSSD), chaired by Jana Malacova, and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM), led by Katerina Konecna, 6%; and finally, Motorists for Themselves (Motoriste sobe), a radical right-wing group chaired by Filip Turek, is due to garner 5.5% of the vote.

The three parties in the Spolu coalition, Mayors and Independents, and the Pirate Party have stated that they will not collaborate with Stacilo!, ANO or Freedom and Direct Democracy. For their part, the latter two parties have ruled out any cooperation with the outgoing government parties.

Finally, the President of the Republic has declared that he reserves the right to refuse to appoint ministers who are in favour of the Czech Republic's withdrawal from NATO or the European Union and that he will not appoint any candidates from Stacilo! or Freedom and Direct Democracy to ministerial posts relating to 'security or foreign policy'.

COULD ANDREJ BABIS FORM A GOVERNMENT?

Winner of the October 2021 general elections, but unable to find coalition partners after the vote, and defeated in the second round of the January 2023 presidential election by Petr Pavel, Andrej Babis is seeking revenge and will lead the list in Moravia-Silesia. *'Never in history have we had such an arrogant, amateurish and incompetent government'* led by a prime minister who is *'completely out of touch with reality'*, says Andrej Babis. He promises to bring down inflation (2.7% in July). *'Only our candidates defend Czech interests'*, he repeats.

In recent years Andrej Babis transformed ANO, which was originally a liberal, centrist, pro-European party into a populist one, anti-immigrant and opposed to Brussels, drawing closer to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban (Alliance of Young Democrats-Civic Union, FIDESZ-MPSZ) and Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico (Direction-Social Democracy, SMER-SD). He has stated that he is considering joining forces with those opposed to granting aid to Ukraine and that he is prepared to abandon his country's defence commitments to NATO, believing that *'2% of GDP for defence is sufficient'*. *"We will revive the*

economy, increase pensions and cap the retirement age at 65, reduce corporate taxes (from 21% to 19%), increase tax deductions for individuals, reduce VAT for restaurants, abolish broadcasting licence fees and freeze politicians' salaries," he said, adding that he would oppose the imposition of European Union carbon emission quotas on households, which are due to come into force in 2027, and the entire Green Deal as well as the European Pact on Migration and Asylum, which he described as *'threats to the Czech economy and security'*. *"We will guarantee cheap energy for all. Under no circumstances will we allow new green taxes on households and transport."* The former prime minister said that these measures would be financed through improved tax collection and stronger economic growth.

Andrej Babis is awaiting a new trial since his acquittal in the so-called Stork's Nest (*Capi hnisdode*) case of European funds fraud was overturned on 23 June by the Court of Appeal (the court acquitted the former Prime Minister in the first instance in February 2024). He is suspected of having excluded his farm, called 'The Stork's Nest', from the conglomerate he owned so that it could benefit from a €2 million EU subsidy intended for small businesses. *'This is a political trial. It is completely absurd, scandalous and without merit,'* he said.

ANO won the September 2024 senatorial elections for the first time in its history, garnering 40.27% of the vote (2nd round) and 12 seats, its highest result in this election. However, Petr Fiala's Spolu government coalition retained its relative majority with 37 seats (32.13%). ANO also won the regional elections held concurrently with the first round of the senatorial elections, coming out ahead in 10 of the Czech Republic's 13 regions. Andrej Babiš managed to turn the regional elections into a national vote. Turnout was low, as the country experienced flooding in the week leading up to the election, making it difficult for some to vote. More importantly, Prague, home to a significant proportion of the voters of the conservative and liberal parties that form the governing coalition, does not vote in regional elections.

Although ANO is leading in all opinion polls, it has a limited number of partners with whom it can form a governing

coalition after the general election. Only Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), a far-right party, seems likely to ally itself with Andrej Babis at this stage. On 21 March 2025, the party merged with three right-wing nationalist groups: Tricolour (Trikolora), led by Zuzana Majerova; Law, Respect, Expertise (Pravo Respekt Odbornost) (PRO), led by Jindich Rajchl; and Svobodni, led by Libor Vondracek. In doing so, he is attempting to eliminate all competition on his right.

"I doubt that this concentration of forces in the patriotic camp will lead to a significant increase in votes in their favour. Firstly, because for the vast majority of voters, patriotism is not a decisive issue and is much less important than in Poland, Slovakia or Hungary. No Czech political party can hope to win an election with a discourse focused primarily on patriotism. Furthermore, there are other anti-establishment and anti-European parties such as Stacilo! and Motoriste sobe. This leads me to believe that if there is a high turnout in the elections, all these parties could end up cannibalising each other's votes and ultimately remain below the 5% threshold," said Vaclav Dolejsi, political analyst for the Seznam Zpravy news website.

Supported by former presidents Vaclav Klaus (2003–2013) and Milos Zeman (2013–2023), Tomio Okamura proposes a Eurosceptic programme, (he is suggesting the organisation of a referendum on the country's exit from the European Union), opposed to any new immigration, continued aid to Ukraine and the reception of Ukrainian refugees: He is a defender of direct democracy and would like citizens to be able to dismiss political leaders if they so wish it. *"The Czech Republic does not belong to Brussels officials. It does not belong to political mafias or energy speculators. It belongs only to Czech citizens. Our country, our rules."* He had his MP immunity withdrawn in early 2025 following accusations that he had made racist remarks during the European election campaign in June 2024.

Another far-right movement, *Motorists for Themselves*, which came third in the June 2024 European elections with 10.26% behind ANO (26.14%) and the Spolu coalition (22.27%), is gaining momentum. They ran in coalition with Prisaha (Oath), another right-wing populist party led by former senior officer of the police

unit against organised crime Robert Slatcha, who has made the fight against the limitation of the sovereignty of the Czech Republic and the protection of the European Union's borders his priorities.

The party was founded on the ashes of the Independence Party in 2022 and chose its name to mark its opposition to the ban on the production of vehicles equipped with combustion engines and, beyond that, to all the initiatives proposed under the European Green Deal, as well as its desire to maintain the traditional model of the automotive industry. *"We chose 'motorist' as a symbol that the public can understand to represent everything that left-wing progressives are attacking so aggressively these days. We find ourselves in an era where these people portray and stand as enemies the ordinary things, fundamental values and areas on which the lives of the vast majority of society depend. Enemies of the planet, enemies of morality, enemies of the West, enemies of the future and even, increasingly, enemies of our present,"* said Petr Macinka, leader of the movement. He defends a reduction in living costs and Czech sovereignty, rejects the ban on combustion engines and the limits to carbon emissions. The party hopes to enter the Chamber of Deputies and aims to participate in a coalition government with ANO.

WILL THE SPOLU COALITION RETAIN POWER?

Prime Minister Petr Fiala wants to do everything he can to combat the 'threat' posed by Andrej Babis. ANO's dominance in opinion polls has led three of the four parties in the current governing coalition (ODS, KDU-CSL, TOP 09) to join forces once again for these general elections. *"It is still too early to say whether this coalition is a good thing or not, although it may be considered a necessity for the three parties concerned, because as things stand, if we go by the polls, it is unlikely that TOP 09 and KDU-CSL will achieve more than 5% of the vote, which would allow them to be represented in the Chamber of Deputies,"* said Vladimira Dvorakova, political scientist and former head of the political science department at the Faculty of International Relations at the University of Prague.

"These will be fundamental elections. Voters will decide whether they want our country to be led by pro-democratic forces that have the ambition to continue

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to move the Czech Republic forward, or whether they prefer to be misled by the propaganda and lies of the left, populists and various other radical forces which, if given the opportunity to form a government, will represent the greatest danger to our country since November 1989," said Petr Fiala. The outgoing Prime Minister highlights the risk of ANO cooperating with parties on the extremes of the political spectrum 'who question our membership of the West and kowtow to the Kremlin at a time when Europe is facing Russian aggression and a war of disinformation', adding, 'This is a fundamental risk for the Czech Republic. We reject this path. We stand firmly on the side of democracy, the rule of law and a clear anchorage in the Euro-Atlantic space.'

Zbynek Stanjura, Minister of Finance, adds, *"The top priority for the next four years will be to ensure that citizens do not lose confidence in the state's ability to guarantee their security (...) The main themes of the campaign are clearly established: security, defence capability, prosperity. But there will soon be no more prosperity if we do not live in a safe country. We must bear this in mind."*

The Spolu coalition which made the fight to counter populism and extremism its priority is promising to clean up public finance and reduce the country's debt. It also hopes to strengthen the country's defence and security by modernising the army.

The outgoing government was weakened mid-June after it was made public that the state had agreed to receive a payment of 468 bitcoins, equivalent to €38.5 million and approximately one billion Czech korunas. In a message posted on X in May, the Ministry of Justice welcomed an auction for approximately 500 bitcoins. The news site Denik N revealed that these bitcoins came from Tomas Jirikovsky, a criminal convicted in 2017 for embezzlement, drug trafficking and illegal possession of weapons, who was released from prison in 2021. Tomas Jirikovsky's lawyer contacted the Minister of Justice to inform him that his client wished to donate 30% of his bitcoins to the ministry. Justice Minister Pavel Blazek (ODS) said he saw nothing illegal or unethical in accepting the sum, arguing that the courts had not proven that the cryptocurrency was the product of criminal activity. He said the money would be used to finance the digitisation of the justice

system, the fight against drugs in prisons and housing for prison staff. This scandal led to his resignation on 31 May and the tabling of a motion of no confidence against the government supported by ANO, Freedom and Direct Democracy and the Pirate Party, which was rejected on 19 June, as 98 MPs voted against and 94 in favour.

"The Czech electorate is divided into two opposing camps: liberal-democratic on one side and authoritarian-populist on the other. This makes it virtually impossible to switch from one camp to the other. Even major events, regardless of who is involved, do nothing to change this situation. At a time when fear of the other camp is still greater than doubts, even justified ones, about one's own camp," writes the daily newspaper Hospodarske Noviny. The parties in the Spolu coalition may consider continuing to govern with mayors and independents.

The Pirate Party (CSP) for its part is in a dire situation. Its leader, Ivan Bartos, chose to resign after poor results in the European elections (June 2024) and regional elections (21 and 22 September 2024). The Pirates lost 96 of the 99 seats they held in the regions. Ivan Bartos was also forced to resign from his positions as Deputy Prime Minister for Digital Affairs and Minister for Regional Development by Prime Minister Petr Fiala, who criticised him for failing to complete the project to digitise administrative procedures related to building permits. The Pirate Party then decided (by internal referendum) to leave the government. Zdenek Hrib, former mayor of Prague (2018-2023), took over as party president. *"The Pirate Party, whose electorate is not very stable, has managed to attract a rather liberal electorate. However, over the last twenty to thirty years, this electorate has tended to be volatile and to choose a new party at each election,"* indicated Michel Perottino, a political scientist at Charles University in Prague.

CAN THE LEFT RETURN TO THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES?

Social Democracy (SOCDEM), formerly the Social Democratic Party (CSSD), chaired by Jana Malacova, decided on 17 July to form an alliance with the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM), founded in 1989, the last unreformed communist party

in Central Europe, chaired by Katerina Konecna, within the Stacilo! (Enough!) List for the general elections. Jana Malacova will head the list in Prague. This alliance has caused rifts among the Social Democrats, leading to the departure of several long-standing members, including former senator (2011-2020) and minister (2014-2016) Jiri Dienstbier and Michal Smarda, former party leader (2021-2024).

"People who want to vote for Social Democracy do so because they don't want to vote for anti-establishment parties, but for the traditional European left, which recognises that the country belongs to the European Union and NATO. I really don't think that all Social Democratic voters would suddenly throw their support behind Daniel Sterzik (president of Stacilo!) and Katerina Konecna, who have included leaving NATO and the European Union in their programme... This is not beneficial for Social Democracy, it is a project by Jana Malacova and Lubomir Zaoralek (vice-president) to ensure their political survival," analyses Petr Honzej, journalist at the daily newspaper Hospodarske Noviny.

On 21 July, President Petr Pavel promulgated a law banning the promotion of communism in public spaces. The law provides for prison sentences of up to five years for anyone who supports or promotes Nazi, communist or other movements that aim to suppress human rights and freedoms or incite racial, ethnic, national, religious or class-based hatred.

The Stacilo! List comprises communists and social democrats as well as members of the National Social Party (CSNS), led by Michal Klusacek, and the United Democrats–Association of Independents (SD-SN), led by Alena Dernerova, two parties that advocate peace and an end to the arms race. The programme of this left-wing alliance includes plans to hold a referendum on leaving the European Union and NATO and on the Czech Republic joining the eurozone. The parties on the left aim to take VAT down to 0% on basic food items and to nationalise to strategic infrastructures (CEZ, the main electricity producer and distributor for example).

It remains to be seen whether this coalition, dominated by the communists and whose programme is also very similar to that of ANO (Euroscepticism, ending military aid to Ukraine, opposition to sanctions against Russia),

will allow the left-wing forces to return to the Chamber of Deputies after a four-year absence. *"The left is becoming irrelevant because politics is determined by the struggle between the conservative right, which proposes a return to normality in these troubled times, and the right-wing radicals, who express the discontent of the working classes with the effects of globalisation (...)* The left, whether social democrats, socialists or greens, can only help to push through centre-right policies as a minority partner," writes the editorialist of the Seznam Zpravy news site regarding the political situation in Europe.

THE CZECH POLITICAL SYSTEM

The Czech parliament is bicameral: it comprises the Senate (Senát Parlamentu Ceske republiky) and the Chamber of Deputies (Poslanecka Snemovna Parlamentu Ceske republiky), which has 200 members elected for four years by a multi-member constituency system in 14 constituencies (13 regions and Prague).

The electoral threshold for entering the lower house is set at 5% of the vote for parties, 8% for coalitions formed by two parties, and 11% for alliances of three or more parties. Seats are allocated in each constituency on a proportional basis using the d'Hondt method. Candidates must be at least 21 years of age.

In the Czech Republic, voting takes place over two days (Friday and Saturday morning). During the night, the ballot boxes remain inside the polling stations, which are usually located in public buildings, but sometimes in private buildings such as inns in certain villages. No election results have ever been contested since the country's return to democracy in 1989.

The Senate has 81 members elected for six years by a two-round, first-past-the-post system, with one-third of the members up for re-election every two years. This voting system was chosen in accordance with the wishes of those who drafted the Constitution, in particular the former President of the Republic (1993-2003), Vaclav Havel, to facilitate the election of independent and well-established figures within the constituencies.

Six political parties won seats in the Chamber of Deputies in the last elections on 8 and 9 October 2021:

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- Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO, which means 'yes' in Czech), a populist party founded in 2012 by Andrej Babiš, the second richest man in the Czech Republic and owner of the Agrofert conglomerate and the Mafra media group, has 72 MPs;

- The Civic Democratic Party (ODS), a liberal party positioned on the right of the political spectrum, created in 1991 and led by outgoing Prime Minister Petr Fiala, has 34 seats;

- The Christian Democratic Union-Czech People's Party (KDU-CSL), a centrist party founded in 1919 and led by Marek Vyborný, has 23 MPs.

- Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09 (TOP 09), a right-wing liberal party created in 2009 and chaired by Marketa Pekarová Adamová, 14 seats;

- Mayors and Independents (STAN), a party defending local interests and promoting decentralisation, founded in 2004 and led by Vít Rakusan, 33 MPs;

- The Pirate Party (CSP), founded in 2009 and led by Zdeněk Hřib, former mayor of Prague (2018-2023), 4 seats;

- Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), a radical right-wing populist party created in 2015 and led by Tomio Okamura, 20 MPs.

The Czechs also elect their president by universal suffrage. Petr Pavel (independent) was elected on 28 January 2023. With 58.53% of the vote, he defeated Andrej Babiš (ANO), who obtained 41.67% of the vote in the second round. Turnout was 70.22%.

Results of the general elections in the Czech Republic on 8 and 9 October 2021

Turnout: 65.4 %

Political Parties	Number of votes won	% of votes won	Number of seats
Coalition Spolu	1 493 905	27.79	71
Action by dissatisfied citizens	1 458 140	27.13	72
Coalition Pirati a Starostove (PaS)	839 776	15.52	37
Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)	513 910	9.56	20
Oath (P)	251 562	4.68	0
Social Democratic Party (ČSSD)	250 397	4.66	0
Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM)	193 817	3.61	0
Others	370 583	7.05	0

Source : <https://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2021/ps2?xjazyk=CZ>

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