



# ROMANIA GEARS UP FOR PRESIDENTIAL & PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

## Pre-election landscape & possible forward scenarios

18 November 2024

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Romania is gearing up for much-anticipated presidential and parliamentary elections that will decide the country's bicameral legislature, next (coalition) government and future head of state, with multiple candidates in the race to succeed outgoing President Klaus Iohannis.

With a record number of candidates (14) in the race, reflecting various ideologies, the top presidential contenders include Marcel Ciolacu, Romania's centre-left Prime Minister and the leader of the senior ruling Social Democratic Party (PSD); Nicolae Ciucă, Ciolacu's predecessor as PM and the leader of the junior ruling National Liberal Party (PNL); Mircea Geoană, the former Deputy Secretary General of NATO (who is running as an independent) and George Simion, the leader of the nationalist Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR). With 10 days to go until the first round, several polls are predicting different outcomes, leaving the race for President on 24<sup>th</sup> November wide open. As no candidate is expected to garner the majority of the popular vote, the election will likely be decided in a run-off vote on 8<sup>th</sup> December.

As for the parliamentary elections on 1<sup>st</sup> December, the senior coalition PSD is consistently polling first with 30% on average, with the two ruling parties likely to secure more than half of the seats in parliament. Accordingly, Aretera's baseline scenario assumes that Romania's grand coalition government between the PSD and PNL will remain in power following the parliamentary elections, with four other formations to enter the Romanian parliament.

Looking beyond the elections, the continuation of the incumbent grand coalition government – despite occasional political tensions and policy disagreements – would ensure political stability in a country previously characterized by years of unstable governments and several coalition crises. Simultaneously, a presidential victory by either of the two ruling party candidates would mean a higher chance of ensuring a smooth legislative process, while an opposition-linked President would bring more political battles between the government and the presidential office.



**Below, Aretera takes a deeper look at Romania's pre-election landscape, the factors shaping the race for President and the possible forward scenarios for the parliamentary elections.**

## COUNTRY TO ELECT NEW HEAD OF STATE

On 24<sup>th</sup> November, Romania will hold much-anticipated presidential elections that will decide the country's new head of state, as incumbent President Klaus Iohannis will step down from his position after his second presidential term expires at the end of the year. A total of 14 candidates<sup>1</sup> are in the race to succeed Iohannis, including ten contenders endorsed by political parties and an additional four candidates running as independents.

The top four contenders include Marcel Ciolacu, Romania's centre-left Prime Minister and the leader of the senior ruling Social Democratic Party (PSD), Nicolae Ciucă, Ciolacu's predecessor as PM and the leader of the junior ruling National Liberal Party (PNL), former NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană (an independent) and George Simion, the leader of the nationalist Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR). Candidates from the opposition also include Elena Lasconi, the recently elected leader of the centrist-liberal Save Romania Union (USR), ex-Foreign Minister Cristian Diaconescu, Hunor Kelemen, the leader of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). Former centre-right PM Ludovic Orban was also a candidate for President up until 18<sup>th</sup> November, when he dropped out of the race and endorsed USR leader Lasconi.

## CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENT

List of the Main Contenders Running in the Presidential Election		
Contender	Affiliation	Description
<b>Marcel Ciolacu</b>	PSD	Prime Minister since June 2023. Leader of the senior ruling PSD since 2019, which remains the most popular party.
<b>Nicolea Ciucă</b>	PNL	Ciolacu's predecessor as PM and the current leader of the junior ruling PNL. Likely to pick up the centre-right vote.
<b>Mircea Geoană</b>	Independent	Former Deputy Secretary General of NATO, stepped down to run for President. Ex-leader of the PSD, former FM.
<b>George Simion</b>	AUR	Leader of the nationalist AUR, MP since 2020. Historian and economist by profession.
<b>Elena Lasconi</b>	USR	Leader of the centrist-liberal USR. Endorsed by centre-right ex-PM Ludovic Orban, who dropped out of the race on 18 <sup>th</sup> November.
<b>Cristian Diaconescu</b>	Independent	Former diplomat, ex-FM and former presidential advisor. Formerly affiliated with the PSD and the centre-right PMP.
<b>Hunor Kelemen</b>	UDMR	Former Deputy PM & former Culture Minister. Leader of the Hungarian minority UDMR.

Source: Central Election Commission of Romania (BEC).

<sup>1</sup> Six other contenders are in the race but none is expected to secure a significant share of the popular vote. These include Cristian Terheş, an MEP and the leader of the AUR-affiliated Romanian National Conservative Party (PNCR), Silviu Predoiu, a former intelligence official and the leader of the National Action League Party (PLAN), Sebastian Popescu from the New Romania Party (PNR), Alexandra-Beatrice Bertalan-Păcuraru from the Alternative for National Dignity (ADN), as well as two independents – environmental expert Călin Georgescu and former Justice Minister Ana Birchall.

## AN OPEN RACE FOR THE PRESIDENCY

With 10 days to go until the presidential elections, multiple polls are predicting different outcomes. Most polls suggest that Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu is ahead with 25-30% of the vote, followed by PNL leader Nicolae Ciucă. Others predict AUR leader George Simion will finish second, while ex-NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană and USR leader Elena Lasconi are also in the race for second place.

Since no candidate is expected to garner more than 50% of the vote in the first round of the elections on 24<sup>th</sup> November, the presidential race is certain to continue with a second round on 8<sup>th</sup> December. At present, most observers expect the race to come down to a clash between Ciolacu and Ciucă, with the second round likely to be heavily influenced by the outcome of the parliamentary elections – to be held on 1<sup>st</sup> December.

Prior to his announcement about running for President, Geoană was not only widely believed to be eyeing the role but had also been polling well ahead of the remaining candidates. However, his late announcement in September seems to have somewhat curbed his momentum, making the race for President more open, with a tight first round expected for 24<sup>th</sup> November.

## PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS TO FOLLOW

The first round of Romania's presidential elections will be followed by parliamentary elections, to be held on 1<sup>st</sup> December. Elected in 43 multi-member constituencies using proportional representation with a 5% threshold, the vote will decide the composition of Romania's bicameral parliament, including the 330-member Chamber of Deputies (lower house) and the 136-member Senate (upper house).

Recent polls suggest that the senior coalition PSD is consistently polling first with 30%, however there is an open race for second place between the junior coalition PNL and the nationalist AUR. Other parties on course to enter parliament include the centrist-liberal USR, the Hungarian minority UDMR and the far-right SOS Romania, whose controversial leader Diana Șoșoacă was prevented from running for President by the Constitutional Court, which found that her anti-EU remarks defy Romania's constitution.

## POSSIBLE FORWARD SCENARIOS

Aretera's baseline scenario assumes that Romania's grand coalition government between the PSD and PNL will continue to stay in power following the parliamentary elections, despite their previous and ongoing political disagreements. Although the PNL is in a tough race for the second place, the two parties will likely take control more than half of the seats in the lower house of Romania's parliament, potentially securing a functioning majority. In June, the two parties ran together in the EU parliamentary elections, securing a comfortable victory, while the country's local elections (also held in June) were also dominated by the PSD and the PNL.

Should the ruling PSD-PNL alliance be unable to garner a majority (which appears unlikely at this point), the two-party ruling bloc will need to look across the aisle to ensure the sufficient number of lawmakers needed to form a government. The new government is expected to be formed by the end of 2022.

## LOOKING AHEAD


Despite the oftentimes tense relations between the PSD and the PNL, the continuation of the incumbent coalition government could bring a higher degree of political stability. Similarly to several other Central and Eastern European countries, Romania has been faced with several coalition crises, resulting in unstable governments prior to 2021. At the same time, the incumbent ruling bloc has so far proved largely stable in spite of several political and policy disagreements.

A Ciolacu victory in the presidential elections could mean that the position of Prime Minister will likely be offered to its coalition partner, as suggested by recent statements from PM Ciolacu. This is even more likely if the current two-party government remains in power.

Depending on the outcome of the presidential elections, it is yet to be seen whether Mircea Geoană will continue to stay in national politics, either as the leader of a political party or in a different capacity. [One recent poll](#) found that if the former top NATO official had a political party, it would be supported by at least 5% of Romanian voters. Another question for 2025 is the future of the PNL-allied outgoing President, Klaus Iohannis, who will step down following his second term as head of state. Iohannis recently confirmed that he will not run for a seat in the Romanian Senate in the December elections.

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*If you would like to schedule a discussion of this paper, please contact:*  
[Anca Gherle](#), Aretera's Country Director for Romania, at [A.Gherle@AreteraPA.com](mailto:A.Gherle@AreteraPA.com)

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