



## Romanian Layer Cake—Voters Choose Parliament between Presidential Election Rounds

Jakub Pieńkowski

On 1 December, parliamentary elections were held in Romania. In the new term, the Chamber of Deputies will comprise 331 seats and the Senate 136 seats, with seven groups crossing the 5% electoral threshold. The new majority is likely to be formed by a broad coalition of moderate parties, with nationalist factions remaining in opposition. The slowing down of the party campaigns at the end of the election period provides an opportunity for the Euro Atlantic-minded Elena Lasconi to build an ad hoc coalition of moderate groups. In the second round of the presidential election on 8 December, she will face Călin Georgescu, supported by the nationalists, who wish to undermine Romania's unambiguously pro-Western orientation.

### How will the composition of parliament change as a result of the elections?

The Social Democratic Party (PSD) remains the strongest faction, although it achieved its worst electoral result since 1996, winning 22% of the vote, which will give it 86 MPs and 37 senators, 24 and 10 fewer, respectively, than in the last term. The nationalist Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) had historic success, doubling its support to 18%, with 64 MPs and 28 Senate seats, 31 and 14 more, respectively. Previously second-strongest, the centre-right National Liberal Party (PNL) fell to third place with 14% of the vote and 50 and 22 seats, 43 and 19 fewer, respectively. Meanwhile, 12% of voters supported the centre-right Safe Romania Union (USR), which won 40 MPs and 19 Senate seats, 15 and 6 fewer, respectively. The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) won 6% of the vote (22 MPs and 10 senators), 1 more MP and 1 senator, respectively. New factions include the extremist S.O.S. România (7% of the vote, 27 and 11 seats) and the far-right Party of Young People (POT, 6%, 23 and 9 seats).

### What was decisive for the outcome of the election?

The decline in support for the so-far dominant PSD and PNL resulted from public disillusionment with their joint governments from 2021 onwards, as they have not solved Romania's structural problems. It is facing demographic collapse and still ranks among the poorest EU Member States—it has lost 4 million citizens since 1990 and its GDP per capita in 2023 was €17,500 compared to an EU average of €32,500. PNL, which had promised a radical fight against corruption, squandered the trust of the electorate by entering into a coalition with the [PSD, associated with corrupt practices](#). Nationalist parties exploited these frustrations by arguing the need to break with the existing political arrangements and restore “national dignity”, allegedly threatened by the progressive left, identified with the EU. They were also aided by [the unexpected entry of the extreme Călin Georgescu into the second round of the presidential election](#), which, among other things, the relatively unknown POT was elected to the parliament due to support this party gave him even before the first round. [The electoral success of](#) USR leader Lasconi did not help her party, which is probably the aftermath of the disputes and splits within it.

# PISM SPOTLIGHT

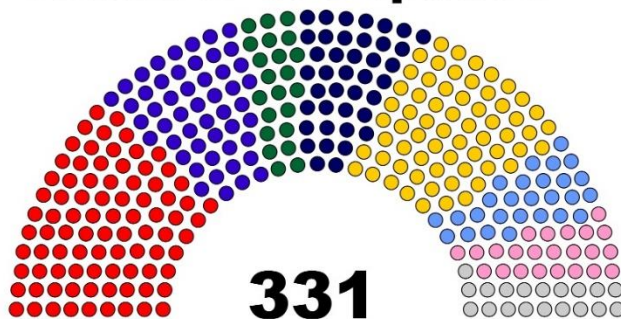
## Who can form a new governing coalition?

It is likely that the new majority will be a grand coalition of all of the moderate parties—PSD, PNL, USR, and UDMR. The Social Democrats initially distanced themselves from Lasconi’s call for such a government, as the USR had been unequivocally critical of its would-be partner. PSD announced an attempt to form a cabinet with the PNL and UDMR, which was part of the coalition until 2023, but without USR, the coalition would have a minimal majority in the Senate while in the Chamber of Deputies it would depend on support from at least 19 deputies from other national minorities groupings (although they generally support any government). The Social Democrats are probably dragging out the decision on their readiness to join the grand coalition in a bid to force their partners to agree to appoint as prime minister again Marcel Ciolacu, whom the PSD leaders persuaded to withdraw his resignation from the party leadership after losing in the first round of the presidential election (despite expectations). The participation of nationalist parties in a governing coalition or their formation of a minority government is unlikely, as all moderate groupings rule out cooperation with them.

## How might the outcome of the parliamentary elections affect the second round of the presidential election?

According to the CURS poll of 1 December, the second round of the presidential election could be won by Georgescu with 58% of the vote. Lasconi is calling for all moderate voters to unite behind her against him, presenting Georgescu as a pro-Russian candidate who, as president, will undermine Romania’s unambiguously Euro-Atlantic orientation. [The PNL and the UDMR, as well as Mircea Geoană, who was running as an independent](#), pledged their voters in the first-round to her. Key to Lasconi’s victory will be PSD voters, whom the party leadership recommended should “decide for themselves what is best for them”. At the same time, however, the party announced its readiness to enter a grand coalition and “indirectly help” Lasconi. The lack of unequivocal support for her is probably due to the calculation that, as a president advocating the fight against corruption, she would be more dangerous to the vested interests of the PSD than Georgescu, who has no experience or political background. The Social Democrats’ calculation may also include the fear that their electorate with nationalist sympathies would anyway ignore the call to vote for Lasconi, who is liberal and critical of the PSD.

## Chamber of Deputies



86	PSD	22	UDMR
64	AUR	23	POT
50	PNL	19	National minorities*
40	USR		
27	S.O.S.		

Jakub Pieńkowski, PISM, 2024

## Senate



37	PSD	11	S.O.S.
28	AUR	10	UDMR
22	PNL	9	POT
19	USR		

\*Recognized in law, other than Hungarians: Albanians, Armenians, Bulgarians, Croats, Czechs, Germans, Greeks, Italians, Jews, Macedonians, Poles, Roma, Russians-Lipovans, Ruthenians, Serbs, Slovaks, Tatars, Turks, Ukrainians.