# Romania to hold presidential election rerun amid concerns over far-right influence and election interference



Romania is set to hold a rerun of its crucial presidential election in May, following the annulment of the original vote held in November last year. The previous election was invalidated amid significant concerns over Russian interference and various irregularities, including cyber-attacks and social media manipulation. The initial front-runner, Călin Georgescu, a far-right, anti-EU, and Moscow-friendly independent candidate, was disbarred from standing again. This development has drawn close attention from political observers in Brussels, Washington, and beyond, given Romania's strategic position as an EU and NATO member bordering Ukraine.

The unusual circumstances leading to the rerun stem from Georgescu's surprising surge in the November vote, when he climbed from less than 5% in pre-election polls to 23%, outperforming established frontrunners. Subsequent declassified intelligence reports detailed over 85,000 cyber-attacks on Romania's election computer systems and the activation of 25,000 dormant TikTok accounts that amplified Georgescu's campaign. Investigations suggested that intermediaries were paying social media influencers to promote Georgescu’s messages, despite his declaration of zero campaign spending. Allegations also tied some members of Georgescu’s campaign team to organised crime and neofascist groups. Two weeks after the election, authorities annulled the vote, and in February Georgescu was placed under criminal investigation for charges including misreporting campaign finances, illegal digital campaigning, and promoting fascist organisations. Georgescu has denied any wrongdoing. In March, Romania’s highest court upheld a ban preventing him from participating in the rerun.

With Georgescu’s exclusion, Romania's far-right parties, which hold over one-third of parliamentary seats, are hurriedly selecting a new candidate. Current opinion polls, although historically unreliable in Romania, place George Simion, leader of the far-right Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), as the frontrunner with about 29% support. Simion, who is 38, emerges as a vocal critic of the EU and NATO and opposes military aid to Ukraine. His party initially grew from an anti-vaccine movement during the COVID-19 pandemic and has declared itself aligned with former US President Donald Trump’s MAGA Republicans. Simion is known for his opposition to gay marriage and Holocaust education in schools. He has faced restrictions from travelling to Moldova and Ukraine due to his advocacy for restoring Romania's pre-1939 borders. Although he has recently toned down his previous pro-Moscow stance and denies accusations of contact with Russian spies, his nationalist platform remains divisive.

Behind Simion in the polls are Crin Antonescu, the candidate from the governing Social Democratic Party (PSD) and National Liberal Party (PNL) coalition, polling around 22%, and Nicușor Dan, the centrist mayor of Bucharest, standing as an independent with about 20% support. Both support Romania's membership in the EU and NATO, as well as ongoing military aid to Ukraine. Trailing them is Victor Ponta, a former PSD prime minister with an ultranationalist platform but who maintains a commitment to EU and NATO. Elena Lasconi of the reformist Save Romania Union (USR), second in the cancelled November vote, remains in the race despite her party endorsing Dan. However, she is polling at just around 8%.

Romania's electoral system requires a candidate to secure more than 50% of all registered votes in the first round to win outright. If no one achieves this, the top two candidates advance to a runoff, with the winner being the one who gains the greater share in the second round. The president serves a five-year term and holds a semi-executive role that includes significant influence over foreign policy, national security, defence budgeting, and judicial appointments, while also acting as Romania’s international representative.

Romania’s diaspora, one of Europe’s largest with approximately 7 million voters, plays a critical role in the election. This group typically constitutes 5% to 7% of the total ballots cast and, since 2020, has consistently supported far-right candidates, with over half backing Georgescu in the annulled vote last November.

The Guardian is reporting that the May presidential election rerun is being closely monitored internationally due to concerns over the potential political direction of Romania following a nationalist victory and the broader implications for the country's alignment within the EU and NATO frameworks.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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