

Parliamentary Elections in Bulgaria



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2026

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Political landscape

Bulgaria is scheduled to hold snap parliamentary elections on April 19, 2026, to determine the composition of Bulgaria's National Assembly (Narodno Sabranie). This electoral event represents a critical juncture for the nation's governance, carrying the potential to significantly alter the domestic political trajectory and end the cycle of institutional instability observed in recent years. The country has faced eight general elections since 2021, experiencing a protracted period of institutional instability, characterized by seven parliamentary elections within a four-year cycle.¹ The current paralysis of the Bulgarian state is the direct result of a systemic breakdown that began with the 2020–2021 protest wave, calculated to be the largest civic protest mobilization in a decade.² This mass mobilization against Prime Minister Boyko Borissov and Prosecutor General Ivan Geshev didn't just challenge corruption; it shattered the old political consensus without laying the ground for a new, stable one.

As the National Assembly fractured into irreconcilable camps, Bulgaria entered a period of unprecedented institutional transition. The persistent failure of political parties to form lasting coalitions led to a cycle of frequent snap elections, especially between 2021-2024. Since 2021, the protracted legislative deadlock has compelled the appointment of six caretaker governments under Rumen Radev³, resulting in a drift toward a de facto presidential system.⁴ The country's internal shift has converged in parallel with a period of profound external instability.

In the current geopolitical climate, marked by a profound destabilization of European security following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Bulgaria has prioritised energy autonomy to decouple from Russian influence.

This strategic move was codified through a landmark 13-year LNG agreement with Türkiye and the technical expansion of the Greece-Bulgaria gas interconnector (IGB).⁵ These geopolitical advancements, however, stand in stark contrast to the domestic political fragmentation as the absence of a stable governing coalition has resulted in a legislative impasse regarding critical judicial and anti-corruption initiatives.

The October 27, 2024, snap elections, the seventh in less than four years, cemented this fragmentation. The 240-seat National Assembly is currently split among eight political groups.⁶ In this period, while GERB party secured a 69-seat plurality, led by former Boyko Borissov, its composition remained isolated.⁷ The collapse of Zhelyazkov administration by 2026 was precipitated by a controversial budget designed to facilitate Eurozone accession. Prioritising fiscal convergence through raised social security taxes, the government ignited mass protests that the eclectic coalition was structurally incapable of weathering.⁸ Currently, the country faces a series of transitional shocks following its Eurozone adoption. Joining the monetary union without a formalized 2026 fiscal plan, economic policies have become central themes in electoral narratives and political competition.⁹

The path to a 121-seat majority is currently blocked by a fragmented electorate that refuses to grant any single bloc a clear mandate. We are seeing more than just a standard political stalemate; it is a visible collision between entrenched status quo brokers and an increasingly anti-establishment “sentiment”. The traditional difficulty of reconciling these factions is now further encompassed by the emergence of the Progressive Bulgaria coalition, an entity widely perceived as the political vehicle for President Rumen Radev’s strategic interests.¹⁰ The apparition of this new force, coupled with the “none of the above” sentiment, creates a pincer effect on the political center. The current five primary blocs are: the dominant and new reformist PB coalition (Progressive Bulgaria), GERB and SDS (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria and The Union of Democratic Forces; EPP-affiliated), PP and DB (We Continue the Change and Democratic Bulgaria), DPS and NN (Movement for Rights and Freedoms and New Beginning), and the ultra-nationalist Vazrazhdane (Revival).¹¹

Political Parties and Key Campaign Themes

A. Overview of the current parliamentary configuration

The 51st National Assembly of Bulgaria (240 seats) exhibits high fragmentation, with several parties. Pro-European forces are limited: the centre-right GERB–SDS (EPP-affiliated, led by Boyko Borisov) holds 66 seats¹², while the centrist-liberal We Continue the Change – Democratic Bulgaria (PP-DB, Renew Europe) holds 36 seats.¹³ Revival, the “russophile” and nationalist bloc led by Kostadinov, holds 33 members in Parliament.¹⁴ The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS, currently 29 seats under effective leader Delyan Peevski). Sanctioned by the US under the Magnitsky Act in 2021 for corruption¹⁵, Peevski led DPS to shift toward conservative and far-right networks: it moved to the European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates group in PACE (April 2025)¹⁶. The left-wing populist BSP–United Left (19 seats)¹⁷; the populist There Is Such a People (ITN, 16 seats)¹⁸; Alliance for Rights and Freedom (14 seats);¹⁹ the socially conservative Morality, Unity, Honour (MECh, 11 seats); and the ultranationalist Velichie (10 seats, led by Ivelin Mihaylov).²⁰

Recent polling indicates a significant change in the Bulgarian political landscape, with the number of parliamentary parties expected to decrease to five. The rise of Progressive Bulgaria has created a competitive environment that threatens to exclude five minor parties by preventing them from surpassing the 4% electoral barrier.²¹ Legislative power resides in

a unicameral National Assembly, comprising 240 members elected through proportional representation. Under this system, which utilises a 4% electoral threshold, a simple majority of 121 seats is required to form a functional administration.²²

B. Political parties

1. Progressive Bulgaria (Прогресивна България)

Rumen Radev's resignation from the presidency to assume the leadership of Progressive Bulgaria (PB) represents more than a standard electoral pursuit; it can be interpreted as an institutional repositioning designed to expand the executive influence he cultivated during Bulgaria's era of instability. Registered on March 2, 2026, Progressive Bulgaria (PB) comprises the Political Movement Social Democrats (PDS), the Social Democratic Party, and the Our People Movement.²³ The coalition is represented by Galab Donev, former caretaker Prime Minister of Bulgaria, and Dimitar Stoyanov, best known for his former position as Minister of Defense in two governments led by Donev.²⁴

In effect, this composition is essentially the structural consolidation of the governance models formed during Radev's successive caretaker administrations. Despite a discursive emphasis on "dismantling the oligarchic model",²⁵ the coalition is predominantly composed of career bureaucrats and former interim officials portrayed as a revolutionary force against the "entrenched networks" of the past. Elena Noneva, leader of PDS, positioned her party

as a principled and independent left-actor by quitting the coalition BSP-United Left, emphasising a crisis narrative.²⁶ On the other hand, Our People Movement represents Atanas Kalchev's party, a long-time local mayor in the municipality of Krichim who publicly supported Radev²⁷, while the Social Democratic Party is represented by Todor Barbolov.²⁸ At the beginning of April 2026, an initiative committee started the legal process to register the coalition as a political party.²⁹



Figure 1. Progressive Bulgaria party leader, former president Rumen Radev. Source: Wikimedia Commons³⁰

At the heart of PB's campaign is a deeply ideological anti-oligarchic crusade: Radev explicitly frames the alliance as "the answer to the expectations of Bulgarians for dismantling the oligarchic corruption model", with a pragmatic sovereigntist orientation.³¹ He has made it their priority to secure a two-thirds parliamentary majority after April 19 to replace the Supreme Judicial Council and elect a new, legitimate Prosecutor General, essential to breaking oligarchic control over the judiciary.³² Its economic vision attempts an ambitious, if structurally contradictory, synthesis of fiscal modernization and social-democratic rhetoric, policies that are incompatible with promises

related to incomes, social policies, and budget redistribution.³³

While critics label the movement as “pro-Kremlin”, within PB’s broader ideology, stands a consistent anti-oligarchic and anti-establishment logic: defending Bulgarian statehood and citizens’ immediate needs against external escalations that could strain the economy post-Eurozone accession. A PB led-government would face considerable obstacles in achieving policy coherence with its NATO and EU partners. This potential for divergence serves as a primary marker of the coalition's progressive-sovereignist orientation, distinguishing it from the prevailing pro-integration consensus.³⁴

Reflecting a discernible pro-Russian geopolitical alignment, Radev has strategically utilized the prerogatives of his office to impede intensified military integration with Ukraine. This is most notably evidenced by his refusal to categorize Russia’s status as an “enemy”³⁵ and criticizing the 10-year security agreement with Kyiv signed in March 2026.³⁶ However, the success of the newly established coalition hinges on a fundamental contradiction: can a movement led by the primary architect of the recent institutional volatility truly provide the “judicial accountability” and “rule of law” it promises, or is it merely the final stage of state capture by a different, presidential-led elite? Following Bulgaria’s historic Eurozone accession on January 1, 2026, PB is currently projected to secure a dominant plurality (30%–33%) in the April 19 snap elections,³⁷ consistently leading polls ahead of GERB-SDS.

2. GERB-SDS (ГЕРБ – СДС)

The Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria and the Union of Democratic Forces coalition (GERBS-SDS) remains the primary and most experienced center-right force in Bulgaria’s deeply fragmented political landscape. Firmly affiliated with the European People’s Party (EPP), its ideological core revolves around fiscal discipline, market-oriented economic growth, infrastructure development, institutional predictability, and the protection of Bulgaria’s national interests within the Euro-Atlantic institutions.^{38 39}

Led by former Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, the coalition has consistently framed its political message around the need for stability and economic development in response to Bulgaria’s prolonged political crisis and repeated snap elections since 2021. This positioning is further solidified by Bulgaria’s Eurozone accession on 1 January 2026—a milestone fundamentally framed within public discourse as the culmination of long-term strategic objectives pursued by successive administrations, most notably those of the GERB party. At the same time, as a self-identified Christian Democratic party, GERB prioritizes a traditionalist social agenda, aligning its policy objectives with the broader European center-right tradition.⁴⁰



Figure 2. President of GERB Source: Wikimedia Commons²⁹

Despite maintaining a solid and consistent presence in opinion polls — typically securing 19–22% support in March 2026 surveys and positioning itself as the clear second force behind Progressive Bulgaria — GERB-SDS is still struggling to find partners to form a stable coalition.⁴² Its electoral image suffers from a deep legitimacy crisis due to widespread corruption and the perception of a “captured state”. The collapse of the Rosen Zhelyazkov (GERB-backed) administration in December 2025 highlighted the coalition’s vulnerable position⁴³, triggering a wave of anti-corruption protests. This mass mobilization was organised primarily by the opposition reformist coalition We Continue the Change – Democratic Bulgaria (PP–DB).⁴⁴ The sharpest criticism was directed at former Prime Minister Boyko Borissov – leader of the largest ruling party, Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) – and at Delyan Peevski, an oligarch under US and UK sanctions for corruption and leader of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms – New Beginning (DPS–NN)⁴⁵, whose support had secured a parliamentary majority for Zhelyazkov’s minority cabinet.

Notwithstanding its consistent ability to perform a parliamentary presence, the party

has struggled to achieve sustained executive control, primarily due to deep-seated skepticism from reformist factions such as PP-DB.⁴⁶ Its historical reliance on ideologically discordant partners—such as the pro-Russian BSP, which opposed Ukrainian military aid, and ITN—coupled with systemic criticism regarding corruption and the rule of law⁴⁷, has consistently hindered the formation of a stable 121-seat majority.

Currently, the coalition frames its support for Ukrainian sovereignty not as a transitory diplomatic gesture, but as a strategic security imperative essential to European defense.⁴⁸ While its policy remains anchored in the ratification of military aid and adherence to EU sanctions, the coalition balances this with pragmatic sovereignty by explicitly rejecting personnel deployment and aligning its peace objectives with the U.S.-led diplomatic frameworks.⁴⁹ Subject to a profound structural governing constraint, there is a persistent disconnect between its credibility to secure a plurality and the capacity to synthesize durable legislative majorities. The upcoming elections represent a critical test of the coalition’s political resilience that raises the question of whether GERB-SDS can successfully translate its institutional experience into a viable governing mandate.

3. We Continue the Change – Democratic Bulgaria (Продължаваме Промяната & Демократична България) - PP-DB

We Continue the Change emerged as a reform-oriented political project in Bulgaria. It is led by economist and former Prime Minister of Bulgaria Kiril Petkov, and former Deputy Prime Minister, Asen Vasilev.⁵⁰ The party built its campaign around anti-corruption and reforms.

It focused on exposing misuse of public resources and “leakages” in the state system. Over time, the party adopted a more direct critique of the political status quo. Its message combined a reformist and moderately populist appeal.⁵¹

The PP–DB coalition advances a reformist model defined by its commitment to Atlanticism and liberal-conservative principles. The bloc posits that Bulgaria’s comprehensive convergence with Western norms—specifically regarding judicial autonomy and legal integrity—is the primary catalyst for domestic development and the country’s meaningful contribution to European cohesion.⁵² Tactically, PP-DB has evolved from pragmatic participation, notably the 2023–2024 rotational government arrangement with GERB-SDS, to a strategy of principled opposition.⁵³ The coalition played a key role in forcing the resignation of the Rosen Zhelyazkov (GERB-backed) government in 2024.⁵⁴

The foreign policy doctrine of PP-DB is defined by its commitment to a formalized, long-term strategic partnership with Ukraine and full integration into the Atlanticist security architecture. This is exemplified by its support for the March 30, 2026, ten-year security cooperation agreement signed by interim Prime Minister Andrey Gyurov and President Volodymyr Zelensky, which institutionalizes sustained multi-level military assistance.⁵⁵ WELT reported that Prime Minister Kiril Petkov and Finance Minister Assen Vassilev secretly supplied Ukraine with weapons and diesel in 2023, using intermediaries to bypass opposition from pro-Russian politicians in Bulgaria, including Socialist Party coalition partners.⁵⁶



Figure 3. Then Prime Minister Kiril Petkov meeting President Volodymyr Zelensky. Source: Wikimedia Commons⁵⁷

As of March 2026, polling consistently places PP-DB support at approximately 11–13% ahead of the April 19 snap elections.⁵⁸ The primary tension facing the movement is the maintenance of its ideological integrity against the logistical constraints imposed by a fragmented legislative body.

4. Movement for Rights and Freedoms – New Beginning - DPS-NN

The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) is Bulgaria’s main political party representing ethnic minorities, particularly the Turkish and Roma communities.⁵⁹ In recent years, Delyan Peevski has emerged as a central figure within the party.⁶⁰ After the 2024 split in the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, Delyan Peevski’s DPS–New Beginning and Ahmed Dogan’s Alliance for Rights and Freedoms (APS) both entered parliament, contributing to an already fragmented political landscape.⁶¹

DPS–New Beginning performed most strongly in southwestern and northwestern Bulgaria, especially in regions with sizable Roma populations.⁶² While the October 2024 elections initially reversed a coalition between GERB-SDS, BSP, and ITN— with APS support—the arrangement was destabilized by a judicial seat redistribution in March 2025 and the subsequent withdrawal of the APS, rendering Delyan Peevski’s faction the primary arbiter of legislative power – a shift that catalyzed mass protests over corruption.⁶³

The nationwide protests in December 2025, among the largest since the 1990s, targeted Peevski’s role as a behind-the-scenes power broker, among Borissov.⁶⁴ Consequently, Peevski has been designated under the U.S. Global Magnitsky Act for corruption and influence peddling by the U.S. Treasury.⁶⁵ Under its leadership, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms–New Beginning has aligned itself with Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz ahead of Hungary’s April 2026 elections, framing its domestic political strategy as part of a broader European “sovereignist” agenda against perceived transnational influence.⁶⁶ The core campaign themes remain stability, security, protection of minority rights, and pragmatic contributions to national development within the Euro-Atlantic framework.⁶⁷ Recent polls (March 2026) project DPS-NN support at approximately 8–10%, sufficient to secure parliamentary entry.⁶⁸



Figure 4. December 2025 protests in Bulgaria
Source: Wikimedia Commons⁶⁹

5. Revival (Vazrazhdane)

The Revival (Vazrazhdane) party—a nationalist and radical-right formation under the leadership of Kostadin Kostadinov—maintains a remarkable presence ahead of the parliamentary elections.⁷⁰ During the legislative elections on October 27, 2024, the nationalist formation secured third place with 13.38% of the vote⁷¹, illustrating its capacity to exert significant influence and credibility as a political voice.

Revival is widely characterised by analysts as hard eurosceptic, opposing Bulgaria’s adoption of the euro⁷² and, to a certain extent, integration into EU economic and institutional initiatives. Beyond mere opposition to European integration, the party’s geopolitical posture is defined by an active search for alternative security and economic partnerships outside the Euro-Atlantic sphere: by signing a cooperation agreement with United Russia in April 2025, the party’s representatives formalized their alignment with the Russian ruling faction, creating a structured channel for high-level political consultation and strategic knowledge sharing.⁷³

Beyond Bulgaria, Revival's influence intersects with broader far-right dynamics in the region, particularly in Romania, where cooperation and ideological convergence with ultranationalist figures and the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) have become increasingly visible.⁷⁴ This was exemplified when Kostadinov appeared at a political rally in Bucharest signalling cross-border mobilisation and shared messaging in support of Călin Georgescu.⁷⁵

The party's tendency articulates a pro-Russian orientation and opposition to Bulgaria's traditional Euro-Atlantic course, criticising Western influence and aligning rhetorically with narratives sceptical of NATO and EU policies. Public opinion surveys ahead of the 2026 elections place Revival around 6-7% support, a decline from earlier cycles, suggesting constrained but persistent influence in a fragmented party system.⁷⁶

Election dynamics

The current political landscape in Europe is being fundamentally reshaped by a "security-first" paradigm, creating fertile ground for populist radical-right movements, especially in Eastern Europe, such as the Romanian Alliance for the Union of Romania (AUR), Bulgaria's Vazrazhdane (Revival), or Fidesz (under Viktor Orbán), to adopt confrontational stance and Eurosceptic narratives.⁷⁷ Over the last three years, Russia's ongoing aggression in Ukraine has pushed defense and geopolitical stability to the forefront of the continental agenda. This external pressure is compounded by domestic anxieties; according

to EU post-electoral surveys, many citizens feel a profound sense of precarity driven by the rising cost of living and global volatility.⁷⁸

In Bulgaria, this dynamic is exacerbated by targeted Russian hybrid warfare designed to stall European integration. The Kremlin has strategically instrumentalized Bulgaria's adoption of the Euro on January 1, 2026, by deploying targeted disinformation campaigns designed to exacerbate inflationary anxieties among socio-economically marginalized demographics.⁷⁹ The domestic landscape was further aggravated by fiscal instability, specifically the late-2025 withdrawal of the 2026 budget. This event exposed a systemic fiscal impasse, as the caretaker administration found itself caught between populist electoral promises and the fiscal discipline required for seamless integration into the Eurozone.⁸⁰ Consequently, this budgetary vacuum has become a central campaign theme with the country entering a new fiscal year without an approved regular state budget.⁸¹ Over the past three months, the budget deficit reached a record high early in 2026, at about €1.5 billion (1.2% of GDP) by March, adding pressure to fiscal policy.⁸² Still, geopolitical alignment remains the primary fault line in the 2026 campaign, as an example given the recent scandal surrounding the 10-year security agreement with Ukraine, which triggered significant criticism from opponents parties.

The integrity of the April 2026 vote is under severe scrutiny due to unprecedented levels of electoral fraud and interference. As of early April 2026, the Interior Ministry has acted on more than 1000 reports of fraud ahead of the election, an increase of around 500% compared to 2024.⁸³ Drawing parallels from the presidential elections in Romania, Bulgarian

authorities face significant institutional hurdles in neutralizing sophisticated bot networks, which constantly threaten the integrity of electoral processes. While the EU system Digital Services Act (DSA) remains active ahead of the election, in order to help counter disinformation and other harmful online content that could affect the electoral process, the speed of malicious content amplification remains a critical vulnerability.⁸⁴ These efforts are not merely external; they are mirrored internally by parties such as Vazrazhdane, which maintains a pro-Russian stance.⁸⁵ The 2026 election thus serves as a litmus test: can Bulgaria's institutions withstand the dual pressure of fiscal adjustment and foreign subversion, or will the prevailing 'anti-system' sentiment result in a fundamental realignment with Russian strategic interests?

Scenarios and Foreign policy implications

In the period immediately following the April 19, 2026, parliamentary elections, Bulgaria's political landscape may seem to be marked by a continuation and consolidation of a fragmented parliament. At present, although PB is leading in the polls and likely to win the most seats, it still faces difficulties forming a government, as it needs at least 121 seats for a majority. The party's path to executive legitimacy is complicated by a profound internal policy rift. Radev's new formation relies on an electorate with notable anti-establishment leanings; however, reconciling these views with the responsibilities of a standard European administration on multiple levels presents a dilemma that could impact the coalition's decision-making. Therefore, the leading party trying to form a minority government with Vazrazhdane and the Bulgarian Socialist Party is discussed as a potential reality - a case scenario that could

freeze military aid to Ukraine and possibly trigger a shift in its strategic role as a Black Sea littoral state, and alter confidence within the EU and NATO. According to Daniel Smilov, a political analyst, (originally written for Deutsche Welle and also published on Dnevnik.bg) a coalition between Progressive Bulgaria (PB) and PP-DB represents "the most plausible governing scenario".⁸⁶ This path is dictated by the explicit refusal by both blocs to collaborate with GERB-SDS or DPS–New Beginning.⁸⁷ Should the reformist blocs (PP-DB and PB) fail to secure an absolute majority, the DPS-NN may occupy a strategic position, influencing further government coalitions.

The 2026 legislative elections mark a critical juncture in Bulgaria's political development, defined by the tension between successful Eurozone integration and a deepening erosion of domestic institutional legitimacy. Rather than consolidating political consensus, the prevailing "security-first" approach, articulated in response to concerns over foreign interference, rising reports of electoral irregularities, and fiscal uncertainty, has coincided with further fragmentation of the party system. The result is a legislature in which the formation of a stable majority remains uncertain, with the threshold proving persistently elusive. In the absence of a viable reformist coalition, the political system risks reverting yet again to a prolonged impasse. Under such conditions, executive authority would likely return to a caretaker administration, reinforcing a pattern of limited governance, a scenario in which institutional drift would leave Bulgaria formally anchored within key European structures. On the other hand, persistent instability may expose the country to external pressures, including hybrid forms of interference.

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