



# Monthly Briefing

## **Bulgaria political briefing:**

### **The Electoral Attitudes of the Bulgarians a month before the early Parliamentary Elections**

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# **The Electoral Attitudes of the Bulgarians a month before the early Parliamentary Elections**

## **Summary**

After the regular government led by the prime minister Rossen Zheliazkov resigned on December 11, 2025, as a result of mass civil protests across the country the parliament then failed to form a new cabinet. Soon after that the President of the Republic of Bulgaria scheduled elections for a new parliament, which should be held on April 19, 2026. This time, however, the situation is different and creates prerequisites for a completely new political picture after the elections. This is because, meanwhile, on January 19, 2026, President Rumen Radev resigned, and a little later announced that he would participate in the elections with his own political force. This suddenly created radically different attitudes in Bulgarian society and mobilized a large part of the population, which for many years doesn't vote for anyone, because they are disappointed with all the traditional political parties and coalitions that existed so far. According to recent surveys by a number of Bulgarian sociological agencies, from February and March 2026, about 30 percent of Bulgarians who say they will vote will categorically declare their preferences for the new political formation of the former president. This is a prerequisite for a very different political configuration within the next parliament. This, on the other hand, would also mean a change in the governance of the country.

On April 19, 2026, early parliamentary elections will be held in Bulgaria. They were triggered after a wave of numerous civil protests across the country in December 2025, as a result of which the regular government of Prime Minister Rossen Jeliaskov resigned. After that, the parliament failed to elect a new government, and this led to a parliamentary crisis, the election of a caretaker government and the scheduling of early parliamentary elections. The mechanism that is applied is clearly described in the Bulgarian Constitution. The problem lies in the fact that only in the last five years from 2021 to this moment, a total of 7 parliamentary elections have been held in Bulgaria. Six of them were early parliamentary elections.

That is, due to the fact that none of the political forces elected in parliament has a majority to govern on its own, and the contradictions between all of them are so great that it is impossible to create a coalition government that is sufficiently stable and durable.

At the same time, in each of these elections, the turnout, or more precisely, the number of voters as a percentage of all eligible voters, **does not exceed 50%**. Here are the real results of the turnover throughout the last 7 votes<sup>1</sup>:

- **April 4, 2021** the turnout was **50.61%** (**3,334,283** people out of 6,588,372 eligible to vote),

- **11 July 2021** - **42.19%** turnout (**2,775,410** people out of 6,578,716 eligibles to vote),

- **14 November 2021** - **40.23%** turnout (**2,669,260** voters out of 6,635,305 eligible voters),

- **2 October 2022** - **39.41%** turnout (**2,601,963** out of 6,602,990 eligibles to vote),

- **2 April 2023** - **40.69%** turnout (**2,683,606** voters out of 6,594,593 eligible voters),

- **June 9, 2024** - **33.78%** turnout (**2,073,730** voters out of 6,138,050 eligible voters),

- **27 October 2024** - **38.94%** (**2,570,629** voters out of 6,601,262 eligible voters).

In fact, the results show that no more than 2 million and eight hundred thousand people voted in all six early elections. This shows that there is a huge number of people who do not vote, but at the same time have the right to vote. This includes both Bulgarians who live permanently in the country and those who live temporarily abroad, but as Bulgarian citizens have all their constitutional rights, including the right to vote.

I note all this to point out the reason why now, on the eve of the 8th consecutive elections for the National Assembly in Bulgaria, the situation looks different. What makes it different is the fact that with the emergence of a new political subject in the political life, there is a huge chance to rearrange the Bulgarian political puzzle. This is the possibility of two interrelated things happening. First, an increase in voter turnout and, secondly, finally, the formation of a regular government that will remain in power and, if possible, serve its

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cik.bg/bg/37>

mandate of 4 years. This would prevent future political crises and allow for the stabilization of political power, which would inevitably give a positive socio-economic result.

### **The political project of President Rumen Radev.**

On January 19, 2026, Rumen Radev announced his decision to resign as President of Bulgaria. In a televised address to the nation, he said that he was stepping down from office in order to actively participate in the political life of the country and participate in the upcoming early parliamentary elections.<sup>2</sup>

The power of the president was officially terminated on January 23, 2026, following a decision of the Constitutional Court. According to the Constitution, the post of head of state was taken over by Vice President Iliana Iotova. This is the first time in the history of Bulgaria since 1991 in which an acting president resigns before his term expires.

In an interview for the Bulgarian National Television on January 30, 2026, Rumen Radev outlined the main goals of his entry into party politics. It was his first major media appearance since officially leaving the presidential institution a week earlier.

The main theses and statements that Radev made during the show are as follows:

First, the former president said that his decision was dictated by the *"failure of the political class"* to meet the expectations of citizens and the need to dismantle the *"corrupt model of governance"*.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, he specified that for the upcoming elections in April 2026 he would participate through a coalition - later registered as "Progressive Bulgaria". According to him, the creation of a real political party will happen only after the elections, in order to avoid the accusation that he used the presidency for party building.<sup>4</sup>

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[https://www.capital.bg/politika\\_i\\_ikonomika/bulgaria/2026/01/19/4874387\\_rumen\\_radev\\_podava\\_ostavka\\_kato\\_prezident\\_i\\_vliza\\_v/#:~:text=%D0%A0%D1%83%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%20%D0%A0%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B2%20%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B0%20%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%BA%D0%B0%20%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%20%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%20%D0%B8%20%D0%B2%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0%20%D0%B2%20%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0%20%D0%B7%D0%B0%20%D0%BF%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82](https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2026/01/19/4874387_rumen_radev_podava_ostavka_kato_prezident_i_vliza_v/#:~:text=%D0%A0%D1%83%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%20%D0%A0%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B2%20%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B0%20%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%BA%D0%B0%20%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%20%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%20%D0%B8%20%D0%B2%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B0%20%D0%B2%20%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0%20%D0%B7%D0%B0%20%D0%BF%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82)

<sup>3</sup> <https://bntnews.bg/news/former-president-rumen-radev-speaks-on-39panorama-39-we-will-form-a-party-after-the-elections-1376776news.html#:~:text=Rumen%20Radev%2C%20who%20served%20as%20political%20party%20after%20the%20elections.>

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

Thirdly, Radev called for a radical change, which he calls a new social contract aimed at strengthening statehood and eliminating "façade democracy", where according to him, real power is in the hands of oligarchic structures.

Fourthly, Rumen Radev stressed that he does not enter politics with ambitions for one-man rule or as a "savior", but his goal is for Bulgaria to develop as a "free, democratic and European state" based on clear rules. The former president expressed readiness to talk with any political force that shares the goal of "*dismantling the oligarchic model*".<sup>5</sup>

Finally, he sharply attacked previous governments and constitutional changes, which, according to him, undermined the balance between institutions and limited the powers of the president.<sup>6</sup>

The president's first interview strengthened his position against the status quo, and according to initial polls, his project has become the main favorite to win the vote.

A little later, on March 2, 2026. Rumen Radev officially announced that he will participate in the parliamentary elections with a coalition named „Progressive Bulgaria“. On that same date, he registered this coalition in the Central Election Commission (CEC) for the vote scheduled for April 19, 2026. “Progressive Bulgaria” includes three parties - the “Social Democratic Political Movement, the Social Democratic Party and the Our People Movement.”<sup>7</sup>

As of March 2026, Rumen Radev’s coalition, "Progressive Bulgaria", positions itself as a systemic alternative to the "old parties" and the "corrupt model."

The core political characteristics of the project include:

- "Patriotic Centralism" - Radev avoids traditional "left" or "right" labels, opting for a syncretic approach.
- Social-Conservative Balance - It combines leftist social policies (increased pensions, state intervention in healthcare) with conservative national values (protection of sovereignty, traditional family values).
- National Interest First: The primary message is "Bulgaria First," emphasizing strategic autonomy within the EU and NATO while maintaining a pragmatic, non-confrontational stance toward global powers.

Some of the most popular political Messages of Radev’s project are:

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<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/radev-izbori-progresivna-balgariya-registrira-koalitsiya/33692101.html>

- "Demolishing the Model": The central campaign theme is the final removal of the "GERB-Movement for Rights and Freedoms" influence from the judiciary and administration.

- Rule of Law and Justice: Radev positions himself as the only leader capable of bringing "real justice" and accountability for high-level corruption.

- Stability vs. Chaos: Leveraging his experience as a two-term President he frames the previous seven elections as "partisan bickering" that only he can end.

- State-Driven Economy: Proposals include a stronger role for the state in strategic sectors (energy, infrastructure) to prevent monopolies and cartels.

The political project of Rumen Radev seems entirely built around Radev's personal high approval rating. It operates more as a national movement than a classic party. By incorporating smaller entities like "Our People Movement" and various social-democratic fragments, the project tries to attract diverse voter groups. Given Radev's military background, the platform emphasizes national security, border control, and modernization of the armed forces as pillars of national dignity. Radev is currently the "Anti-System Frontrunner." He occupies the space once held by various protest parties (like "There is such people" or early "We continue the Change") but adds the weight of institutional experience. By resigning the Presidency, the analysts consider this move of Radev as successful PR trying to highlight this move as a selfless sacrifice for the nation. The point is to mobilize apathetic voters who never vote for anyone.

### **What is the social profile of non-voters in Bulgaria?**

Political apathy and record low voter turnout in Bulgaria, which in the last elections held in 2024 ranged between 33-39%, are due to a complex of factors accumulated in recent years of constant political instability. The main causes identified by sociologists and analysts could be resumed to several key factors.

On the first place, it is a question of deep distrust in the political class. The main reason is the feeling of Bulgarians that "*there is no point*" and "*there is no one to vote for*". Bulgarians believe in democracy as a principle, but have extremely low trust in specific institutions, the law and parties.

Secondly, scientists define the reason for a large part of Bulgarians not to vote as "election fatigue" or the so-called electoral erosion. Holding seven early votes in four years leads to such "election fatigue". Voters feel exhausted by constant campaigns that do not lead to stable governance.

Thirdly, we should note the real lack of a political alternative and an increased level of political *"disappointment"*. Many people believe that the parties do not represent their interests and that the political behavior of the leaders (difficult coalitions, falling apart of agreements) actually alienates voters.

To this we must add a feeling of helplessness. According to surveys by Gallup International Balkan, trust in the fairness of the electoral process is among the lowest in the world in Bulgaria (about 10%), which discourages people from participating.<sup>8</sup>

A number of economic and social factors also contribute to political apathy. Protests since the end of 2025 against the 2026 budget, which provided for raising taxes and social security contributions, have reinforced the feeling that political decisions are being made to the detriment of citizens.

According to the analyses of social psychologists, a significant part of the population shows "passive resistance" and distances themselves from public life as a form of coping with the stress of the political crisis.

This vicious circle of apathy makes it increasingly difficult to form a legitimate majority in parliament, which in turn leads to new elections and even greater alienation of voters.

The sociological profile of non-voters in Bulgaria is complex, and the group of "non-voters" is not homogeneous, but consists of people with different social status, political views and motivation. However, data from multiple elections (2021-2024) shows some sustained trends.

Among those who do not vote, there is a high percentage of young people (18–30 years old) who feel apathy or do not see representation. Often these are people with lower education and lower income, living in smaller settlements, although disillusioned intellectuals from the big cities also fall into this group. Non-voters are often the "silent majority" who do not identify with any of the major political parties.

The core group is made up of people disillusioned with the political class who believe that their vote will not change anything. Many of them believe that all parties are the same and not voting is the only way to protest against the system. Many Bulgarians do not trust any of the political leaders, which directly affects the low voter turnout.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/poll/652433/no-one-trusts-elections-less-bulgarians.aspx#:~:text=WASHINGTON%2C%20D.C.%20%2D%2D%20As%20Bulgaria,in%20Elections%20Globally%20in%202023>

At the same time, as already noted, some of the non-voters are people who simply do not see an alternative but say that they would vote if they found a political entity that meets their expectations. This is where the place and the role of the new political project of President Rumen Radev comes in, which changes the situation, changes the attitudes of people who, according to the latest opinion polls, express an increased desire to vote in the upcoming elections, because they finally see a political entity that wins their trust and gives them hope for an opportunity for change and the establishment of a stable government.

### **What are the electoral attitudes of Bulgarian society a month before the early parliamentary elections?**

As of mid-March 2026, the political situation in Bulgaria is dominated by the entry of former President Rumen Radev into active party politics

About a month before the early parliamentary elections, we already have an emerging picture of the attitudes of Bulgarians to the vote.

Since the beginning of February, a total of five polling agencies have published their official surveys, and there are many common points in them.

Here are the main current attitudes according to the latest surveys by Alpha Research, Gallup, Sova Harris and Trend:

All opinion polls show the same picture as far as who enters the next parliament and who remains below the 4% line of the mandatory minimum of votes required for a political force to enter parliament according to Bulgaria's electoral legislation.

According to all surveys, after the next elections there will be a total of five political forces in the Bulgarian National Assembly. These are: "Progressive Bulgaria" led by Rumen Radev, GERB-Union of Democratic Forces, "We Continue the Change - Democratic Bulgaria", "Movement for Rights and Freedoms - New Beginning" and "Revival".<sup>9</sup>

Below the 4% barrier, but still with a lively chance of entering in the parliament are the "Bulgarian Socialist Party", led by its newly elected leader Krum Zarkov, and the "Morality, Unity, Honour" party led by Radostin Vassilev. Apart from the study of the "Sova Harris"

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<sup>9</sup> <https://alpharesearch.bg/post/1043-obshtestveno-politicheski-i-elektoralni-naglasii-fevruari-2026.html>  
<https://retrend.bg/project/%d0%b5%d0%bb%d0%b5%d0%ba%d1%82%d0%be%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%bb%d0%bd%d0%b8-%d0%bd%d0%b0%d0%b3%d0%bb%d0%b0%d1%81%d0%b8-%d1%81%d0%bf%d1%80%d1%8f%d0%bc%d0%be-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b4%d1%81%d1%82%d0%be%d1%8f/>

agency, which gives much better forecast results for the BSP, all other agencies predict that the election campaign will be of great importance for the two parties.<sup>10</sup>

The rest of the political forces, including "There is such a people" (ITN), the "Alliance for Rights and Freedoms", "Greatness", at least for the time being, seem sure that they will remain out of the next parliament.

According to all surveys, Rumen Radev's new project occupies a clear first place, gathering the support of about a third of the voters. The difference between the first and the second is significant – over 10%.

Political force	Estimated support (%)
<b>Progressive Bulgaria (R. Radev)</b>	<b>31.0% – 32.7%</b>
<b>GERB-Union of Democratic Forces</b>	<b>19.0% – 20.0%</b>
<b>We Continue the Change - Democratic Bulgaria</b>	<b>11.0% – 13.0%</b>
<b>Movement for Rights and Freedoms - New Beginning</b>	<b>9.0% – 11.0%</b>
<b>Revival</b>	<b>6.4% – 7.0%</b>

*The data is summarized from surveys by Gallup, Alpha Research and Trend from late February and early March 2026.*

Only the latest survey by the Sova Harris Agency, conducted in the period March 7-12, shows that if the elections were held at this time, not five but six parties and coalitions would enter parliament. These are "Progressive Bulgaria" with 30.9% of the votes of the respondents, GERB-Union of Democratic Forces with 19.3%, "We Continue the Change – Democratic Bulgaria" with 12.2%, "Movement for Rights and Freedoms – New Beginning" with 7.1%, "Revival" with 6.7% and "Bulgarian Socialist Party – United Left" with 4.4%.<sup>11</sup>

**In terms of expected voter turnout, sociological forecasts** vary significantly – from low motivation due to election fatigue to turnout expectations of about 55-60%, reinforced by the new political force of the former president, Rumen Radev. According to the current

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<https://www.bta.bg/bg/news/bulgaria/1084287-partiite-i-koalitsiite-koito-biha-vlezli-v-sledvashtiya-parlament-ako-izborite>

<sup>11</sup> <https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/sova-haris-v-sledvashtija-parlament-vlizat-6-formacii-parva-e-progresivna-balgarija-s-30-9.html>

sociological analyses from February and March 2026, Rumen Radev's project "Progressive Bulgaria" has real potential to mobilize a significant part of the non-voting Bulgarians.

Sociologists predict that Radev's formation could attract more than 1 million votes, and the bulk of them are expected to come from people who have not voted so far or have been disappointed with the political system.

Polls by Gallup and Alpha Research show that the emergence of a new, strong leadership project acts as a catalyst for voter activation. As It was already pointed out, the projected support for the coalition is about 31%-33% among voters.

The political coalition "Progressive Bulgaria" of Rumen Radev positions itself as an alternative to the "status quo" and the "corruption model", which is the main motive for returning to the polls of protest and punitive voting. In addition to the non-voters, the Radev's political project attracts some of the voters who in the past used to vote for Bulgarian Socialist Party, Revival, There is such People and even We continue the change – Democratic Bulgaria. This will further increase the overall voter turnout. According to sociologists, "Progressive Bulgaria" practically "steals" votes from all political forces (or almost all).

Despite Rumen Radev's strong start, the overall voter fatigue from eight consecutive elections in five years still remains a factor that can suppress turnout below expected levels in some regions of the country.

What will be the real results, however, and whether Bulgaria will actually have the opportunity to form a stable government that will finally serve its full, four-year mandate remains to be seen on April 19, 2029.

## **Conclusion**

Bulgaria's frequent snap elections (seven in five years) are due to systemic political instability, which began with mass anti-corruption protests in 2020. The main reasons include:

A fragmented parliament, difficult coalition formation and huge mutual distrust between political forces, constant corruption scandals, foreign policy divisions, economic discontent and last but not least, electoral apathy.

Over the last years the election results systematically led to a fragmented National Assembly, in which no party has enough votes to govern independently. The strong polarization between traditional parties and some new political forces, generally referred to as "formations of change", makes it extremely difficult to form sustainable coalitions. Even the rare attempts at co-governance made over the past few years end in early collapse. Deep-

rooted problems with corruption and the influence of behind-the-scenes interests (often referred to as the "Peevski model") erode public trust and block the work of institutions. The different positions of the parties regarding Russia, the war in Ukraine and European integration further escalate the tension in the parliament.

In late 2025 and early 2026, new protests against fiscal policy and inflation led to another collapse of the government.

At the moment (March 2026), Bulgaria is preparing for the eighth consecutive parliamentary vote since 2021, after the last attempts at a cabinet in January 2026 ended in failure.

There is something unusual about the upcoming campaign for the early parliamentary elections on April 19, 2026. In fact, it happened at the moment when, on January 19, 2026, President Rumen Radev announced that he will resign to join the political race for the next parliamentary elections. A little later, he created his own political coalition, which was called "Progressive Bulgaria". This caused great enthusiasm among a large part of the population of Bulgaria, who want change, but so far have not had an incentive to vote.

Rumen Radev and his coalition "Progressive Bulgaria" rely on a wide electoral spectrum, which unites both disillusioned voters from traditional parties and periphery from different ideological sectors.

According to current opinion polls from February and March 2026, his formation leads in preferences with support between 30% and 33%.

The main groups of voters he relies on are:

Disappointed by the traditional left in the face of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, supporters of national-conservative formations who see Radev as a strong leader who can offer an alternative to the current model, voters from the so-called "urban right wing voters", which are provoked by political instability and the feeling of failure of the previous governments.

The most important thing for the final result, however, will be what will be the percentage of people who have not voted at all so far and who will go to the ballot boxes this time. Most recent opinion polls show that Rumen Radev's political formation attracts people who in previous elections voted with "I do not support anyone" or were in the group of non-voters, but now they see in Radev a chance to "dismantle the corruption model". This is because "Progressive Bulgaria" is positioning itself as a "different" political project from the status quo, trying to capitalize on the personal high rating of President Rumen Radev.

According to all election experts, the most important factor for change remains the significant increase in the number of voters.

Voter turnout is a key indicator of the health of any democratic system and of citizens' confidence that their free expression can have an impact on the governance of the country. The devaluation of elections in a compressed and accelerated electoral cycle, the growing feeling that every time people get "more of the same", the electoral machinations that call into question the results of the vote and many other issues were the basis for the dramatic decline in voter turnout in Bulgaria in recent years.

The civic energy from the December 2025 protests, and then the request for a new player on the political scene, led to an increase in readiness to vote – about 500,000 more votes than in the previous elections.

Unfortunately, the latest opinion polls show that there is a small but clearly pronounced decline in the declared desire of people to participate in the elections. At the moment, no more than 3 million people firmly intend to cast their vote (at about 3.1-3.2 in December-January). Whether this attitude will change during the election campaign remains to be seen. But the outflow is a clear sign that compromising evidence, mistrust and lack of a clear perspective are alienating voters.

The election campaign officially begins on March 20 and ends on April 18. The same day should be designated as a "day for reflection", so parties and coalitions must close their campaigns on April 17. No later than April 23, the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Bulgaria must announce the votes and the distribution of mandates between the parties and coalitions in the next National Assembly. Finally, the names of the new MPs in the 52nd National Assembly should be known on April 26.

**What will be the real results of the upcoming parliamentary elections in Bulgaria** and whether the preliminary sociological surveys on the electoral attitudes of Bulgarians will turn out to be correct, we are about to find out very soon.