Bulgaria: Elections and the rule of law

The elections at a glance

**When?** 11 July 2021  
**Who is being elected?** All 240 members of the National Assembly  
**Why?** Second election this year after elections in April did not lead to a government formation  
**Who is leading the polls?** (Alpha Research)  
  - There Are Such People (-) 21.8%  
  - GERB (EPP) 21.5%  
  - Coalition for Bulgaria (S&D) 16.4%  
  - Democratic Bulgaria (EPP) 12%  
  - DPS - Movement for Rights and Freedoms (RE) 11.1%  
  - Stand Up.BG (-) 5.4%

**System of government:** Unicameral parliamentary republic  
**Electoral system:** proportional representation with 4% electoral threshold  
**Election rules & covid-19:**  
  - Only in-person voting of registered voters at polling stations is permitted.  
  - However, those infected with covid-19 or under quarantine can vote from home through mobile polling stations.  
  - Postal voting is not possible. No exceptions have been made this year.  
  - Voting abroad is possible via Bulgarian embassies and consulates.

Key numbers & facts

- Freedom House Freedom in the World 2021:  
  - Score 78/100, free (27/27 in the EU)  
- RSF World Press Freedom Index 2021:  
  - Rank 112/180 (27/27 in the EU)  
- TI Corruption Perception Index 2020:  
  - Rank 69/180 (27/27 in the EU)  
- Eurobarometer on Rule of Law 2019:  
  - 70% of Bulgarians see a strong need for improving effectiveness and independence of courts (50% EU average)  
  - Implementation of leading ECHR cases: 49% pending from the last 10 years (45% average)  
- Bulgaria, like Romania, falls under the EU Mechanism for Cooperation and Verification (CVM) that aims to monitor respect for the rule of law, democracy and human rights since the two states joined the union.

Previous DRI analysis

- Bulgaria’s elections and the rule of law (2021)  
- Bulgaria’s protests and the rule of law (2020)

Further reading

- EU Commission 2020 Rule of Law Report Bulgaria  
- Eurobarometer on Corruption 2020  
- EU Commission CVM progress reports

Top rule of law issues in Bulgaria

**Prosecutor general:** Public protests in 2020 were closely linked to the public outcry at the scope of powers and likely abuse of office by Prosecutor General Ivan Geshev, who is still in office.

**Corruption:** Corruption remains one of the biggest issues in Bulgaria, with the country consistently ranking among the worst in the EU. In June 2021, the United States blacklisted multiple Bulgarian individuals and entities over alleged corruption, contrasting with the overall more timid actions by EU institutions.

**Independence of the judiciary:** There are persistent concerns with the independence, integrity and effectiveness of the courts, although Bulgaria has not seen a capture of key judicial institutions by the ruling party, unlike the situation witnessed in countries such as Poland.

**Press freedom:** The situation of journalists and independent media in Bulgaria is assessed as alarming by leading civil society groups and experts. Corruption and collusion between media, politicians and oligarchs is seen as widespread in Bulgaria, with the situation deteriorating in the recent years.