



**PRELIMINARY OBSERVATION
REPORT FOR THE NOVEMBER 24
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

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The **Vot Corect** coalition is made up of [Expert Forum \(EFOR\)](#), [CIVICA](#), [CSD \(Centrul Pentru Studiul Democratiei / Center for the Study of Democracy\)](#), [Centrul Pentru Resurse Civice / the Civic resource Center](#), [Rădăuții Civic \(Civic Rădăuți\)](#) and [Observatorul Electoral \(Electoral Observer\)](#). [Code for Romania](#) developed the **Vote Monitor** application. In the Republic of Moldova we collaborated with [Promo-Lex](#), and in Romania with international observers accredited by the [European Platform For Democratic Elections – EPDE](#).

The "**Vot Corect Coalition**" consists of civic organizations dedicated to promoting democracy and defending human rights. The coalition's goal is to oversee the organization of elections and referendums to ensure they adhere to constitutional principles, as well as the international standards and best practices that Romania has committed to. Partner organizations primarily focus on accrediting observers for election day but also monitor the overall electoral process, work to improve the legal framework, and respond to violations of these principles.

For more details about the coalition and our partners, click [here](#).

We thank everyone who supported us in the election monitoring campaign: our partners, the media, volunteers, and donors.

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SUMMARY

The elections held on November 24 were competitive, and fundamental rights were generally respected. However, scheduling elections over three consecutive weeks failed to adequately separate the presidential elections from the parliamentary ones, leading to mutual influence between the two campaigns and creating significant organizational challenges. While electoral authorities generally managed the technical aspects of the process efficiently, the complexity caused by overlapping electoral periods proved difficult to handle. The electoral legislation lacked coherence in several stages of the process, and the insufficient regulation of certain situations further highlighted the urgent need for an Electoral Code. The results were surprising even for most high-profile political actors expected to reach the second round, as the visibility of candidate Călin Georgescu in the mainstream electoral landscape was very low. His campaign heavily relied on what was considered inauthentic promotion on TikTok and lacked proper funding, raising questions about its credibility.

The transparency of the electoral process was diminished by the Central Electoral Bureau's decision to hold its meetings behind closed doors. While decisions and rulings were generally published promptly, it is regrettable that the minutes of these meetings remained confidential. Key information was primarily shared with the public through press releases. Several restrictive legal interpretations made by the bureau were contested, including by Vote Correct. In one instance, the Central Electoral Bureaus for the presidential and parliamentary elections interpreted the same legal procedures differently for each election. A restrictive decision by the bureau regarding the extension of voting hours on Saturday and Sunday was overturned in court on Friday—after overseas voting had already begun. This unprecedented situation resulted in voting rules being changed mid-process, further complicating the elections.

The arbitrary rejection of a candidacy by the Constitutional Court, citing reasons seemingly applicable to other candidates who remained in the race, and without allowing the rejected candidate to present her arguments, negatively impacted the inclusiveness of the candidate registration process and set a dangerous precedent. Additionally, public trust in the process was diminished by the widespread perception that this action aimed to favor another candidate with a similar electoral message. Concerns were also raised about the authenticity of signature collections for certain candidates who neither organized visible campaigns to gather these signatures nor appeared to have significant public support. Vote Corect could not observe the verification process for signatures at the Central Electoral Bureau (BEC) because it was not public, reducing transparency.

The overlap of the two electoral campaigns significantly limited the visibility of the parliamentary election campaign. Similarly, the presidential campaign lacked dynamism, with few meaningful debates. Controversies regarding the integrity of several candidates overshadowed discussions about candidates' policies. Online promotion was heavily used, with unmarked propaganda actions—mainly on TikTok—becoming a notable feature. Public institutions failed to effectively counter campaigns that appeared to breach election and campaign financing laws. A lack of visible street-level campaigning during the official period, contrasted with significant expenditures on promotion outside this timeframe, reduced the effectiveness of campaign messaging and favored ruling parties. Excessively restrictive rules on street advertising (e.g., billboards) were noted, alongside numerous violations of campaign laws. Cases of continued campaigning on the Saturday before and even on election day were

reported. Authorities were slow to act in instances where high-profile public figures continued campaigning, though private individuals faced sanctions for social media posts expressing political preferences, raising concerns about voter intimidation and unjustified interventions.

Campaign financing transparency was hindered by the Permanent Electoral Authority's (AEP) failure to publish updates on candidates' revenues and expenditures after November 8, without explanation. Data eventually published on November 25 revealed that one candidate, Călin Georgescu, reported neither income nor expenses, which appears implausible and raises questions about the accuracy of the declaration. The AEP was urged to conduct an urgent investigation, and ANCOM was called upon to investigate the TikTok campaign linked to Georgescu in collaboration with the European Commission. The persistent use of public subsidies for media and propaganda gave an advantage to parties benefiting from state funds well before the campaign officially began. Additionally, undeclared campaign financing was identified, including cases of Facebook Ads run by pages affiliated with political parties and indirect promotion of candidates through influencers, podcasts, or artists, with unclear contractual arrangements for these services.

Election days proceeded in an orderly and generally calm atmosphere, with voter turnout at 52.55%. *Vot Corect* observers positively evaluated the process in 97% of polling stations during opening and voting, and in 95% during the vote count. However, observers reported crowding in 22% of polling stations visited, tension in 4%, and the presence of unauthorized individuals in 5%. Although intentional falsification of results was observed in only two cases during the vote count, the process took place in a tense atmosphere in 14% of observed polling stations, and polling station presidents encountered difficulties completing protocols in 11% of cases. Numerous calls to the election day call center revealed that some voters in Bucharest were improperly denied the right to vote in the local referendum due to residency restrictions.

Following election day, Expert Forum filed a complaint requesting that the AEP investigate the campaign financing of Călin Georgescu and provide citizens with the necessary information to do the same. Shortly after, the website www.expertforum.ro suffered DDoS (distributed denial-of-service) attacks, a serious incident that raised additional concerns.

Legislative framework

The legal framework for organizing presidential and parliamentary elections in Romania is highly complex, and scheduling the elections in consecutive weeks highlighted procedural contradictions between laws. Primary legislation (Law 208/2015, Law 370/2004, Law 3/2000, and Law 288/2015) was supplemented by Emergency Ordinance (OUG) 98/2024, along with numerous rulings and decisions issued by the two Central Electoral Bureaus (BEC) and the Permanent Electoral Authority (AEP). Positively, OUG 98/2024 introduced fewer significant amendments compared to OUG 21/2024, adopted for the June elections. However, the legislative framework has become increasingly cumbersome and difficult to follow, and the absence of a unified Electoral Code negatively impacted the electoral process.

The lack of clear legal provisions for organizing referendums made it necessary to rapidly amend the law approving OUG 29/2019 (which regulated the national referendum held alongside the 2019 presidential elections). Subsequently, additional regulations were issued

by the BEC very close to the election date. Even with these adjustments, the rules for conducting the referendum and the related campaign remained insufficiently clarified.

One of the negative effects of the electoral calendar with overlapping elections was the continuous issuance of a high number of decisions by the electoral bureaus, which reduced the public's ability to follow the activities of the two BECs and harmed the transparency of the electoral process.

Vot Corect criticized how several decisions were issued by the two BECs, particularly their restrictive interpretation of the law. For example, Decision 115D/30.10.2024 by the BEC for presidential elections limited voters who were in the polling station or waiting in line outside at 9:00 PM to casting their vote only on Sunday until 11:59 PM, excluding Friday and Saturday¹. Given that the law does not clearly distinguish between days, this decision was deemed restrictive. The High Court of Cassation and Justice (ÎCCJ) annulled the decision on November 22, after the first voting day had already begun. Subsequently, the BEC issued a new decision confirming that voting hours could be extended.

The electoral administration

The Permanent Electoral Authority (AEP), the Central Electoral Bureau (BEC), and lower-level electoral administration generally managed the technical aspects of the process efficiently. However, the demanding electoral schedules, numerous procedures, and the simultaneous operation of two Central Electoral Bureaus and two intermediate-level bureaus in each county—partially sharing membership - placed significant strain on the electoral administration's activities.

The formation of electoral bureaus was amended by Emergency Ordinance (OUG) 98/2024 without affecting their political composition. The ordinance established that presidents and deputy presidents of polling station electoral bureaus (BESV) selected for the presidential elections would also serve in the parliamentary elections. Political parties were allowed to nominate the same representatives for both elections. However, a potential risk is that these individuals might struggle to fulfill their responsibilities effectively across all three election weekends.

Regarding the establishment of polling stations abroad for the presidential elections, the procedure for appointing political party representatives was determined by a decision of the electoral bureau for the foreign constituency, which involved a lottery to determine party order. PNL and AUR were drawn for the 8th and 9th positions, respectively, which reduced their representation in some polling stations, despite being parliamentary parties with nominated candidates. Conversely, some eligible parties could not designate representatives, complicating the completion of polling station staffing. The primary legislation should provide clearer criteria for filling these positions. In many polling stations, the number of electoral bureau members was increased on November 21 and 22.

Electoral bureau meetings are not public, and meeting minutes are not published. Vot Corect requested permission to observe these meetings but was denied by both BECs. Publishing

¹ The decision has been contested in court by the Union Save Romania (USR)

meeting materials online does not sufficiently ensure transparency, as it fails to provide insight into the dynamics of the BECs' operations and decision-making processes.

BEC rulings and decisions were generally published promptly on their websites. However, draft decisions were not published in advance. Meetings sometimes held on the same day, combined with the high volume of published documents, made the monitoring process significantly more challenging.

The Central Electoral Bureaus declined to meet with *Vot Corect* representatives, citing that the "necessity" for such meeting was not identified. This refusal reflects a lack of openness and transparency from the two institutions. In contrast, *Vot Corect* representatives were welcomed by officials from the AEP, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Electoral Bureau for Polling Stations Abroad (No. 48), and Romanian Post (Stamp Factory), where they observed the processing of postal votes at the sole office in Romania. The requested information was provided during these meetings. Additionally, *Vot Corect* reached out to several constituency bureaus in Bucharest and Ilfov—most citing the demanding electoral calendar or lack of time—and political parties. Ahead of the parliamentary elections and the second round of the presidential election, the organization plans to continue requesting meetings with other election-related institutions and political actors.

Candidates' registration

According to the law, each candidacy must be supported by a list of 200,000 signatures, representing more than 1% of registered voters. This high threshold has been criticized by *Vot Corect* member organizations in previous elections. The fact that some candidates managed to enter the race without conducting any visible signature collection campaigns raises questions about the authenticity of the submitted signatures. *Vot Corect* was unable to observe the verification procedure for these signatures despite requesting access from the Central Electoral Bureau (BEC). On a positive note, both BECs issued decisions outlining the procedures for validating candidacy files and verifying signatures.

For the presidential elections, 14 candidates were registered, of whom 10 were supported by political parties, and four were independents. The arbitrary rejection of Diana Șoșoacă's candidacy by the Constitutional Court, for reasons seemingly applicable to other candidates who remained in the race, without allowing her to present her arguments, negatively impacted the inclusivity of the candidate registration process and set a dangerous precedent. Moreover, public trust in the process was further eroded by the widespread perception that this action was intended to favor another candidate with a similar electoral message.

Electoral campaign

The presidential campaign, though marked by a lack of authentic debate on candidates' political programs, overshadowed the parliamentary campaign, as has happened in past years when the two elections coincided. Delaying the election dates by just one week failed to separate the two campaigns and instead created the potential for voters' decisions in one election to influence the outcome of the other.

While debates were organized for the presidential elections, the format of many of them did not allow for meaningful discussions among candidates. Selective participation in debates prevented voters from witnessing real confrontations, with few exceptions. Many of these programs featured only a handful of candidates or even just one, failing to reflect the true nature of the political competition. For example, the candidates nominated by the PNL and PSD declined to participate in a televised debate organized on the Monday before the elections, opting instead to appear on a different program airing simultaneously on another channel. Scandals involving allegations about the integrity of candidates such as Mircea Geoană, Marcel Ciolacu, Nicolae Ciucă, and George Simion played a significant role in the campaign, overshadowing constructive debates. Although the existence of debates is a positive development (compared to their absence in 2019), their format and relevance need substantial improvement.

In general, the media's obligation to include electoral debates or informational programs is fulfilled in a formalistic manner, avoiding meaningful polemics or authentic discussions on policies and programs. In their current format, these programs represent a waste of resources.

During the mandatory campaign silence period, instances of continued campaigning were observed among several candidates, including Nicolae Ciucă and George Simion. For instance, a promotional song for Ciucă was launched on November 23². Authorities failed to act promptly against public figures with large audiences who continued campaigning but imposed sanctions on private individuals for social media posts expressing political preferences. These disproportionate interventions risk intimidating voters and lack justification.

Many presidential candidates appeared on podcasts and similar online shows even before their official registration, with most avoiding debates or confrontations. These appearances often resembled platforms for delivering electoral messages rather than fostering genuine dialogue about political programs.

Public campaigning remains limited and ineffective. Billboard advertising offers little visibility for candidates, and the rules on placement and use were frequently violated. Numerous cases were observed where parliamentary and presidential campaign posters were mixed, or candidates exceeded the permitted number of materials.

The significant use of outdoor promotional materials during the pre-campaign period, combined with the lack of visibility during the official campaign, continues to undermine transparency in campaign spending and fairness in the electoral process. These regulations favor well-funded parties, particularly those benefiting from public subsidies, at the expense of smaller parties reliant on private financing.

The frequent publication of opinion polls with inconsistent and sometimes implausible results suggests attempts to manipulate voters. A serious post-campaign discussion among polling practitioners is necessary to draw conclusions, improve future methodologies, and address the presence of unprofessional practices, as has been done in other countries.

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFnCWQKoytg&ab_channel=GHEBOAS%C4%82

The financing of electoral campaigns

The financing of the two electoral campaigns was conducted separately for the two types of elections, following mostly common rules regulated by Law 334/2006. AEP published two guides on electoral campaign financing, which were subjected to public debate and organized several training seminars for the financial agents of the parties. EFOR participated in the debate and submitted comments; none of these were included in the final version of the guides.

AEP publicly committed to publishing data regarding the income and expenses of electoral competitors, information that was made available during the first two weeks of the presidential campaign and the first week of the parliamentary campaign. However, this data was not published between November 8 and 25³, for reasons that were not communicated. EFOR requested AEP to publish this data consistently to ensure the transparency of the electoral process. AEP's decision shows a lack of transparency and raises questions regarding the reasons for such a measure.

Six electoral competitors, including three independents, declared contributions of 8.4 million lei. Călin Georgescu did not declare any income. From transfers, the parties declared 101 million lei by November 22, 2024, with 66 million declared by PSD.

In total, the competitors spent 88 million lei, with PSD registering invoices of 49 million lei, PNL 14.3 million lei, AUR 4.3 million lei, Mircea Geoană 6.6 million lei, and USR 10.5 million lei. Călin Georgescu did not declare any expenses. By category, **the largest expenses were for online (50%)**, radio/TV/print media (21%), and print (7%). In the "other" category (19%), various services were included, such as clothing for volunteers, consultancy, and others.

EFOR filed a complaint with the Permanent Electoral Authority requesting an investigation into how independent candidate Călin Georgescu financed his campaign, as the lack of reported income and expenses is implausible, especially considering certain statements that indicate how his campaign was supported.⁴

Although reports are made for contracts for services concluded by the parties, there are ways in which the parties have circumvented the campaign financing rules. One of these methods is through third parties masked as publication productions, which are later promoted via Facebook Ads. In the case of AUR, several pages were identified that heavily promoted the candidates. For example, the page 60m.ro spent 20,000 euros in the last month for the benefit of the AUR candidate without marking the ad. Similar expenses were found on other pages associated with AUR. In the case of candidate Călin Georgescu, an intense promotion campaign on TikTok was observed; even the BEC decided to remove some of his materials. TikTok, a less transparent platform when it comes to marking political advertising, was an important communication channel for the main candidates. Those of PNL and AUR were promoted by showbiz artists, and given that creating materials in-house is not permitted, the question arises as to how these materials were made and whether they were paid for.

³ <https://expertforum.ro/finantarea-campaniei-prezidentiale-25nov/>

⁴ <https://expertforum.ro/sesizare-aep-finantare-calin-georgescu/>

In the context where the legality of campaign financing is verified based on documents submitted by candidates, doubts may arise regarding the efficiency and integrity of the campaign financing control in the absence of proactive investigations by AEP.

Election monitoring

The Permanent Electoral Authority accredited 73 civil society organizations (five of which are members of the Vot Corect coalition) and international observers from 23 organizations for the observation of the presidential elections. The elections were not observed by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Unlike other elections, AEP did not publish the list of accreditations as they were issued or by the deadline for their issuance (November 15), but only two days before the election.

The Vot Corect member organizations accredited nearly 600 observers in the country and abroad. During the election days (November 22-24), Expert Forum organized an assistance center for voters and observers in Bucharest, consisting of the toll-free service 0800 460 002, where over 400 reports and inquiries related to electoral procedures were registered. On the votcorect.ro platform, over 1000 reports were registered from the beginning of the electoral campaign until the day this report was published.

The observers accredited by Vot Corect member organizations transmitted information from over 650 polling stations through the Vote Monitor application. For the first time, the Vote Monitor application included, in addition to the observation forms for accredited observers, the possibility for the general public to report irregularities related to the elections.

The distribution of observers across the country also depended on their preferences, which means the statistical relevance of the sample of observed polling stations may have been affected by the fact that in some counties, the number of observers was higher than in others.

The election day

The election days took place in an orderly manner and in a generally calm atmosphere, with voter turnout reported by the AEP at 52.55%⁵.

The opening of polling stations was assessed as good or very good in nearly 97% of the more than 200 polling stations observed, according to data transmitted by observers through the Vote Monitor application. In eight cases (4% of the observed stations), unauthorized individuals were present at the polling stations during the opening, and in three cases, individuals outside the electoral bureau interfered with the opening process.

The voting process was evaluated positively by observers in 97% of the more than 600 polling stations visited by Vot Corect observers. Some of the issues reported by observers included tense atmospheres near polling stations (4% of the stations visited) or inside the stations (4%), overcrowding (22%), and the presence of unauthorized persons (5%). Regarding procedures, observers noted that electoral bureaus at some polling stations did not allow

⁵ At the local referendum that took place in Bucharest at the same time as the first round of the Presidential Election, the turnout was 40.97%.

voters with a residence or domicile in a different locality to vote in a concerning 12.5% of the stations, and in 11% of the 176 stations observed in Bucharest, voters with domicile in another locality were allowed to vote in the local referendum. Ballots were not properly sealed in 2.5% of the observed stations. Observers reported that voter secrecy was respected in 98% of the observed stations, and the SIMPV functioned properly in over 99% of cases. As in previous elections, Vot Corect observers noted that 25% of the stations visited were not accessible to people with disabilities.

Numerous calls received at the call center organized on election day revealed that some voters were abusively denied the right to vote in the referendum based on their residence visa. Following a request from EFOR, the BEC issued a circular reminding the chairs of the electoral bureaus to respect the legislation regarding this issue.⁶

The vote abroad was efficiently organized, with extended options for exercising the right to vote. For these elections, 950 polling stations were organized, the highest number so far, which is a positive aspect.

The processing of absentee ballots was well-organized, despite a limited number of complaints regarding the lack of electoral materials. The number of complaints related to missing electoral materials was low. For both types of elections, the number of people who registered to vote decreased significantly compared to 2019. Vot Corect observed the opening of absentee voting envelopes at the electoral office, where the process went smoothly and normally.

The counting of votes was evaluated as good or very good in 95% of the more than 150 stations observed. However, observers reported that procedures were not always followed, although not with the intent to alter the results: in 40% of the visited stations, members of the electoral bureaus signed blank forms, in 20% of cases, the chairs of the electoral bureaus did not announce each vote aloud, and in nearly 18% of cases, the validity of contested votes was not decided by vote. The chairs of 11% of the observed stations had difficulty completing the records, and the counting took place in a tense atmosphere in nearly 14% of the cases reported. In 4% of cases, not all members of the electoral bureau had the opportunity to examine the ballots. There were reports of potential falsification in two cases.

In the vast majority of the visited stations, observers were well-received, and the requested information was provided. The transparency of the process was enhanced by the fact that accredited observers from other organizations were present in the stations observed by Vot Corect during the opening (12.8%), during voting (14.6%), and during the vote counting (18.29%). However, there were also reports of cases where some observers accredited by civil organizations presented themselves as representing political parties and even cases where observers did not know the names of the organizations that accredited them.

For the first time in these elections, the Permanent Electoral Authority published preliminary results based on data transmitted by the polling stations through SIMPV in an aggregated format, allowing the viewing of the candidates' rankings or, in the case of the local referendum in Bucharest, the referendum options. This initiative is welcome and contributes to

⁶ <https://expertforum.ro/am-solicitat-bec-sa-transmita-birourilor-electorale-din-bucuresti-o-circulara-cu-privire-la-votul-la-referendum-cu-resedinta/>

transparency. However, the fact that the total results are presented in such a way that it could be understood they are centralized only from stations within the country has the potential to mislead the public, and some important indicators could be included, such as the number of valid votes and the number of invalid votes. On a positive note, tables with results at the polling station level were made available as the stations reported their results; it is important for this practice to continue, to ensure the verification of vote centralization by civil society organizations and all interested parties.

The final results indicated that none of the candidates received the necessary number of votes to be elected in the first round of voting. The two candidates who qualified for the second round are Călin Georgescu, an independent candidate, and Elena Lasconi, nominated by USR. In the case of the former, a candidate with an ultranationalist, anti-Western, and pro-Russian message, his victory was surprising even for most political actors, as his visibility in the mainstream electoral landscape was very low, and his message was mainly promoted on social media, apparently through inauthentic content generated by programs that mimic human behavior online.

The day after the election, the leaders of PSD and PNL, who were also presidential candidates, resigned from their respective party leadership positions. The candidate nominated by PSD, who obtained a vote count very close to the second place, announced that he would not contest the result.