

Authorities have cleared a dozen candidates for the May election — and rejected a dozen others. Meet the runners and riders here.

Romania is making a second attempt at choosing a new president after the country's top court canceled last year's election.

Concerns had flared ahead of the deciding December ballot that the frontrunner, ultranationalist Călin Georgescu, had benefited from undisclosed campaign funding and online promotion that may have been part of a Russian influence operation.

That triggered a re-do election — in a country of 19 million people that is an EU and NATO member and borders Ukraine — which is being closely watched in Brussels and Washington.

A win for a far-right candidate this May could mean more trouble for the Brussels establishment and could push Romania into closer alignment with U.S. President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" movement.

Georgescu is one of a dozen candidates who have been banned from running by Romanian authorities. In his case it was because he failed to comply with the rules during the previous election.

Other candidates were rejected for not meeting the necessary threshold of 200,000 signatures in support of their candidacies, or for other technical reasons. Romania's election authorities also prohibited far-right European Parliament member Diana Șoșoacă from running, flagging a similar decision by the Constitutional Court from last year, due to the threat she would pose to the country's position in the EU and NATO.

The big question now is whether any of the candidates in the race will manage to attract Georgescu's voters, with more than one jockeying to do so.

The nearly dozen candidates include a former spy, an actress, an ex-prime minister and a major city mayor.

We introduce them all here:

The candidates are:

1. Nicușor Dan,
2. Crin Antonescu,
3. Victor Ponta,
4. Elena Lasconi,

5. George Simion,
6. Lavinia Șandru,
7. Cristian Terheș,
8. Silviu Predoiu,
9. John Ion Banu,
10. Daniel Funeriu,
11. Sebastian Popescu

Nicușor Dan

Nicușor Dan is an independent candidate who has been the mayor of Bucharest, Romania's capital, since 2020.

A mathematician, he moved into activism and politics in the late 1990s upon his return from Paris, where he had completed his doctoral studies. His activism, he said, aimed to counter the “real estate mafia” in an effort to preserve green spaces and heritage sites in Bucharest.

In 2015 he founded the Save Bucharest Union, a political party that later became the Save Romania Union (USR), shifting its focus from the local to the national arena.

Dan resigned from the party in 2017 after a conflict over whether the Romanian constitution should reject gay marriages. Dan didn't want the party to take a position, but USR members voted to oppose allowing the constitution to restrict marriage to heterosexual couples.

Crin Antonescu

Crin Antonescu is running as the joint candidate of Romania's mainstream parties: the Social Democrats (PSD), the National Liberals (PNL) and the Hungarian minority party (UDMR).

A former PNL leader, Antonescu is best known for his stint as interim president a dozen years ago after the Romanian parliament suspended then-President Traian Băsescu from office.

An effort to impeach Băsescu later failed, leaving Antonescu with a tarnished image.

He has held no political office over the past decade.

Victor Ponta

Victor Ponta served as prime minister for Romania's Social Democrats from 2012 to 2015, when he resigned amid street protests over a nightclub fire that killed 64 people and brought wider public dissatisfaction to a head.

He later founded his own party, but failed to gain much traction. Prosecutors investigated Ponta over several corruption charges but cleared him in 2018.

He has sought to reinvent himself politically and is now running as an independent, hoping to attract Georgescu's voters.

Elena Lasconi

Elena Lasconi is an opposition politician running for president as the candidate of the Save Romania Union party, which she leads.

Lasconi came second in the annulled first round of Romania's presidential race and was set to face Georgescu in a December runoff before the authorities intervened.

She entered politics in 2020, successfully running for mayor in Câmpulung Muscel, a small town close to Bucharest, as a USR candidate.

The 52-year-old had a decades-long career in journalism.

George Simion

George Simion is the leader of Romania's second-largest party in the parliament, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) and the hard-right's man in the race.

He secured the spot after the withdrawal of another hard-right candidate, Anamaria Gavrila, with whom he had agreed in advance that one would pull out if both were approved as candidates by the election authorities.

The 38-year-old has campaigned for the unification of Moldova and Romania, and was banned from entering Moldova on several occasions.

He was also banned from entering Ukraine over his "systematic anti-Ukrainian activities," according to the Ukrainian Security Service.

Lavinia Șandru

Lavinia Șandru was a member of Romania's lower house of parliament between 2004 and 2008. A journalist and actress, she has belonged to several parties including the former Democratic

Party. She is now a member of the Social Liberal Humanist Party, a new iteration of a party founded decades ago by Dan Voiculescu, a Romanian media mogul who spent seven years in prison for corruption.

Șandru is known for her high-profile previous marriage to Darius Vâlcov, a former Social Democrat finance minister who's serving a six-year jail sentence for money laundering and influence peddling. Șandru and Vâlcov divorced in 2016.

Cristian Terheș

Cristian Terheș is a member of the European Parliament from the European Conservatives and Reformists Group. He's a deputy chair of the Parliament's committee on budgetary control.

A former priest, Terheș described transgender women as "male perverts" in a speech in the Parliament in 2023. He also challenged a 2020 spring lockdown by the Romanian government in response to the Covid-19 pandemic to the European Court of Human Rights, but the court turned down the case.

He has opposed vaccine mandates that restricted people's access to public spaces if they were not immunized against Covid-19, and called for European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to resign over her dealings with pharma company Pfizer in purchasing jobs.

Silviu Predoiu

Silviu Predoiu is a Romanian general and a long-term intelligence officer who served several stints as the interim director of Romania's external intelligence service.

His run is supported by the National Action League, a small center-right party.

Predoiu worked for Romania's feared Securitate secret police during the pre-1989 communist era, but didn't violate anyone's fundamental rights, according to Romania's National Council for the Study of Security archives. Those found to have done so are typically barred from running for public office.

John Ion Banu

John Ion Banu is a mechanical engineer who emigrated to the United States in 1985, where he founded the Romanian-American League.

In a 2017 interview he said he had voted for Donald Trump due to his promise to control America's borders. He also said he would introduce the death penalty in Romania for corruption and murder, and supported giving Romanians the right to bear arms.

“I have five guns at home in Florida,” he said in the interview. “We don’t carry them around in plain sight, we don’t show them off, but we know we can rely on them if needed.”

The Romanian Electoral Bureau validated his candidacy but notified prosecutors that it suspected some of the signatures Banu submitted to support his run were fake.

Romanian law requires presidential candidates to submit a list of 200,000 signatures by citizens along with their personal details to be able to run.

Daniel Funeriu

Daniel Funeriu is a former center-right education minister and a former member of the European Parliament.

He has a PhD in chemistry and has worked in France, the United States, Japan and Germany.

Sebastian Popescu

Sebastian Popescu is a veterinarian who has founded two news websites and created the New Romania Party.

Popescu is running on reforming Romania’s health system, improving education in the country and promoting sustainable economic development.

Again, the Romanian Electoral Bureau validated his candidacy but notified prosecutors that some of the signatures Popescu submitted in support of his run may have been falsified.