



RELEASE DATE
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ELECTORAL VULNERABILITY INDEX 2026-2027

COUNTRY ANALYSIS

BULGARIA

EVI RISK INDEX: 9.6 | PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF ANY ELECTORAL VIOLENCE: 18.7%
REGIONAL RISK INDEX BASELINE (EU/EEA AND EU CANDIDATES, EXCL. COUNTRY): 9.4



PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: EXPECTED BY LATE 2026

BACKGROUND

Bulgaria's EVI Risk Index of 9.6 is close to the country-excluded EU/EEA and EU-candidate Risk Index baseline, indicating a relatively low risk of electoral violence compared with most of the ten selected cases. The score reflects structural concerns rather than acute conflict risk. Bulgaria is a consolidated electoral democracy in formal terms, a member of the European Union and NATO, and has a long record of elections without large-scale violence. Its inclusion in this Top 10 should therefore be read as comparative rather than alarming: the main concern is democratic resilience, institutional trust and information integrity, not a high probability of large-scale physical violence.

However, the country has experienced prolonged political instability, repeated parliamentary elections, corruption allegations, institutional distrust and polarization over foreign policy and rule-of-law reform. Since 2021, cycles of snap elections and fragile coalitions have contributed to voter fatigue. The immediate context changed in 2026 after former president Rumen Radev resigned from the presidency, led Progressive Bulgaria to a parliamentary victory and returned to executive power as prime minister, while Iliana Iotova assumed the presidency. This has reduced some government-formation uncertainty but has also concentrated attention on institutional balance, presidential succession and geopolitical orientation.

Vote buying and coercive mobilization have been recurrent issues, especially in economically marginalized communities, including Roma communities. These practices are generally not expected to generate national-scale violence, but they can undermine legitimacy and contribute to local confrontation.

Bulgaria's political debate is also shaped by disinformation and external influence, particularly pro-Russian narratives around the war in Ukraine, EU policy, NATO commitments and national sovereignty. Such narratives can intensify polarization even when physical violence remains limited.

Although Bulgaria's risk of physical electoral violence is low, the political significance of elections has become more consequential because repeated failures in government formation and the 2026 political realignment have made each vote part of a longer legitimacy debate. Citizens may not fear polling-day violence, but many remain concerned about whether institutions can deliver accountable government, credible anti-corruption reform and a stable European orientation. This distinction is important for prevention: the main challenge is democratic resilience rather than immediate security breakdown.

UPCOMING ELECTIONS

Presidential elections are expected by late 2026, with the official date to be confirmed by the competent authorities. The office of the president is elected through a two-round system. If no candidate wins a majority in the first round, or if legal turnout requirements are not met, a runoff is held between the two leading candidates. The presidential office has limited executive powers compared with the government, but it carries significant symbolic weight and can influence foreign-policy narratives, caretaker-government politics and institutional legitimacy. The election will take place after a major shift in which Radev moved from the presidency into party leadership and then the premiership, making the contest relevant for institutional balance.

The political field remains fragmented despite the formation of a new government. The campaign may focus on corruption, judicial reform, economic pressures, relations with Russia, EU and NATO commitments, defense spending, and the social effects of euro adoption. In a context of repeated elections and a recent parliamentary realignment, citizens may approach the vote with both fatigue and heightened concern over geopolitical direction.

The electoral administration is experienced but continues to face scrutiny over machine voting, paper ballots, counting procedures, media coverage and local-level pressure. Allegations of vote buying can become especially salient in close contests or in municipalities where political brokers have strong influence.

The most likely risks are localized intimidation, disinformation-driven tensions and isolated clashes involving party activists or far-right groups. National-scale electoral violence remains unlikely, but erosion of confidence in the electoral process could reinforce democratic backsliding and make future contests more confrontational.

The presidential campaign may also become a test of institutional balance after the 2026 transition from presidential leadership to executive-party leadership around Radev. While the presidency is not the center of executive government, it can influence caretaker arrangements, public rhetoric and foreign-policy positioning. In a polarized environment, presidential candidates may use the office's symbolic authority to frame broader disputes over sovereignty, Europe and reform.

POTENTIAL DRIVERS OF CONFLICT

According to the Electoral Vulnerability Index (EVI), these are the factors that contribute most to the increased potential for violence:

Disinformation and geopolitical polarization: Pro-Russian and anti-Western narratives can frame the election as a civilizational choice. This may increase hostility toward journalists, civil society and minority communities, especially online.

Vote buying and local coercion: Marginalized communities may be targeted by brokers or local power networks. Even if violence is limited, these practices undermine confidence and can produce localized intimidation.

POTENTIAL DRIVERS OF CONFLICT, CONT.

Institutional distrust and electoral fatigue: Repeated elections weakened citizens' belief that voting produces stable government, even if the 2026 parliamentary outcome reduced immediate coalition uncertainty. Low trust may make fraud claims, corruption allegations or institutional-balance disputes more potent if the presidential race is close.

Far-right mobilization: Radical groups may exploit migration, minority rights, war-related narratives or economic grievances. The risk is more likely to involve harassment, rallies or isolated incidents than organized national violence.

Minority-targeted rhetoric: Campaign narratives that link Roma communities, migration or social assistance to electoral manipulation could produce harassment or localized intimidation. Preventing scapegoating is relevant even in a low-violence environment.

Administrative credibility: Even routine technical disputes can become politically charged after years of repeated elections. Rapid, transparent correction of errors is therefore important to prevent disproportionate escalation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION

- Authorities should continue improving transparency around voting technology, counting procedures, campaign finance and complaints. Clear communication can prevent technical issues from becoming political crises.

RULE OF LAW AND ANTI-CORRUPTION

- Longer-term prevention requires credible judicial and anti-corruption reforms. Reducing perceived state capture would address one of the main sources of democratic distrust.

NATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA

- Civil society and media should monitor vote buying, disinformation and harassment of vulnerable communities. Fact-checking should be linked to civic education rather than only reactive debunking.

LOCAL PARTIES

- Parties and candidates should adopt and respect codes of conduct prohibiting inflammatory rhetoric, intimidation and misuse of administrative resources.

LOCAL AUTHORITY

- Local administrations should cooperate with law enforcement and civil society to identify communities vulnerable to vote buying or intimidation. Prevention should focus on transparency, social trust and rapid complaint handling rather than heavy security presence.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Central Election Commission of Bulgaria; Constitution of Bulgaria; OSCE/ODIHR election observation reports; European Commission Rule of Law Report; Freedom House; V-Dem country data; Reuters; Balkan Insight; Politico Europe.