

Romania's ruling coalition, the Social Liberal Union (USL), disbanded in February 2014 after Prime Minister Victor Ponta of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) rejected attempts by the National Liberal Party (PNL) to replace several cabinet ministers. The PNL left the government, and a new cabinet consisting of the PSD, the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), and two small parties—the Conservative Party (PC) and the National Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR)—took office in March.

The shifting political alliances were seen as part of preparations for the November presidential election, which pitted Ponta against Klaus Iohannis, leader of the PNL and joint candidate of that party and the center-right Democratic Liberal Party (PDL). Iohannis, running on a reformist, anticorruption platform, won a surprise victory in the runoff and took office in December. Ponta reorganized his cabinet after losing the support of two parties in Parliament.

A Constitutional Court ruling and the political changes ahead of the election delayed a package of draft constitutional amendments. The proposals include a reduction of presidential powers, changes to the size of Parliament, and a reorganization of the country's administrative divisions.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 34 / 40 (-1) [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12 (-1)

The president is directly elected for up to two five-year terms and appoints the prime minister with the approval of Parliament. Members of the bicameral Parliament, consisting of the 176-seat Senate (upper house) and the 412-seat Chamber of Deputies (lower house), are elected for four-year terms. Elections since 1991 have been considered generally free and fair.

In the 2012 parliamentary elections, the USL took 273 of 412 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 122 of 176 seats in the Senate. The opposition PDL and its Right Romania Alliance placed a distant second with 56 lower house seats and 24 upper house seats, followed by the People's Party–Dan Diaconescu with 47 and 21, the UDMR with 18 and 9, and various national minority representatives with a total of 18 seats in the lower house. International observers assessed the elections positively.

The PSD led the voting for Romania's 32 European Parliament (EP) seats in May 2014 amid 32 percent turnout, capturing 16 seats in combination with smaller coalition partners. The PNL followed with six seats, the PDL won five, the UDMR and the Popular Movement Party each took two, and an independent secured the remaining seat.

In the November presidential election, Ponta, one of 14 candidates, won 40.3 percent of the vote in the first round, followed by Iohannis with 30.4 percent. However, Ponta's personal attacks on his opponent frustrated voters, as did extensive polling problems for Romanians living abroad, many of whom were unable to vote due to long lines and a shortage of official stamps to mark ballots. Voters abroad overwhelmingly supported Iohannis, and many saw the bottlenecks as an attempt to limit their participation. Despite an outcry, Foreign Minister Titus Corlatean refused to increase the number of polling sites. He resigned under pressure on November 10, as did his successor a week later. The number of

ballots cast abroad more than doubled in the runoff, but thousands were again unable to vote, leading to clashes with local police in Paris, London, and Turin. Domestic turnout also surged in the second round, and Iohannis won with 54.4 percent.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 14 / 16

Romania's unfettered multiparty system features vigorous competition between rival blocs. No single force has been able to dominate both the executive and legislative branches in recent years. Some parties display little ideological consistency and tend to seek coalitions that will advance their leaders' personal or business interests. Critics noted that many of the 2014 EP candidates were relatives or personal associates of Romania's political elite. The entire PNL leadership resigned following the party's poor showing in those elections.

The constitution grants one lower house seat to each national minority whose representative party or organization fails to win any seats under the normal rules, and 18 such seats were allotted in 2012. The UDMR represents ethnic Hungarians. It has lobbied for the creation of an autonomous region for the minority's Szekler subgroup as part of the constitutional reform. The PSD in 2014 said it opposed the plan, and the UDMR quit the PSD-led governing coalition in November. Iohannis, an ethnic German and a Lutheran, became the country's first president from either minority.

Roma, who make up over 3 percent of the population, are underrepresented in politics, though three Romany candidates won seats in Parliament in 2012, and a Romany PSD candidate won an EP seat in 2014.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12

Romania, which joined the European Union (EU) in 2007, has struggled to meet the bloc's anticorruption requirements amid resistance from much of the political class. It was ranked 69 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index. A European Commission report released in July 2014 found that Romania was the source of the second-highest number of attempts to defraud the EU in 2013, after Italy.

However, the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) increased its growing record of charges and convictions against high-ranking officials from across the political spectrum during 2014. New arrests included Mircea Băsescu, brother of outgoing president Traian Băsescu, who was held in June for allegedly taking a bribe from an organized crime figure, and Bacau mayor Romeo Stavarache, who was detained in July for allegedly accepting bribes in exchange for public contracts. Many other investigations involving high-ranking politicians were under way at year's end. The DNA reported in June that some 850 people had been convicted over the previous 12 months, including 4 ministers or former ministers, 5 lawmakers, 11 mayors, and 5 judges. In January, former prime minister Adrian Năstase of the PSD was sentenced to four years in prison for bribery. He was released in August for good conduct under a law allowing sentence reductions for inmates over the age of 60. Also in August, an appellate court sentenced politician and media mogul Dan Voiculescu to 10 years in prison over a corrupt land deal.

In 2013, the lower house passed a bill that would have exempted many national and local elected officials, including the president and legislators, from most corruption charges in the criminal code. The Constitutional Court struck down the measure in January 2014.

Civil Liberties: 49 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

The constitution protects freedom of the press, and the media environment is pluralistic. The government does not interfere with internet access. However, poor economic conditions have led some foreign media companies to sell their Romanian assets, leaving a larger share of important outlets in the hands of wealthy Romanian business figures, who typically use them to advance their political and economic interests. Many outlets have also been forced to close, cut staff, or change to more entertainment-based formats, though signs of a recovery in the advertising market were reported in 2014. Financially hobbled public media remain dependent on the state budget and vulnerable to political influence. A 2013 Constitutional Court ruling created ambiguity about defamation, raising the possibility that it could be treated as a criminal offense.

Religious freedom is generally respected, but the Romanian Orthodox Church remains dominant and politically powerful. The government formally recognizes 18 religions, each of which is eligible for proportional state support. The Orthodox Church accounts for about 85 percent of the population, meaning it receives the bulk of state funds. Religious minorities report discrimination by some local officials and hostility from Orthodox priests.

The government does not restrict academic freedom, though the education system is weakened by widespread corruption. Private discussion is unrestricted.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

The constitution guarantees freedoms of assembly and association, and the government respects these rights in practice. In 2014, protests were held on issues including shale-gas exploration and calls for a Szekler autonomous region. After pro-Szekler demonstrators scuffled with police at a March event attended by Hungarian far-right figures, Romania imposed a travel ban on a number of Hungarian citizens belonging to such groups.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate freely and have increasing influence, though they suffer from funding shortages, often rely on foreign donors, and sometimes face hostility from politicians. Workers have the right to form unions and a limited right to strike, but in practice many employers work against unions, and enforcement of union and labor protections is weak.

F. Rule of Law: 12 / 16

The country's courts continue to suffer from chronic problems such as corruption, political influence, staffing shortages, and inefficient resource allocation. The EU praised the independence of the Constitutional Court in January 2014, but political and media pressure on the judiciary persisted in cases against powerful defendants. Conditions in prisons remain poor, though overcrowding has eased in recent years.

In 2014, the courts began proceedings against former commanders of communist-era prison camps for their role in the deaths of hundreds of political prisoners. The prosecutions were the first of their kind in postcommunist Romania.

Roma, people with disabilities, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people, and HIV-positive children and adults face discrimination in education, employment, and other areas. The country's antidiscrimination council fined Băsescu 600 lei (\$180) in February 2014 for racist remarks made in 2010—the first such penalty against a sitting president in Romania.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 12 / 16

Romanians face no significant restrictions on freedom of movement, whether for internal or external travel. Citizens are also free to change residence and employment, though bribery can play a role in access to higher education.

A large proportion of business activity in Romania takes place in the so-called gray economy and is exposed to criminal influences and practices. This unofficial, untaxed sector accounted for about 28 percent of gross domestic product in 2013, according to the Council of Europe.

The constitution guarantees women equal rights, but gender discrimination is a problem. Women hold less than 12 percent of the seats in Parliament. A 2012 legal amendment provided for restraining orders in domestic violence cases, which are rarely prosecuted. Romany community leaders agreed in March 2014 to ban marriages of children under age 16, an illegal practice that has persisted among some minority groups. Trafficking of women and girls for forced prostitution remains a major concern, as does trafficking of children for forced begging.

Same-sex marriage is not permitted, and proposed constitutional amendments have included a provision that would define marriage to exclude same-sex relationships.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)