

# Czech Presidential Election 2023

16 January 2023

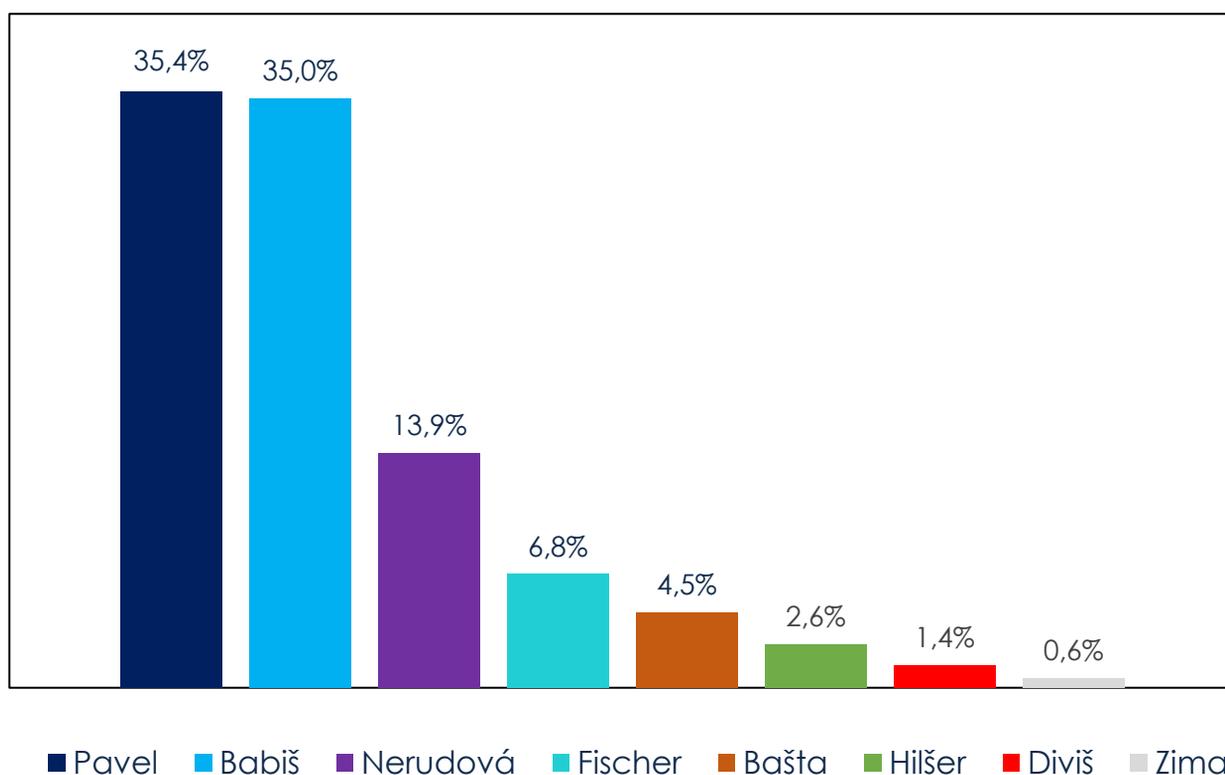
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## Results of the 1<sup>st</sup> round of the election

Last weekend the first round of the presidential elections took place in the Czech Republic, with a very high voter turnout of 68.23%. Since none of the 8 candidates won a majority of the total votes (over 50%), the two most successful candidates, Petr Pavel and Andrej Babiš, will advance to the second round. The success of Petr Pavel and Andrej Babiš is no surprise and it is in line with opinion polls published prior to the first round.

However, the result of the candidate at the third-place, Danuše Nerudová, who was according to the pre-election polls one of the front-runners, must be disappointing. Only 14% of the votes represents a significant drop compared to initial expectations. As recently as December 2022, polls attributed her 28% of the votes. Her reputation was, however, damaged at the end of the campaign mainly by poor communication about the scandal concerning suspicious issuance of diplomas at Mendel University under her leadership.

### Results of the 1<sup>st</sup> round



Although it may seem that both Petr Pavel and Andrej Babiš are entering the second round as evenly matched opponents, given that the difference in the number of votes between them is very close, with only 23 000 votes separating them, Petr Pavel is in a better starting position before the second round.

Shortly after the results of the first round were announced, majority of the remaining candidates (Nerudová, Fischer, Hilšer, Diviš) expressed their support for Petr Pavel. Unlike Andrej Babiš, Petr Pavel can thus more easily attract more voters before the second round as it can be expected that some of the voters of the unsuccessful candidates will support him. Given the record-high turnout, Babiš cannot rely too much on mobilising voters who did not take part in the first round, nor can he hope that voters of Danuše Nerudová, Pavel Fischer or Marek Hilšer will support him.

Andrej Babiš will therefore have to try to demobilise Petr Pavel's voters and discourage the voters of the other candidates in the first round from taking part in the elections and giving Petr Pavel their vote. It can, therefore, be assumed that the Czech Republic will be facing a very negative campaign over the coming weeks, which may further deepen the polarisation of Czech society.

The second round of the election of the President of the Czech Republic is scheduled for 27 and 28 January with the current President Miloš Zeman's second term ending on 8 March 2023.



## The role of the President in the Czech political system

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy; therefore, the President has limited powers but often enters the scene in times of political tension and crisis. The president of the Czech Republic is the formal head of state and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The president is elected in a direct presidential election for a term of 5 years.

The Czech Republic's supreme legislative body is its Parliament, which consists of the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house) and the Senate (the upper house). The supreme executive body is the government, led by the prime minister and appointed by the president.

Other important powers of the President include, for example, the appointment of the Governor and members of the Board of the Czech National Bank and the appointment of judges of the Constitutional Court. He also has veto power, which allows him to send a bill passed by Parliament back to the Chamber of Deputies. The presidential veto can be overridden by a majority of all members of the Chamber of Deputies.



## Petr Pavel

A lifelong soldier and retired general since 2018, Petr Pavel officially announced his candidacy in September 2022 after long speculation that he would run. In addition to the senior positions in both the Czech army and NATO, Pavel has experience of direct military conflict in the former Yugoslavia, for which he received high Czech and French military honours. Furthermore, the campaign highlights his experience as "an experienced and calm leader who does not spread chaos".

In the campaign, Pavel has to explain his membership in the Communist Party before 1989, which he calls a mistake. His pre-revolutionary training in military intelligence is also controversial. However, Pavel has a negative lustration certificate and, as a senior NATO official, he says he has undergone the most stringent vetting. In autumn of 2022, he was endorsed in his candidacy, along with two other Danuše Nerudová and Pavel Fischer, by the governing coalition SPOLU as a suitable candidate for the presidency.

### Career profile

- Born 1 November 1961
- Retired General of the Army of the Czech Republic
- Graduated at the Military Academy in Brno, Staff College in Camberley, Royal College of Defence Studies in London or King's College in London
- 2007 – 2009, Deputy Military Representative of the Czech Republic to the EU in Brussels
- 2012 – 2015, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic (the highest-ranking officer in the Czech Army and the principal military adviser to the Czech Government)
- 2015 – 2018, Chairman of the NATO Military Committee (second highest post in NATO)



## Andrej Babiš

Andrej Babiš is a controversial politician with both a successful business and political career and scandals. One of the richest Czechs is facing trial on charges of aiding and abetting subsidy fraud just before the presidential election. His past as a member of the Communist Party and a possible agent of the State Security (the political police in communist Czechoslovakia) is also problematic.

He announced his candidacy last year in October 2022 after a rather long deliberation on whether he would actually run. He tried to appear more consensual in the election campaign, but he refused to participate in the vast majority of debates before the first round with other candidates. Nevertheless, he has a wide name recognition, social media presence and the backing of a large media house which he owns through his trust funds.

### Career profile

- Born 2 September 1954
- Former PM (2017 – 2021), now MP (from 2013)
- Graduated at the University of Economics in Bratislava
- Founder of the Agrofert Group (currently in trust funds due to the conflict-of-interest law)
- In 2012, he is also the Chairman and founder of the political movement ANO 2011
- From 2014 to 2017 Babiš was a 1st Deputy PM and Minister of Finance (government of Bohuslav Sobotka)

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