

European
Elections monitor

Corinne Deloy

ANALYSIS

The Farmers and Greens Party (LVZS), led by outgoing Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis, could remain in office after the general election in Lithuania

At the beginning of April, while Lithuanians were in lockdown the President of the Republic Gitanas Nausėda announced that his fellow-citizens would be called to ballot on October 11 and 25 to renew the 141 elected MPs of the Seimas, the only house of parliament. 22 political parties are competing in these parliamentary elections, 332 people, including 282 affiliated to a party and 38 who are running as independents, are candidates.

Lithuania is governed by a coalition government led by Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis, which includes the LVZS and the Social Democratic Labour Party (LSDDP) of Gediminas Kirkilas. The government is supported by "Welfare Lithuania" and the Electoral Action for Lithuanian Poles-Christian Family Alliance (LLRA-KSS) led by Waldemar Tomaszewski and Rimantas Dagys.

After the legislative elections of October 9 and 23, 2016, LVZS, led by Ramūnas Karbauskis, formed a government with Gintautas Paluckas' Social Democratic Party (LSP). The latter has since split over the issue of its participation in power. In 2017, some of its members seceded and founded the Social Democratic Labour Party (LSDDP), which chose to remain in the government that the LSP quit. The governing coalition then no longer held an absolute majority. With only 66 MPs, it had to negotiate and form ad hoc majorities to pass its bills. In September 2018, it signed a cooperation agreement with For Order and Justice (TT) (now "Welfare Lithuania"), then in July 2019, with the Polish Electoral Action-Alliance of Christian Families, led by Waldemar Tomaszewski and Rimantas Dagys, which enabled it to regain an absolute majority in the Seimas (76 MPs).

Political observers expect little change in the voting on October 11 and 25. They anticipate that negotiations over a future governing coalition will be lengthy. It could also be unstable.

According to the latest opinion poll conducted by the Spinter Tyrimai Institute, the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats (TS-LKD), the main opposition party led by Gabrielius Landsbergis, is due to come out ahead with 21.7% of the vote. It is expected to be followed by the Farmers and Greens Party with 19.4%, the Social Democratic Party with 12.6%, and the Labour Party with 8.6%, followed by the Freedom Party (Laisvės), a social-liberal party led by Ausrinė Armonaitė with 6.8% and the Liberal Movement (LRLS) of Eugenijus Gentvilas with 5.9%.

Another poll conducted by the Norstat Institute for Radio and Television LRT also shows that 42% of Lithuanians would like to see Ingrida Simonytė, head of the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats (TS-LKD), become Prime Minister. A fifth (20%) prefer the head of government Saulius Skvernelis.

Contrary to the vast majority of some EU Member States, Lithuania is a country where the majority of the cities vote for right-wing parties, while the countryside has more confidence in the left. Indeed, Vilnius, Kaunas or Panevezys are conservative municipalities. "In the larger municipalities, the population is more affluent and does not always appreciate State intervention in the social sphere. Voters generally disapprove of State regulations, they don't want to be dictated to regarding how they live their lives," says Tomas Janeliūnas, professor at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science at Vilnius University.

General elections in Lithuania

11-25th October 2020

As in many countries, the coronavirus pandemic has strengthened national unity in Lithuania. On the one hand, the majority of Lithuanians consider that the outgoing Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis and his government have managed the health crisis correctly (the population was confined between March 16 and June 17). On the other hand, despite the expected decline in GDP this year, the plan for the country's economic future presented on May 20 last by Finance Minister Vilius Sapoka (independent), which forecasts that €6.3 billion will be invested in the country before the end of 2021, has reassured the population, large sections of which have already received aid. A change in the issues at stake in the election has been seen: if before, the question of values was a major issue, socio-economic problems have now taken over in the election campaign.

"The rise of the Farmers' and Green Party is certainly the result of the government's good management of the Covid-19 pandemic. The party members were very active in the public sphere and they did not commit any major health faults. To help the population cope with the coming economic crisis, the Farmers' and Greens Party has injected millions of euros into the economy; companies have received significant aid, and pensioners will also receive financial support in September, on the eve of the elections," said Liutauras Gudzinskas, professor of comparative politics at Vilnius University.

It remains to be seen who will govern the Farmers' and Green Party if it can stay in power. Saulius Skvernelis has already stated that he will not form a coalition with the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats unless the party changes its leader (currently Gabrielius Landsbergis).

The main opposition party, the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats is trying to capitalise on the looming economic crisis. The party has chosen to go into electoral battle under the leadership of Ingrida Simonyte, who is not a party member but belongs to the parliamentary group in the Seimas. Former Minister of Finance (2009-2012), she was a candidate in the presidential elections of May 12 and 26, 2019. Supported by the Homeland Union-Christian

Democrats, she won 33.47% of the vote in the second round, but was beaten by Gitanas Nausėda (66.53%). Although some Lithuanians voted for Ingrida Simonyte, it is difficult to determine how many of them are ready this time to give their vote to the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats. The party is torn between a conservative right-leaning Christian wing, which defends traditional values, and a more liberal wing, to which Gabrielius Landsbergis belongs.

The choice of a lead candidate for an election who is not the party head is commonplace in Lithuania. In addition to the Farmers' and Green Party and the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats, the Social Democratic Labour Party has appointed the outgoing Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius as its lead candidate. Like the leaders of the other two parties, its leader Gediminas Kirklis is second on the list.

Mazvydas Jastramskis, Professor of Political Science at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science at the University of Vilnius, believes that while Ingrida Simonyte's candidacy strengthens the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats and that this should help the party to attract supporters of the Liberal Movement and the Freedom Party, the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats may find it more difficult to obtain support from these parties after the elections. They may not achieve the 3% threshold required for representation in Parliament. The Homeland Union-Christian Democrats would then be obliged to find other coalition partners. Gabrielius Landsbergis says he is ready to cooperate with all political parties with the exception of the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania-Alliance of Christian Families.

THE LITHUANIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

Lithuania has a unicameral parliament. The Seimas comprises 141 members, elected every 4 years according to a mixed voting system: 71 deputies are appointed under the majority system and 70 under the proportional list system with a proportional distribution of seats on the basis of the simple quotient, with Lithuania forming a single constituency for this voting system. Voters may express a preferential vote.

A party must win 3% of the votes cast to be represented in Parliament (5% in the case of a coalition). In majority voting constituencies, any candidate obtaining an absolute majority of the votes in the first round, provided the turnout is at least 40%, is declared elected. If turnout is less than this, the candidate with the highest number of votes (and the votes of at least one fifth of those registered) is elected. A second round is organised if these conditions are not met. Any party wishing to participate in the parliamentary elections must have at least 1,000 members. Candidates must be at least 25 years old. Lithuanians living abroad will be represented in a specific constituency for the first time.

Lithuanians voted on May 12, 2019 to reduce the number of deputies from 141 to 121. Although the majority of voters were in favour (76.16%), the referendum did not meet the conditions necessary for its validation, i.e. obtaining an absolute majority of the votes cast (representing at least one third of the total number of registered voters) and the participation of at least half of the registered voters.

7 parties are represented in the Seimas at present:

- Homeland Union-Christian Democrats (TS-LKD), the main opposition party founded in 1993 and led since 2014 by Gabrielius Landsbergis, won 31 seats;
- the Farmers and Greens Party (LVZS), led by Ramunas Karbauskis, and of outgoing Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis, won 54 seats;
- the Social Democratic Party (LSP), founded in 1896 and led since 2017 by Gintautas Paluckas, won 17 seats;
- the Liberal Movement (LRLS), founded in 2006 and led by Eugenijus Gentvilas, won 14 seats;
- the Polish Electoral Action (LLRA), founded in 1994 and led by Waldemar Tomaszewski, won 8 seats;
- For Order and Justice (TT), created in 2002, which has since been dissolved and whose several members founded "Welfare Lithuania", won 8 seats;
- the Labour Party (DP), founded in 2003 and led by Viktor Ouspaskich, won 2 seats.

3 seats were won by "small" lists and 4 by independents. Lithuania elects its President of the Republic by direct universal suffrage every 5 years. On 26 May 2019, Gitanas Nausėda (independent), an economist, beat Ingrida Simonyte, supported by the TS-LKD.

Reminder of the general election results on 9th and 23rd october 2016 in Lithuania

Turn out : 50,64%

Partis politiques	Proportional Vote			Majority Vote	Total number of seats won
	Number of votes won	% of votes won	Number of seats	Number of seats	
Homeland Union-Christian-Democrats (TS-LKD)	276,275	21.70	20	11	31
Farmers' and Greens Party (LVZS)	274,108	21.53	19	35	54
Social Democratic Party (LSP)	183,597	14.42	13	4	17
Liberal Movement (LRLS)	115,361	9.06	8	6	14
Electoral Action of Lithuanian Poles (LLRA)	69,810	5.48	5	3	8
For Order and Justice (TT)	67,817	5.33	5	3	8
Labour Party (DP)	59,620	4.68	0	2	2
Others	174,297	14.02	0	3	3
Independents			0	4	4

Source : Electoral Commission <https://www.vrk.lt/en/2016-seimo/rezultatai>

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