

# In the particular context of the war in Ukraine, Krisjanis Karins' government is expected to be re-elected in Latvia in the general elections on 1 October

Latvians are set to go to the polls on 1 October next - as usual, the first Saturday in October - to renew the 100 members of the *Saeima*, the single house of parliament.

19 lists, parties or coalitions are in the running for this election representing a total of 1,832 candidates. 41 polling stations have been opened around the world for Latvians living abroad.

National security in the context of the war in Ukraine, the cost of living and, in particular, the price of energy are the main themes of the election campaign.

## OUTGOING GOVERNMENT PARTIES LEAD IN POLLS

Latvia is led by a coalition of 4 parties: New Unity (JV) of Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins, National Alliance (AN), Development/Pro! (AP!) and Conservatives (K). Note that Who Owns the State (Kam pieder valsts? KPV?), a populist party founded in May 2016 led by Maris Mozvillo, participated in the government until 2021.

This government, in office since the general elections of 6 October 2018, is the longest-serving in the country's history. According to the latest opinion polls, it could remain in office after the elections on 1 October. [The opinion poll by SKDS](#) for Latvian television gives New Unity (JV) 8.3% of the vote, National Alliance (AN) 7.5% and Harmony (S) 7.3%. The Union of Greens and Peasants (ZZS) would take

fourth place with 6.4% of the vote, followed by the Progressives (5.1%). The undecideds remain numerous with one month to go before the election, representing a quarter of the electorate (25.2%).

According to Pauls Raudseps, editor of the weekly IR, the only question remaining is: who will be in the next government, the Conservatives or the Progressives, alongside New Unity, National Alliance and Development/Pro!

Outgoing Defence Minister Artis Pabriks is the AP candidate for Prime Minister; Janis Bordans, in charge of Justice, is the Conservative candidate.

## AN OPPOSITION THAT IS LOSING MOMENTUM

Harmony (S), the social democratic party, the main left-wing opposition led by Janis Urbanovics and for several years the leading political force in the country, has seen a sharp drop in opinion polls since 24 February, the date of the invasion of Ukraine by Russian army forces. While it was leading in pre-election polls, the party has totally collapsed. Its leader, however, took an unequivocal stand in favour of Ukraine. In 2014, Harmony had chosen to remain neutral during the Russian army's invasion of Crimea and the party had maintained its links with the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin.

On 24 February, however, Janis Urbanovics said that neutrality was impossible. "We had to

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*be the first to say that Russia was the aggressor and condemn it. Many of our voters and members thought it was in our interest to keep quiet, but the Russian leadership is really acting in a criminal way," he said. "We have not changed; it is Russia that has changed."*

Harmony's long-standing popularity and electoral success was due to the party's ability to unite Latvia's Russian speakers behind a left-wing programme that emphasised the rights of the minority they represented, including language issues. Russia's invasion of Ukraine turned everything upside down and divided the Russian-speaking electorate. Ivars Zarins is Harmony's candidate for Prime Minister. He resigned as a member of parliament, as he had promised, after admitting that he had been wrong in assuring that Russia would not invade Ukraine.

Harmony could lose voters to the Russian Union of Latvia (LKS), a party led by Tatiana Zdanoka and Miroslavs Mitrofanovs that has not been represented in parliament since 2006, but also to centrist parties that could attract Russian speakers who support Ukraine. LKS refused to condemn Moscow following the Russian army's aggression against Ukraine. It said it deplored the war situation and called on Kiev and the West to find ways to stop it. It is well aware that he could lose some of his voters by taking a position in favour of Russia.

Miroslavs Mitrofanovs, the party's candidate for prime minister, said that while the people he met were critical of Russia's actions in Ukraine, they were also critical of the West's attitude towards Moscow, which he said was the cause of the current war.

The Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS), the party of oligarch and Ventspils mayor Aivars Lembergs, has retained its name, while the Green Party recently left the Union to join the United List (AS), an alliance of conservative environmentalist parties. Aivars Lembergs was sentenced on 22 February 2021 for corruption, money laundering and abuse of power to 5 years in prison, a €20,000 fine and the confiscation of several of his assets (worth tens of millions of euros). The mayor of Ventspils, who appears on the list of people involved in the Panama Papers (the name given to

documents released by a whistle-blower who revealed in 2016 the names of several personalities around the world who used offshore companies to launder money or carry out capital evasion), is nevertheless his party's candidate for prime minister on 1 October.

**THE LATVIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM**

The 100 members of the *Saeima* are, since 1998, elected for 4 years by proportional voting according to the Sainte-Laguë method. Voters choose a list but can put a + or - next to the name of the candidates of their choice to promote or exclude them.

For the general elections, Latvia is divided into 5 districts: Riga (which is the constituency in which Latvians abroad vote), Vidzeme, Latgale, Zemgale and Kurzeme. The number of seats to be filled in each constituency (ranging from 13 to 29) is determined by the Central Electoral Commission four months before the vote, based on the number of inhabitants in each constituency. Candidates must be at least 21 years old. Former officials of the USSR, the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic or the security, intelligence or counter-intelligence services are ineligible to stand for general elections; persons who worked as technicians in the former Soviet security services have been eligible to stand for election since 2009. Multiple candidacies are prohibited. A political party must receive at least 5% of the votes cast to be represented in parliament.

Parties wishing to run in the general elections must have been established at least one year before the election date and have a minimum of 500 members. For the 1 October election, each party is allowed to spend up to €708,053 on campaigning.

Following the general elections of 6 October 2018, 7 political parties joined *Saeima*:

- Harmonie (S), social democratic party, led by Janis Urbanovics, has 23 seats;
- Who Owns the State (Kam pieder valsts? KPV?), a populist party founded in May 2016 by former actor Artuss Kaimins and led by Maris Mozvillo, which in 2020 became For a Humane Latvia (PCL), has 16 MPs;

- the New Conservative Party (JKP), which in 2022 became The Conservatives (K), founded in May 2014 and led by outgoing Justice Minister Janis Bordans, has 16 seats;
- Development /For (AP!), a liberal coalition chaired by Ivars Ijabs, has 13 elected members;
- National Alliance (AN), formed from the Union for Fatherland and Freedom (TB/ LNNK) and All for Latvia (VL). Led by Raivis Dzintars, it has 13 seats;
- the Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS), party of Ventspils mayor Aivars Lembergs, has 11 seats;

- New Unity (JV), the liberal party of Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins, has 8 seats.

In Latvia, the President of the Republic is elected by the parliament every 4 years. Egils Levits was nominated for the post on 29 May 2019. He received 61 votes, an absolute majority, in a vote that for the first time took place in an open ballot.

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#### Reminder of the results of the general elections of 6 October 2018 in Latvia

Turnout: 54.30%

Political Partis	Number of votes won	% of votes cast	Number of seats
Harmony (S)	167 117	19,80	23
Who owns the State? (KPV)	120 264	14,25	16
New Conservative Partyt (JKP)	114 694	13,59	16
Development/For ! (AP !)	101 685	12,04	13
National Alliance (AN)	92 963	11,01	13
Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS)	83 675	9,91	11
New Unity (JV)	56 542	6,69	8
Others	102 060	11,29	0

Source : Latvian Electoral Commission <https://sv2018.cvk.lv/pub/ElectionResults>

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