

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda is expected to be re-elected

On 12 May, Lithuanians will go to the polls for the 1st round of the presidential election. The outgoing head of state, Gitanas Nausėda, is running for re-election. Among his main rivals is Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte (Union of Fatherland-Christians, TS-LKD). The two candidates already faced each other in the 2nd round of the previous presidential election on 12 and 26 May 2019. 6 other candidates are in the running for this election. If none of them receives more than 50% +1 vote on 12 May, a 2nd round will be held on 26 May.

Gitanas Nausėda is Lithuania's most popular political figure across all socio-professional categories. *"Nobody sees themselves as a serious challenger to Gitanas Nausėda. Some parties don't want to spend money unnecessarily and some political players are thinking about the European elections and the forthcoming parliamentary elections,"* explained Aine Ramonaite, Professor of Political Science at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science at Vilnius University, in explaining the lacklustre election campaign for the presidential election.

According to the opinion poll carried out by the Vilmorus Institute for the daily Lietuvos Rytas, the incumbent president is expected to win the 1st round with 40.20% of the vote, well ahead of lawyer Ignas Vegele, credited with 10.6%, and Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte, with 8.9%.

THE CANDIDATES

The 8 candidates contesting the presidential election are:

- Gitanas Nausėda (independent), outgoing President of the Republic;
- Ingrida Simonyte (TS-LKD), Prime Minister since 2020 and former Finance Minister (2009-2012). She claims to represent the centre right and is supported by voters in major cities, who are more right-wing than the average population, unlike in many European countries. Half of

Lithuanians believe that Ingrida Simonyte should have left her post as Prime Minister to stand as a candidate in the presidential election, according to an opinion poll carried out by the Baltijos Tyrimai Institute for Lithuanian radio and television broadcaster LRT;

- Ignas Vegele, lawyer, known for his opposition to the government's policy during the Covid-19 pandemic. Very conservative in terms of morals, he is supported by the less educated and less wealthy, as well as by people living in rural areas;
- Eduardas Vaitkus (independent), professor at the University of Health Sciences;
- Dainius Zalimas (Freedom Party, LP), Dean of the Faculty of Law at Vytautas Magnus University and former President of the Constitutional Court;
- Giedrimas Jeglinskis (For Lithuania, DSVL), project manager at the Atlantic Council;
- Andrius Mazuronis, leader of the Labour Party (DP) and deputy chairman of the Seimas, the single chamber of Parliament;
- Remigijus Žemaitaitis (Aube de Nenumas, NA), MP

THE (NON) ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

On 7 December, Gitanas Nausėda announced that he was standing for re-election. *"I am determined to continue the work we have started,"* he said. He emphasised his record as head of the country, in particular the substantial military, financial and humanitarian support provided by Vilnius to Ukraine. He has also called for

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an international tribunal to be set up to judge Vladimir Putin's aggression against Ukraine. Gitanas Nausėda has played an important role in welcoming Belarusian refugees opposed to the dictatorship of Alexander Lukashenko. He offered refuge to the Belarusian opposition leader, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, founder and president of the Coordination Council, which is fighting for an end to the political persecution of citizens, the release of political prisoners and the organisation of new democratic elections in Belarus. He also contributed to the increase in the country's defence budget, which now stands at 2.5% of GDP. He finalised the agreement enabling Germany to permanently deploy a brigade in Lithuania. *"Lithuania is more secure than ever before in the face of external threats"* declared Gitanas Nausėda.

On 3 February, the Social Democratic Party (LSDP) announced its decision not to nominate a candidate for the presidential election and its support for the outgoing head of state. Some members have expressed reservations about this choice, arguing that the other left-wing parties could easily criticise the Social Democrats' support for a banker and economist (Gintanas Nausėda was Chief Economist to the President of SEB Bank between 2008 and 2018 and Director of Monetary Policy at the Central Bank of Lithuania between 1996 and 2000). On the other hand, other members of the Left Party have pointed out that without a candidate, the Social Democrats are therefore absent from the election campaign and cannot defend their ideas. According to opinion polls, three quarters (75%) of Social Democratic voters support Gitanas Nausėda.

"Without the candidacy of Social Democratic Party President Vilija Blinkevičiute (Lithuania's 2nd favourite political figure), all bets are off," points out Virgis Valentinavičius, a professor at Mykolas Romeris University.

"Visibility is important for a political party, but it is related to the resources available and needed for an election campaign. This is why some parties will not nominate a candidate for the presidential election", said Vilpiskauskas Ramūnas, professor at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science at Vilnius University.

Also for the first time, the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania - Alliance of Christian Families (LLRA-KSS) is not fielding a candidate in a presidential election. Its leader Valdemar Tomasevski was a candidate in the last three elections. The party is not supporting any candidate for the 1st round.

On the same day, Lithuanians will also be asked to vote in a referendum on the legalisation of dual nationality. Article 12 of Chapter I of the Constitution states that *"except in special cases provided for by law, no person may be both a citizen of the Republic of Lithuania and a citizen of another State"*.

Lithuanians who left the country after 11 March 1990, the date of the restoration of the country's independence, and who have obtained the nationality of another State through naturalisation, must therefore give up their Lithuanian nationality, which they cannot pass on to their children. The Constitutional Court has indicated that the law can only be changed by referendum. Six out of ten Lithuanians support the possibility of dual nationality. The referendum on 12 May will be binding.

In 2019, a referendum was already held on this subject during the 1st round of the presidential election on 12 May. Seven out of ten voters (72.92%) voted in favour of the dual nationality project, while a quarter (26.08%) voted against. Turnout was low (38.46%), insufficient to validate the popular consultation, which required half of Lithuanians to go to the polls

Results of the presidential elections in Lithuania on 12 and 26 May 2019

Turnout: 57.37% (1st round) and 53.88% (2nd round)

Candidates	Number of votes obtained (1st round)	Percentage of votes cast (1st round)	Number of votes obtained (1st round)	Percentage of votes cast (2nd round)
Gitanas Nausėda (independent)	441 396	31.16	881 495	66.53
Ingrida Simonyte (independent)	446 719	31.53	443 394	33.47
Saulius Skvernelis (Farmers' and Green Party, LVZS)	279 413	19.72		
Vytėnas Povilas Andriukaitis (Social Democratic Party, LSP)	68 118	4.81		
Arvydas Juozaitis (independent)	66 957	4.73		
Valdemar Tomasevski (Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania, LLRA)	56 476	3.99		
Mindaugas Puidokas (independent)	37 036	2.61		
Naglis Puteikis (Centre Party, LCP)	11 302	0.80		
Valentinas Mazuronis (independent)	9 205	0.65		

Source : <https://www.vrk.lt/2019-prezidento/rezultatai?srcUrl=/rinkimai/904/2/1544/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiPreRezultatai.html>

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Publishing Director : Pascale JOANNIN

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