

Gitanas Nauseda and Ingrida Simonyte will face off in the second round of the Lithuanian presidential election

Outgoing head of state Gitanas Nauseda came very close to being re-elected in the 1st round of the presidential election in Lithuania on 12 May. He won 44.1% of the vote, well ahead of his main rival, Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte (Homeland Union-Christian Democrats, TS-LKD), who won 19.8%.

Lithuania's two leaders will therefore meet again in the 2nd round on 26 May, for which the outgoing President of the Republic is the clear favourite.

The two candidates had already secured the lead in the 1st round of the previous presidential election, and faced each other in the second round on 26 May 2019.

As opinion polls had predicted, Ignas Vegele, known for his opposition to the government's policies during the Covid-19 pandemic, came third with 12.55% of the vote. He said that he had probably lost a third of the votes he could have won because of the presence of other candidates who shared his wish to change the political system, in particular Remigijus Zemaitytis (Aube de Nenumas, NA), who came 4th with 9.25%.

Turnout was high: 58.80% of Lithuanians went to the polls, +1.43 points compared to the 1st round of the previous presidential election five years ago. This was the highest turnout since the presidential elections of 21 December 1997 and 4 January 1998.

Results of the first round of the presidential election in Lithuania on 12 May 2024

Turnout: 58.80%

Candidates	Number of votes won	% of votes cast
Gitanas Nauseda (independent)	395 708	44.1
Ingrida Simonyte (Homeland Union-Chrétiens-démocrates, TS-LKD)	138446	19.86
Ignas Vegele	106 350	12.37
Remigijus Zemaitytis (Dawn of Nenumas, NA)	90 428	9.25
Eduardas Vaitkus (independent)	65 929	7.33
Dainius Zalimas (Freedom Party, LP)	26 532	3.13
Andrius Mazuronis (Labor Party, DP)	12 973	1.53
Giedrimas Jeglinskas (For Lithuania, DSVL)	11 143	1.31

source : <https://rezultatai.vrk.lt/?srcUrl=/rinkimai/1504/1/2070/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiPreRezultatai.html>

Presidential election in Lithuania

12nd may 2024

Elected five years ago on the theme of prosperity, Gitanas Nausėda said he wanted to continue reducing inequalities in the country. "My main objective was to reach the second round and I think I have," said Ingrida Simonyte when the results were announced.

"We are both serving public servants - I am the President of the Republic, she is the Prime Minister. Voters can assess my five years of work and her four years of work and draw their own conclusions," said the outgoing head of state. *"Gitanas Nausėda is seen as the safest choice for voters of almost all ideological persuasions,"* said Tomas Janeliūnas, Professor of International Relations at Vilnius University.

Gitanas Nausėda represents continuity and therefore stability and security, two essential points in the eyes of Lithuanians against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine. Lithuania shares a border of just over 200 kilometres with the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.

"The core mission of the President of the Republic is to defend Lithuania's geopolitical and security interests. Gitanas Nausėda's positions are close to those of the majority of Lithuanians. Moreover, there are no major differences between the positions of the main candidates on the European Union, Russia and NATO," points out Linas Kojala, Director of the Centre for Eastern European Studies. *"Lithuania's understanding of the Russian threat is unanimous and indisputable, and the main candidates agree on this point,"* added Linas Kojala.

Gitanas Nausėda and Ingrida Simonyte agree on the threat posed to Lithuania by Vladimir Putin's Russia. The country sees itself as the Russian army's next target should Moscow emerge victorious from the war in Ukraine.

Gitanas Nausėda has promised to continue putting pressure on Lithuania's Western allies to step up their military support for Ukraine. *"Ukrainian President Volodimir Zelensky has already said it all. The Ukrainians don't need our declarations of*

goodwill, which are useless in combat; they need air defences. As long as they don't have them, Ukraine will remain vulnerable" declared the outgoing Lithuanian President.

Lithuania is one of Ukraine's biggest aid donors. Defence spending accounts for 2.75% of Vilnius's GDP. Ingrida Simonyte's government wants to increase this to 3% of GDP. Lithuania will also host a German brigade of around 5,000 soldiers on its territory between now and 2027. The three main candidates in the presidential election supported these projects.

Lithuania was also the first European country to completely do without Russian oil and gas. Vilnius imports electricity from Sweden, Poland and Finland, and is investing heavily in renewable energies.

However, Eduardas Vaitkus, a candidate calling for the lifting of sanctions against Russia, an end to military support for Ukraine and the normalisation of Vilnius's relations with Moscow and Minsk, received 7.33% of the vote. The candidate, running as an independent, claims that Vilnius' policy towards Russia and Ukraine is leading Lithuania into war.

Foreign policy and defence issues failed to provide a clear dividing line between the candidates, so it was personalities and socio-economic positions that steered Lithuanians' votes. *"Ingrida Simonyte is supported by voters from the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats and liberals, while Gitanas Nausėda is a left-wing candidate in terms of economic and social policy,"* said Ramunas Vilpisauskas, professor of political science at Vilnius University.

Finally, on 12 May, the second attempt to amend article 12 of the Constitution to legalise dual nationality failed. 1,396,828 voters, or almost 59% of the electorate, took part in the referendum on this subject. Of these, 1,014,304, or 73.90%, voted in favour of the change to allow dual nationality. However, it was essential that

at least half of all eligible voters, i.e. 1,192,617 people, vote in favour of the amendment. This is the second failure after the referendum held on 12 May 2019, in which the turnout was too low to validate the vote (38.46%).

The question put to Lithuanians concerned a new wording for article 12 of chapter I of the Constitution, which sets out the conditions for acquiring Lithuanian nationality[1]. The proposed article read as follows "*Citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania shall be acquired by birth or on other bases established by law. The procedure for acquiring and losing citizenship shall be*

established by law". Many political analysts have criticised the wording as unclear.

Around one million people have emigrated from Lithuania since the country regained independence on 11 March 1990. They have obtained the nationality of another country through naturalisation and have therefore had to give up their Lithuanian nationality, which they cannot pass on to their children. 1,200 Lithuanians lose their nationality every year when they acquire the nationality of another country.

[1] The current Article 12 stipulates that "except in special cases provided for by law, no one may be both a citizen of the Republic of Lithuania and a citizen of another State."

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