

The Social Democrats come out ahead in the first round of general elections in Lithuania, marked by a populist upsurge.

The Social Democratic Party (LSP), led by Vilija Blinkeviciute, came out ahead in the first round of the Lithuanian general elections on 13 October with 19.74% of the vote and 18 seats in the Seimas, the single chamber of Parliament (results of the proportional ballot only). It beat the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats (TS-LKD), the party of outgoing Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte, led by Gabrielius Landsbergis, which obtained 18.32% and 17 seats. The Dawn of Nemunas (Nemuno ausra), a populist party led by Remigijus Zemaitytis, won 15.29% and 14 seats. Hitherto relatively unaffected by the phenomenon, Lithuania is now experiencing the effects of populism. The Union of Democrats for Lithuania (DSVL), founded by former prime minister (2016-2020) Saulius Skernelis, came fourth with 9.42% and 8 seats. The Liberal Movement (LRLS), led by Viktorija Cmilyte-Nielsen, took 7.85% and 7 seats, followed by the Farmers' and Greens' Party (LVZS), led by Ramunas Karbauskis, with 7.16% and 6 MPs.

The latter party's result, lower than that forecast by opinion polls, came as a surprise, as did the ousting from Parliament of the Freedom Party (LP), a social-liberal movement led by Austrine Armonaite,

which with 4.59% of the vote failed to pass the 5% threshold required to be represented in the Seimas.

The first round of these elections allocates around half of the 141 seats in parliament, with 70 deputies elected under the proportional representation list system. The remaining 71 are elected under the two-round majority system. Eight candidates were elected in the first round under the majority system: two Social Democrats and two members of the Polish Electoral Action-Alliance of Christian Families (LLRA-KSS), one member of the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats, one member of Dawn of Nemunas (NA), one member of the Liberal Movement and one independent.

Turnout was slightly higher than in the first round of the previous general elections on 11 and 25 October 2020. More than half the electorate voted. Turnout was 52.06% (+4.51 points). The large number of elections (Lithuanians have been called to the ballot box on three occasions in 2024: presidential elections in May, European elections in June and general elections in October) did not lead to any significant loss of interest.

General elections in Lithuania
13th and 27th October 2024

02

Results of the first round of the general elections of 13 October 2024 in Lithuania

Turnout: 52.06%

Political Parties	Proportional vote		
	Number of votes	% of votes	Seats
Social Democratic Party (LSP)	240 253	19.74	18
Homeland Union-Christian-Democrats (TS-LKD)	222 974	18.32	17
Dawn of Nemunas (NA)	186 136	15.29	14
Union of Democrats for Lithuania (DSVL)	114 643	9.42	8
Liberal Movement (LRLS)	95 524	7.85	7
Farmers' Party and Greens (LVZS)	87 181	7.16	6
Freedom Party (LP)	55 845	4.59	0
Polish Electoral Action - Alliance of Christian Families (LLRA-KSS)	48 253	3.96	0
Others	98 117	13.67	0

Source : <https://www.vrk.lt/2024-seimo/rezultatai>

"The Conservative era is behind us (...) I believe that a large part of the population, particularly those living outside the cities, want change. They want the state to work to improve public services. They want politicians to understand them, to listen to them before taking decisions," declared Social Democrat leader Vilija Blinkeviciute after the results were announced. She announced that she would form a coalition government with Saulis Skernelis' Union of Democrats for Lithuania. For the time being, however, she refused to say whether she would cooperate with Remigijus Zemaiteitis' Dawn of Nemunas, but she did mention the possibility of Viktorija Cmilyte-Nielsen's Liberal Movement taking part in the government.

Saulis Skernelis said that his party and the Social Democratic Party would support each other and would not compete against each other in the second round of voting on 27 October. "We will be asking our electorate who voted for our candidate in the first round to vote for the Social Democrat candidate on 27 October if he does not qualify for the 2nd round. The Social Democrats will do the same for our candidates".

For Ieva Petronyte Urbonaviciene, a researcher in political science at Vilnius University's Institute of International Relations and Political Science (VU TSPMI), the Social Democrats and the Democratic Union will need political partners to form a majority. The Farmers' and Greens' Party could join the two parties in government.

The Social Democrats have pledged to curb the impact of rising prices on the lives of Lithuanians, tax luxury goods and increase spending on social services, particularly in the health, education and housing sectors (up to 36% of GDP), increase income tax for the richest and reduce tax for families with children, increase retirement pensions and offer VAT relief on foodstuffs. The changeover at the head of state is unlikely to bring any significant shift in foreign policy, with the main political parties in agreement on support for Ukraine and the need to strengthen defence in the face of threats from neighbouring Russia. "There is no real alternative policy to the one Lithuania chose twenty years ago (i.e. membership of the European Union and NATO)," said Linas Kontrimas, Director of the Political Communication Research Centre at the Faculty of Communication at Vilnius University.

Vilija Blinkėvičiūtė, 64, from Linkuva in the north of the country, has a law degree from Vilnius University. She has twice been elected to the Seimas (2004 and 2008) and served as Minister of Social Security and Labour between 2000 and 2008. In 2009, she was elected to the European Parliament, where she has been re-elected at every ballot since. In 2021, she took over as leader of the Social Democratic Party.

"The main achievement of the Dawn of Nemunas has been to consolidate the anti-establishment electorate," points out Ignas Kalpokas, head of the master's degree in journalism on the media of the future at Vytautas Magnus University. Remigijus Zemaitytis has succeeded in attracting the votes of disaffected voters who have become disillusioned with politics by presenting himself as a man of the people fighting against the country's elites. Dawn of Nemunas sees itself as a left-wing, liberal and Christian party. Remigijus Zemaitytis founded it in November 2023 following his ousting in May from Liberty and Justice, the liberal party led by Arturas

Zuokas, partly for making anti-Semitic remarks. At the beginning of the year, the Constitutional Court acknowledged that the MP had repeatedly violated his oath as a member of parliament and the Constitution with his anti-Semitic comments, in particular by denying the reality of the Shoah. Remigijus Zemaitytis avoided dismissal by resigning from the Seimas last April.

According to Ainius Lasas, a political science researcher at Kaunas University of Technology (VTU), after the second round of voting on 27 October, the Social Democratic Party could win 43 seats, the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats 36 and Dawn of Nemunas 22.

The predicted victory of the Social Democrats is good news for the President of the Republic, Gitanas Nausėda, whose relations with the Homeland Union-Christian Democrats were difficult during the last legislature and who has never hidden his closeness to the left-wing opposition.

You can read all of our publications on our site :

www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director : Pascale JOANNIN

The opinions expressed in this text are the sole responsibility of the author.

© All rights reserved, Fondation Robert Schuman, 2024

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France, Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani